

WOMEN AND SLAVERY
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY COLONIAL CUBA



Sarah L. Franklin

Women and Slavery in Nineteenth-Century Colonial Cuba



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Sarah L. Franklin



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For my mother

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Florence, Alabama

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Introduction

Patriarchy, Paternalism, and the Development of the Slave Society

On the night of December 14, 1807, in San Miguel, Cuba, just outside Havana, Doña Teresa Días left home. She ran away, taking all her clothes with her, and moved in with Don Marcos Valentín. Her husband, Don Dionsio de Meza was angry, so angry that he complained to a local government official. Teresa's actions were a direct affront to the social and cultural norms and precepts of nineteenth-century Cuba. The state viewed the matter gravely as evidenced by its actions; it took Teresa into custody and "deposited" her in a house that met with government approval. Local officials sought the advice of the captain general, Cuba's highest official, who ordered the parameters of the case be presented to a tribunal that would render judgment in the matter.¹

Although such a course of action may seem quite remarkable today, there was nothing exceptional about it in Cuba in 1807. Women in nineteenth-century Cuba lived under a hierarchical structure employed to create and maintain the slave society. Those at the top of that structure recognized that the escalation and perpetuation of the Cuban slave society required a rigid social hierarchy based on race, gender, and legal status, and they employed patriarchy to achieve that end. The white men who dominated Cuba in the interconnected arenas of politics, business, and religion did not create patriarchy out of whole cloth, but they did shape it to fit local demands. Patriarchal discourse routinely and repeatedly emphasized women's subordinate place in the hierarchical society of Cuba, regardless of race, and both white women and women of color had clearly prescribed roles to fill. The prospering of Cuban society required the subordination of all groups to white males, no matter their station in Cuban society. To that end, patriarchy stood as the tool to order Cuban society; paternalism served as the method.

In this book I will explore patriarchy's role in Cuba's slave society. Neither patriarchy nor paternalism were new in Cuba in the nineteenth century, nor were they the exclusive purview of Cuba. Both had a long history and wide range; this should come as no surprise, especially given the relatively widespread nature of plantation agriculture in the Americas. In Cuba (as elsewhere), patriarchy was a tool of authority, in this case of white male authority over those of the lower social ranks, including both white women and people of color. Paternalism, or the notion of benevolent, fatherlike leaders

who bettered the lives of all Cubans, served as a method to attain that goal. In nineteenth-century Cuba the familial relationships that featured as their hallmark the idea of “benevolent fatherly concern” had to take women into account, and the addition of gendered analysis of the hierarchical ordering of plantation society provides new insights to contemporary scholars. In the case of Cuba, class-based investigation alone cannot explain how women of high social status came into conflict with the state. If slaves were the children in paternal hierarchy, women surely had to play some role, and that role was not limited solely to serving as adjuncts to high-status men.

Patriarchy

The plantation economy of nineteenth-century Cuba provided the context for the patriarchy that dominated Cuban society. The terms *patriarchy* and *paternalism* have long served to aid historical investigation into the past, and scholars have widely used them in the literature, often interchangeably. Yet, the two are distinct. Patriarchy serves to institutionalize male dominance, thus placing paternalism under the umbrella of patriarchy. Paternalism, while implying asymmetrical, reciprocal rights and obligations, must serve its master, patriarchy. The arena in which these exchanges occur privileges the male, and while women have the ability to manipulate the system to their own ends, they do so from a subordinate position.² This distinction between paternalism and patriarchy is beneficial for investigation of Cuba in this period as elites widely employed the language of both patriarchy and paternalism in the maintenance of their order.

Patriarchy is a particularly useful tool for exploring the institution of slavery as it allows analysis to transcend race, class, and material relations (foci that have a long tradition in the literature of Caribbean slavery) and to explore instead how patriarchal representations of gender and ideology organize slavery.³ Patriarchy is well suited to the evaluation of colonial Spanish societies, as it joins the ideology of household rule with that of imperial rule. Placing the master-slave relationship under the rubric of patriarchy provides a better point of analysis than does limiting that enquiry to paternalism alone, as patriarchy illuminates the subordination of slave to slaveholder and the similarity of that subordination to the subordination of woman to man and child to adult. Moreover, as authority in the colonial Spanish American household contained coexisting gendered, racial, and generational dimensions, patriarchy could not exhibit constant inflexibility or rigidity.⁴ It provided the structure that ordered hierarchies of race, gender, and status (slave or free), and, given its complexity and nuance, could not exist as an unbending construct.⁵ Yet, scholarly treatment of patriarchy in Latin America as a monolithic institution that never saw contestations

of its power and authority has “relegated women and poor men to comparatively one-dimensional roles, as foils and objects useful to develop the characters of the main drama.”⁶ The need for investigation of the role of patriarchy in Cuba’s slave society is therefore both necessary and overdue.

Many scholars have explored the role of patriarchy in the slave societies of the Americas. According to Gilberto Freyre’s somewhat nostalgic and romanticized view, the close quarters that plantation society required led to a gradual amelioration of the harsher aspects of Brazilian slavery due to “proximity, shared daily routines, and erotic attraction.”⁷ Although the notion that the harsher aspects of slavery attenuated over time remains debatable and has been challenged by Brazilian historians since the 1960s, Freyre’s work introduced the issue of patriarchy and paternalism into the study of slavery and Latin America and demonstrated how analysis of patriarchy can inform our understanding of both slavery and gender within the larger society. Scholars have long examined the role and place of paternalism in the United States’ antebellum South, and the issues that emerge in that literature offer an opportunity to compare Latin American and US slave societies. Historians of the antebellum South have raised questions related to patriarchy and paternalism, yet as scholars have plainly recognized, patriarchy in slave societies varied from one place to another, even though clear parallels existed.⁸ The notion that slaves were permanent children constantly needing protection and direction both validated and buttressed the position and authority of the master class.⁹ Similarly, women of all classes in Cuba, but perhaps most important, upper-class white women, needed protection, correction, and direction to perpetuate the society Cubans worked so diligently and arduously to achieve.

In a slave society, paternalism does not imply benevolence on the part of the master. As one historian noted, paternalism in the antebellum South served the opposite purpose by preventing slaves from identifying with their own community, instead causing them to identify with their master, thus ensuring the stability of the slaveholding regime.¹⁰ But paternalism remains a particularly useful metaphor to describe the antebellum South and principles (based on domestic relations) used to govern that society, which included both the family and the unfree laborer.¹¹ Other scholars have viewed the matter differently, seeing patriarchy as an indication of male social domination and governance and paternalism as the governing of people in a fatherly fashion. This concept thus avoids the problem of applying a label (paternalistic) that connotes fatherly concern for subordinate groups within a system that is defined by superordinate and subordinate groups.¹² Others have subscribed to the idea that slavery (in the antebellum South) shifted from being patriarchalist in nature to paternalist, as paternalism implied a humanitarianism that the post-Revolutionary age seemed to demand, and that may well have been the case there.¹³ Yet such

a choice may suggest that patriarchy and paternalism cannot coexist, and as I will demonstrate, in Cuba's slave society, they did. There, people of disparate social classes employed the filial language of paternalism to promote their own ends within the construct of patriarchy.

No discussion of patriarchy in nineteenth-century Cuba can ignore African antecedents. Claude Meillassoux asserts that understanding the operation of community and economy requires recognition of the central role of human reproduction, as it is through reproduction that a labor force is created, a notion that would seem to give women a relatively powerful social position. Yet, Meillassoux contends that reproduction, both biological and of social institutions, occurs through "the ordered manipulation of the living means of reproduction, that is: women."¹⁴ Such a notion greatly informs the present analysis, as reproduction and labor have an especially close relationship in a slave society. Neither hierarchy nor patriarchy were uniquely European constructs, and they too would adapt and be adapted across the Atlantic.¹⁵ Without doubt, patriarchy shifts according to both time and place, but consideration of African precedents and examples can and does illuminate the Cuban experience. African norms were neither static nor monolithic, however, so care must be taken in the extension of them to Cuba.

Remarkably, discussion of patriarchy is largely absent from gender-based historical analyses of nineteenth-century Cuba.¹⁶ While Catherine Clinton's and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's pathbreaking works introduced gender and the examination of patriarchy in the United States a generation ago, works focusing on Cuban society in the nineteenth century have, in large part, continued to emphasize the importance of class.¹⁷ Notably, works on Cuba from Latin American scholars initially tended to deemphasize gender as a point of examination for historical processes due in part to local issues. Following the 1959 Cuban Revolution, works of history served to ground the revolution in historical legitimacy and relevancy. As a result, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, workers, peasants, women, and blacks were the subjects of the new, postrevolutionary, didactic works.¹⁸ Joan Scott's work had a tremendous impact on the historiography and carries some responsibility for the cultural turn in history, but in Latin America, it had a much greater influence in the realm of feminist social history.¹⁹ Cuban scholars in the social sciences have incorporated gender as a lens of analysis within a Marxist framework as, they argue, gender implies a feminist commitment to social justice for all, not just women.²⁰ As gender has advanced the historiography, it has also led, at least within the field of Latin American history, to an ideological underscoring of patriarchy as a method of exploring and investigating Latin American history. Heidi Tinsman notes that patriarchy retains its categorization as useful for analysis because it emphasizes the "principle of political authority."²¹ Moreover, the notion of "patriarchy" has, in the last two decades, seen its meaning contested in ways that have strengthened it as

a category of analysis. Patriarchy is no longer recognized as an unbending, monolithic construct, but instead as one that is infused with distinct and dynamic meanings that shift in response to time, place, and issue.

The scholarly move away from conceptualizing patriarchy as an unyielding model ordering society has proved especially useful in Latin American historiography. Steve Stern articulated how women in colonial Mexico had reason both to accept and resist patriarchy in order to promote both self-protection and their own well-being.²² Kimberly Gauderman has demonstrated how patriarchy used women, and was, in turn, used by the women of colonial Quito to defend their social and economic interests. These arguments hold true for nineteenth-century Cuba as well. Although the authoritarian nature of patriarchy placed women below men in the hierarchy, it did not take from them all power. Individuals did contest the system, but the state always responded by working to buttress patriarchy. What was true of colonial Quito was equally true of Cuba. "The object of authority was not to enforce the blind obedience of subordinates but to facilitate responses to changing situations. Because power was distributed among satellites within a network, contesting authority at any one point did not rupture the overall system."²³ Women were able to work within the system, so long as their actions were not perceived as a direct assault.

Understanding Cuba's slave society requires a gendered analysis to explore how patriarchy functioned in the lives of both white women and women of color. The study of gender implies a relational concept as its social construction requires the examination not just of the role of women in society, but that of men as well. Thus, studies that do not include the role and place of women as well as men give us an incomplete view of the nature and complexity of Cuban society. Moreover, gendered analyses of Latin America have demonstrated how states "use gender on multiple institutional and cultural levels to naturalize the hierarchies of political order."²⁴ Consequently there remains the need for gender-based analysis of nineteenth-century Cuba and slavery's impact on society. Patriarchy and gender both operated in the public realm and the private, and together they defined nineteenth-century Cuba. Even as Cuban society recognized the imminent end of slavery, patriarchy maintained through the familial ordering of society continued, and even shifted to meet the demands it would face in an era of wage labor. We must therefore understand patriarchy if we are to understand Cuba's slave society.

Slavery and the Haitian Revolution

Cuba underwent great changes in the nineteenth century as slavery expanded dramatically, but it would be a mistake to assume that Cuba was

previously an all-white society. In the early years of the Spanish Conquest, Cuba needed an influx of people to maintain Spanish dominion, and later, after Charles V's issuance of the New Laws ended the enslavement of Indians, Cuba needed labor. The historian Jorge Ibarra notes that the arrival of three hundred Africans a few months after the abolition of the *encomienda* was no accident; a new group had come to replace the natives as slaves.²⁵ The end of the sixteenth century also marked the arrival of Canary Islanders who, significantly, were the first to cultivate tobacco and to engage in the rudimentary production of sugar.²⁶ By the end of the seventeenth century, Cuba emerged as a colony with a stable economy and society. Peninsulars and creoles sat atop a social "pyramid" of their own making supported by a large but subordinate group below.²⁷ Yet, Cuba remained a majority white island settlement, and as such exhibited little or no racial fear of the nonwhite sector of the population. Moreover, in Cuba, before the advent of the large-scale plantation society, "the African simply represented little economic value and even less economic competition."²⁸ In sugar-producing regions, the demographic composition of the island changed dramatically in the seventeenth century. Although slaves constituted only 29 percent of the population of Havana in 1691, they totaled 59 percent of the population in the sugar-producing region of Jesús del Monte.²⁹ Certainly there were slaves in Cuba in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and in some regions a microcosm of the plantation economy existed, but in no way did they constitute the slave society that would later emerge in Cuba.³⁰

The historian Franklin Knight wrote that in the years between 1763 and 1838, "Cuba changed from an underpopulated, underdeveloped settlement of small towns, cattle ranches and tobacco farms to a community of large sugar and coffee plantations."³¹ Before the emergence of the nineteenth-century plantation economy, Cuban labor requirements were relatively low, but that should not suggest that slavery was not a crucial component of the Cuban economy. For example, in 1774, approximately one-quarter of the total population was enslaved, and another 18 percent were free people of color. Over time, the enslaved portion of the population would increase from its eighteenth-century levels. By 1827, slaves constituted 40.7 percent of the population and free people of color another 15.1 percent.³²

The growth of the enslaved population was in part a response to events in Cuba. Although Cubans endured only minor incidences of violent conflict in the eighteenth century, there was a notable exception. In 1762, the British captured Havana and occupied it for ten months, until its cession back to Spain as part of the 1763 Treaty of Paris.³³ That occupation had a definitive impact on Havana and the larger Cuban society and economy. Creoles in Cuba had long resented Spanish economic policy, which sacrificed the interests of the colony in favor of the metropole. The sudden appearance of new goods, large cargoes of Africans, and the constant

presence of foreigners could not go unnoticed.³⁴ The English occupation of Havana placed in high relief the discrepancy between the number of slaves Cuban society demanded and the supply Spain allowed into the island.³⁵ Cuban planters had continually complained about the high price of slaves stemming from the *asiento* system, by which the Spanish Crown sold licenses to individuals or companies for the import of slaves into Spanish America.³⁶ The *asiento* system theoretically provided “revenue for the Crown, slaves for the colonists and royal control over the number and religion of African slaves arriving in the Indies.” While the Crown did enjoy the revenue stream the *asiento* produced, the colonists resented the higher costs it imposed on them.³⁷ In this context the Spanish Crown issued the 1789 Declaration of Free Trade in Slaves, which had as its stated objective the promotion of agriculture on several Caribbean islands including Cuba.³⁸ The Declaration of Free Trade in Slaves removed all the previous restrictions on the sale of slaves and suspended taxes for three years. The Declaration of Free Trade, part of the larger Bourbon Reforms that Spain undertook concerning her empire in the Americas, allowed the unlimited introduction of slaves into designated ports. Havana constituted one of those ports and the declaration was the necessary impetus for the expansion of the plantation system in Cuba.³⁹ Free trade figured as an important component for a successful plantation economy, but not the only one.

The following years would further the development of the Cuban slave society; in the years between 1763 and 1792, “all the factors braking Cuban sugar development were eliminated and the island was transformed into the top world producer.”⁴⁰ Sugar prices, disturbed by the ruination of Saint Domingue’s economy as a result of the Haitian Revolution, rose to extraordinary highs (though they later returned to lower, yet still immensely profitable levels), and under the stimulation of such high prices, Cuban sugar entered the world market. Interestingly, the metropole did not impose this development on the Cuban economy as had been the case in the English colonies. In Cuba, events in the Caribbean led to the expansion of the plantation economy, and plantation economies required labor. Slavery as an institution had been defeated in all the mainland areas where the indigenous worker sold his work for wages, albeit extremely low wages. “But in Cuba and other depopulated Caribbean islands, black slaves were the cheapest and quickest solution to the sugar production process.”⁴¹ Without the African slave trade, Cuba’s economic transformation could not have taken place, and pressure from Cuban planters was in large part responsible for the freeing of the Spanish slave trade from restrictions.

The Haitian Revolution had a great impact on the development of Cuba’s plantation economy. Sugar, the hallmark of the large-scale Caribbean plantation economy, had yet to dominate Cuba’s. The Haitian Revolution destroyed prospering Saint Domingue’s sugar-producing capacity. Cuba

emerged to fill the void it left.⁴² Saint Domingue had been the wealthiest colony in the Caribbean. Although members of Cuban society at the highest levels demonstrated grave reservations about the possibility of becoming another Saint Domingue, the Cuban creole who has been termed the Father of the Cuban plantation system, Francisco Arango y Parreño, wrote that the elimination of Haitian production brought about the arrival of “the happy times.”⁴³ Arango contended that Cuba stood in contrast to Saint Domingue, and that the profound differences between the two would prevent a revolution such as had occurred there from happening in Cuba. In 1791, he argued that the cause of the catastrophe of revolution in Haiti lay at the feet of the slaveholders, whom he termed “authors of anarchy.” “The masters have taught their servants and by their own hand they have manufactured their ruin. . . . The slaves have aspired to civil liberty by the example of their masters.”⁴⁴ He further charged that much of the French colony’s problems stemmed from their maltreatment of slaves. “The French view them as beasts, and the Spanish as men.” Moreover, he noted that the slaves of Havana were among “the happiest in the world,” as civil law in Cuba had “perfectly balanced the two extremes: the abuses of the owners and the promotion of insubordination.”⁴⁵ Arango’s view would carry the day. Following the collapse of the Haitian plantation system, Cuba became the world’s top producer of sugar and the “new devourer of slaves.” Sugar prices soared, Cuban ports teemed with slaves, and the twenty-hour workday during the harvest season spread across the island, although it seems unlikely that Cuban slaves remained among the “happiest in the world.”⁴⁶

The advent of the nineteenth century and the growth of the plantation economy had a profound effect on the island. As the Cuban scholar Manuel Moreno Fraginals wrote, “The sugar boom of 1792 quickly made obsolete all the colony’s administrative and juridical forms. . . . From 1792 to 1802 life in Havana took on a new quality: the deep transformation created an exotic world of interrelations and business deals hinging on sugar.”⁴⁷ The sugar boom had far-reaching effects beyond just economic change. “And on top of all this were the non-economic repercussions: a gamut of secret, sordid deals born in the sugarmill and flowering in the University, the Cabildo, the royal medical college, the Audiencia, the Cathedral.”⁴⁸ The sugar boom changed the nature of Cuban society at all levels, and the development of the sugar economy was closely tied to Havana’s nobility, which was itself closely tied to the peninsular economy. At its uppermost reaches, society grew increasingly aligned with the interests of the sugar producers, and old elites continued to exercise tremendous influence in society. Cuban creoles with titles of nobility had long held huge tracts of land in usufruct, and they had embodied political and economic power in Havana for decades. They dominated the *cabildo* (municipal government) and were invested both in urban and rural Cuba. They married among themselves; they were the O’Farrills, the Arangos, the Santa Cruzes, the Calvos,

and many others. And when opportunity presented itself in the wake of the Haitian Revolution, they were well poised to take advantage of it, quickly emerging at the forefront of the sugar industry. Their members held important positions all over Cuba: in the military, in the University of Havana, in the religious orders and the Church. They were attorneys and physicians, government officials and intellectuals. In sum, they ran Cuba.⁴⁹

The Haitian Revolution transformed Cuba. If Cuba had before been a society with slaves, it would now become a slave society.⁵⁰ The dramatic importation of slaves into the island is but one indication of that change. Although some scholarly debate remains as to the specific number of slaves imported into Cuba, there is consensus that at least three hundred thousand slaves arrived in Cuba between 1790 and 1820, a statistic that becomes even more striking given that in the “previous 280 years only 100,000 slaves had been imported.”⁵¹ Such a dramatic increase in the slave population could not go unnoticed, but it was hardly the only change. Magnificent forests, protected by royal writ and a source of pride in Cuba for centuries, were cut down to provide fuel for the sugar mills. And the number of mills seemed to be ever increasing. As early as the 1790s, Cuba’s plantation complex began to expand dramatically. It first did so at the expense of tobacco farmers who would soon enough be dispossessed of land, and then later, at the expense of cattle ranchers. Sugar and coffee were the big winners; unsurprisingly, peasants were the losers.⁵² The Crown, always eager for a new source of cash, went right along with the changes, breaking up the existing large estates and providing for legal title to lands that had traditionally been held in usufruct. The expansion of the plantation system and the opening of new lands meant a dramatic escalation in the value of real estate, which created additional wealth on the island and tied individuals not directly connected to plantation agriculture to the maintenance of the slave society.⁵³ Urban areas grew as well. A depopulated countryside meant that cities in sugar districts, such as Matanzas, experienced population growth of 11 percent annually from 1800 to 1820.⁵⁴ Yet, these changes were only the beginning. Between 1821 and 1860, upward of another four hundred thousand slaves arrived in Cuba.⁵⁵ The height of the sugar boom was not reached for decades after the intensification of the 1790s. Railroads and scientific advances in sugar making would harken a sugar revolution, and the 1840s and 1850s were truly boom times for Cuban sugar. By the 1850s, there was no doubt as to the primacy of sugar in the Cuban economy; coffee and tobacco had fallen well behind sugar.⁵⁶ Keep in mind that the “sugar boom” was an evolving process. It did not spring forth fully formed in the years immediately following the Haitian Revolution. Yet, in no way does that denigrate the impact of the Haitian Revolution on Cuba’s development, economically or socially.

The dramatic transformation of Cuban society likewise required a transformation of governance as the old colonial organization could not

accommodate the new situation. The problems associated with large-scale agricultural production required a new institution that would, in short, transform the economy through its ability to implement a plantation society in such disparate areas as the financing of mills, the promotion of the slave trade, the improvement of transportation infrastructure, and the education of the populace.⁵⁷ Although sugar production was the impetus for such change, sugar was not the only important sector of the plantation economy, as coffee too received the attention of Cuba's elites.⁵⁸ The demand for change would bear fruit in the form of the Real Consulado and its Sociedad Patriótica.⁵⁹ Established in 1795, the Real Consulado de Agricultura y Comercio primarily concerned itself with sugar and the new Cuban economy. It addressed issues such as interest rates, taxes, and transportation. For example, the 1838 completion of Cuba's first railroad represented a solution to a problem faced by planters in bringing their goods to market. That railroad was the first in the Caribbean, Latin America, or Spain. Construction of a major project such as the building of a railroad lay within the purview of elite interests as their influence reached to the highest levels of the Cuban power structure.⁶⁰

The Sociedad Patriótica served as the intellectual arm of the Real Consulado. Founded in 1791, the Sociedad Patriótica of Havana was intimately connected with agriculture, and producers and merchants dominated it. A major objective was an increase in sugar production through education and the "practical application of pure science." Unlike the Consulado, which focused on such basic problems as trade regulations and commercial matters, the Sociedad Patriótica addressed its goal—the economic primacy of Cuba in the world sugar market—through scientific studies, intellectual activities, and examination of the social repercussions of the sugar boom.⁶¹ The Real Consulado and Sociedad enjoyed profound influence over Cuban society. They determined the outcome of all conflicts in the Cuban economy. Creole producers controlled the Consulado; their intellectuals ran the Sociedad Patriótica. Moreover, Moreno writes, "the Sociedad Patriótica was an organ of ideology, communication, and message."⁶²

The Real Consulado and the Sociedad Patriótica stood at the zenith of Cuban society. The Sociedad's membership expanded to nearly two hundred people, representative of Havana's elite, and comprised the most articulate and influential men on the island. Franklin Knight likened it to an exclusive club focused on the pursuit of economic power and political influence.⁶³ The first governing board of the Consulado included the highest-ranking political and military official in Cuba, captain general Luis de Las Casas, as *ex officio* president, along with a host of extremely wealthy and interrelated individuals. Unsurprisingly, Francisco Arango y Parreño was among their number, "who, apart from being related to all the others, was the group's natural leader and political guide, thanks to his organizing

abilities and gift for seeing into the future.”⁶⁴ Luis de Las Casas wrote to the king that the recently founded Sociedad exemplified the “economy, integrity, illustriousness, and success that should be expected of a body composed of the most educated and capable subjects of the city” who endeavored to do good.⁶⁵ The Real Consulado and Sociedad Patriótica dominated Cuban society and were in turn dominated by those with a vested interest in the plantation economy, though the sugar interests should not be viewed as a monolith.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, sugar production and commerce were the order of the day, and both economic and social policy had to meet to transform Cuba into the world’s leading sugar producer and to preserve that economic dominance within the world market.

Sugar, in this book and elsewhere, receives most of the scholarly attention given to nineteenth-century Cuba; yet, sugar was not the only product in the development of the plantation economy. Decades ago Fernando Ortiz introduced tobacco into analyses of Cuban agricultural production.⁶⁷ More recently, William Van Norman has demonstrated that the scholarly focus on sugar has obscured the true nature of the agricultural complex. He notes that coffee and other secondary crops “were important in diversifying the economy and culture.” Although sugar’s “ultimate dominance” is manifold, the “veneer of sugar dominance” has incorrectly directed the historiography for too long. And significantly, those often identified as sugar elites, the members of the Sociedad with Arango among them, also gave attention to the promotion and production of coffee, producing reports and publications on how to establish a coffee plantation.⁶⁸ Consequently, the traditional invocation of “sugar elites” is one that merits new consideration. Yet, the long-overdue inclusion of coffee into analysis of Cuba’s slave society does not negate the power and privilege of Cuba’s elite and their ability to transform that society to suit their own ends.

Just as Cuba underwent dramatic social change, other changes, more political in nature, had a significant impact on the formation of the nineteenth-century colonial society. Following their disastrous performance in the Seven Years’ War, Spain implemented the aggressive Bourbon Reforms to prevent the recurrence of such a calamity. Those reforms encompassed almost every area of society: administration, commerce, military structure, religious policy, and fiscal policy.⁶⁹ Napoleon’s invasion of Spain, the abdication of Charles IV, the very brief rule of Ferdinand VII, and Ferdinand’s replacement on the throne with Joseph Bonaparte would reverberate throughout the Spanish Americas, and Cuba was no exception. Word of events in the metropole reached Cuba by July 1808, but problems already abounded. The decline of Atlantic shipping meant that Cuba was isolated, and the reliance on agriculture exacerbated the situation as Cuba’s economic health was dependent on foreign markets. But even in the face of such obstacles, and while other colonies viewed the Napoleonic Invasion