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## State of Ambiguity

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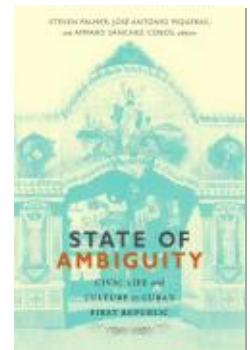
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## INTRODUCTION



### **Revisiting Cuba's First Republic**

Steven Palmer, José Antonio Piqueras,  
and Amparo Sánchez Cobos

On May 20, 1902, the Republic of Cuba was proclaimed in an act transmitting sovereignty from the U.S. occupation authorities to the Cuban people's elected representatives. A new state was born in the family of American nations. The republic came after three wars of independence in the space of thirty years that had served to express the Cuban will to self-government and erode Spanish colonial dominion, though they had not been sufficient to provide liberty to the island directly. The intervention of the United States in the conflict in 1898 had precipitated the defeat of Spain and reserved for the United States a special role in determining the future of the "Pearl of the Antilles." Despite the subordination to a new empire implicit in this relationship, the new state of Cuba enjoyed a democratic constitution that had been written by an elected constituent assembly a year earlier. It could build, moreover, on a series of measures adopted by the U.S. occupation government between 1899 and 1902 intended to address the main problems of reconstruction, even if these had also been designed to constrain and channel the country's political orientation. Cubans had been able to elect new municipal governments in June 1901, and they had gone to the polls on New Year's Eve that same year to choose congressmen, governors, and provincial councilors as well as the electors who would vote for president, vice president, and senators. On February 24, after the only other candidate for the country's highest office withdrew from the race, Tomás Estrada Palma was acclaimed president of Cuba. The outcome was popular and legitimate: Estrada Palma had been president of the Republic in

Arms in 1876–77, and during the independence struggle of the late 1890s he had acted as José Martí's delegate to the Partido Revolucionario Cubano.

That is to say, the Republic of Cuba was born democratic in 1902. It possessed a founding charter that organized political life and enshrined the rights of its citizens, among them freedom of assembly and association, freedom of speech and the press, the right to make petition, habeas corpus, the inviolability of correspondence and dwelling, and freedom of worship. Education was declared obligatory, and while the state was unable to provide it, the burden would fall on the municipalities and the provinces. Political equality was guaranteed, as was universal suffrage for men over twenty-one years of age. Following the U.S. model, the constitution adopted a representative system that authorized wide powers to the presidency even as it promoted administrative decentralization to the provinces, a compromise solution to avoid the frictions of federalism while giving continuity and honoring the federal spirit of the constitutional charters issued by independence forces in 1869 and 1895.<sup>1</sup>

At the moment it came into the world the Republic of Cuba enjoyed political and economic conditions much more favorable than those that the great majority of Latin American nations had worked through eighty or ninety years earlier at the beginning of their respective republican lives. It is true that the U.S. occupation apparatus and a Cuban creole elite that had devoted itself, between 1878 and 1895, to the cause of Autonomism rather than outright independence were both interested in a conservative regime that denied agency to popular forces.<sup>2</sup> To that end they brokered a transitional pact that pulled the rug out from under the more radical democratic impulses of the Cuban independence struggle. And it is true that the highest officers of the independence armies would opt to join in that pact to further their own material and political interests in the republic.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the country enjoyed a much more fortuitous and truly democratic basis for independent national politics than what had been achieved almost anywhere else in Latin America to that point. This was due to the later era in which Cuban independence was proclaimed, which occurred after the entrée of the masses into institutional politics. It was also, of course, due to the long struggle to achieve national liberation in which the protagonism of Cubans of African ancestry was widely acknowledged as key to the popular mobilization that had taken place and during which the ideals of Martí had united the dispersed national forces.<sup>4</sup> These formative experiences also proved an immovable impediment to Cuban and U.S. elite designs to engineer annexation of the island to the United States. Perhaps most important, they ensured

that the formal embrace of meaningful democratic politics would not be sacrificed to the doctrinaire and authoritarian liberal formulas that dominated the political panorama in the nineteenth century and that persisted in most countries in Latin America and Europe.

Yet neither democracy nor independence would flourish in the first Cuban republic. After a mere four years, amidst a crippling revolt of rival factions opposed to the (constitutionally quite permissible) reelection of Estrada Palma, the threatened president took the fateful step of requesting that the United States intervene to prevent civil war. Cuba would endure a second U.S. military occupation government from 1906 to 1909. Then, starting with the presidency of William H. Taft—*ex-secretary of war* and interim governor of Cuba in 1906—the United States would regularly practice “preventive intervention” in the island’s affairs. In 1912 the Independent Party of Color (PIC) would revolt, claiming that Afro-Cubans, after playing a predominant role in the independence armies, had been thoroughly marginalized from the political process. Prickly diplomatic statements from the North raised the possibility that the unrest might provoke yet another U.S. intervention. The PIC challenge was met by a savage racist backlash from the state and civil militias that left some gaping new wounds in the Cuban body politic, even as it reopened barely healed ones left by a slave society still very much part of living memory, emancipation having only finally become a reality in 1886.<sup>5</sup> Another liberal rebellion erupted in 1917 in the wake of electoral fraud perpetrated to keep the Conservative Mario García Menocal regime in power, and again the United States intervened to broker results favorable to “stability” (for U.S. investors in particular).

By 1920, despite rivers of gold flowing from Cuba’s sugar plantations thanks to unprecedented prices on the world market, a wide variety of voices began pronouncing Cuba’s republican experiment a failure.<sup>6</sup> They decried a political culture rotten with clientelism and misappropriation of funds at every level and a sovereignty grossly mocked by the island nation’s acute economic and foreign policy dependence on the United States. By that point the cancer of the Platt Amendment had been diagnosed. When the amendment was passed into U.S. law in 1901 under the direction of Senator Orville Platt, its acceptance by Cuba became the condition for ending the U.S. occupation. The Platt Amendment prevented Cuba from entering into many kinds of international agreements and gave the United States specific rights on the island. These included the right of intervention under certain circumstances and the right to establish a naval “coaling station” on the island (eventually built in Guantánamo Bay as something substantially more than a fuel depot).

Much has been written about the folly and perfidy of the Platt Amendment.<sup>7</sup> Suffice it to say that, although in 1901 the constituent assembly had been offended by the heavy-handed substance and style of the legal imposition, the eventual acquiescence to insertion of the clause in the Cuban constitution was not seen at the time as a fatal blow to the republic's sovereignty. It was the growing tendency of increasingly interventionist U.S. administrations to adopt the most interventionist reading of the amendment that turned it into a symbol of neocolonial affront to sovereignty and international law in an emerging world system of nation-states. And it was the political elites of republican Cuba—important leaders of the independence movement among them—who first invoked the Platt Amendment in order to seek U.S. arbitration of conflicts over political succession. Once the door was opened by Estrada Palma in 1906, the United States began to get a feel for Platt leverage, and so did subsequent Cuban leaders: José Miguel Gómez would use the threat of further U.S. intervention to suppress the PIC revolt in 1912, and Mario García Menocal would use it to keep his faction in power in 1917.

The commercial reciprocity agreement signed with the United States in 1903 was embraced by the majority of Cuba's principal economic actors and quickly proved a boon for the Cuban sugar industry. Sugar exports, almost all to the United States, grew 40 percent within five years, and Cuba quickly amassed a favorable balance of payments with the United States. Imports and investment from the United States also grew dramatically, with results that did not necessarily favor Cuban sovereignty. The emergence or resurgence of many local industries was curtailed by the presence of cheap manufactured goods from the United States. By 1927 the country was, after Mexico, the second most important destination for U.S. investment in Latin America, and this rapid expansion of U.S. capital in the Cuban economy paved the way for the transfer of an unhealthy proportion of the island's productive assets into the hands of U.S. financial concerns following the crash of 1920.<sup>8</sup>

As the sweet cycle went sour after that year, so went the republic. The total collapse of international sugar prices led to economic ruin for many Cuban companies and sugar concerns. U.S. banks were the main beneficiaries, rapidly achieving majority ownership over the island's agricultural sector. During the shockingly corrupt presidency of Alfredo Zayas in the first half of the 1920s, Enoch H. Crowder, "special envoy" of the president of the United States, exercised unofficial rule over island politics and fiscal policy, first as a sinister proconsul who lived on a U.S. battleship in Havana harbor and later as ambassador.<sup>9</sup> In the midst of widespread disenchantment, the

demand for the revitalization of Cuban republican democracy was taken up by a new generation. Intellectuals, professionals, workers, and university students confronted the persistent abuses of the political class and the presidency of Gerardo Machado, whose co-optive populist regime slid inexorably into a bloody dictatorship. If this cycle ended in 1933 with a cathartic nationalist revolution that rid the people of one dictator, it only proved that the republic could not shrug off the shackles it had been born into. Another U.S. ambassador was waiting in the wings to turn the screws; another strongman, Fulgencio Batista, was not long in showing himself capable of keeping the house of cards in order. The revolution of 1933 would soon become just another republican opportunity lost, ultimately going down in history as a prologue to the “real” revolution of 1959.<sup>10</sup>

It is easy to see why the Cuban republic has become “*el tiempo omitido*” (the “time that is left out”), as Marial Iglesias has put it. The fact that the current Cuban state let the centenary of independence pass by without notice in 2002—unprecedented in the history of modern statehood—reveals the derision with which the first republic is dismissed in official Cuban historical culture. In this version, the U.S. intervention of 1898 and subsequent occupation kidnapped Cuba’s history just as the insuperable contradictions of the late colonial period and the patriot blood spilled in the war of independence had put the people on the brink of revolutionary sovereignty. The Platt Amendment is the smoking gun that proves the United States cheated Cuba of its true nation-statehood, replacing it with a “protectorate,” a “pseudo-republic,” or a “neo-colony” where U.S. power was mediated, in thinly disguised fashion, by a former colonial ruling class turned into flunkies of U.S. financial and corporate power.<sup>11</sup> Seen this way, the entire republican experience prior to 1959 is merely the antithesis of the Cuban revolution. It is a fifty-seven-year period of U.S. proxy rule studded with villains and martyrs and punctuated by political upheavals that prefigure the historical absolution of 1959. A main task for revolutionary scholarship has been to recuperate the radical, popular, and epic nationalist character of the independence struggles in the face of the uncomfortable fact that a good proportion of its revolutionary leaders defected, during the occupation and the republic, to the service of a bourgeoisie dependent on U.S. capital.<sup>12</sup>

In U.S. historical culture the Spanish-American War and the occupation of Cuba pack a kind of “shock and awe” punch—1898—a watershed moment for a country en route to its place as preeminent world power. Whether approving or disapproving, a great deal of the historical work done within the U.S. fold picks up the story on the twentieth-century side of the great wall

of 1898. The year marks the beginnings of the country's exercise of imperial power over foreign peoples, the unleashing of the foreign policy controversy leading to the Platt Amendment, the start of repeated U.S. military, diplomatic, and economic intervention in Cuban affairs, and of U.S. support for sun-drenched, mob-backed dictatorships that would come back to haunt them after 1959.<sup>13</sup> A third strong historical culture—that of Spain—takes a proprietary interest in Cuba's past as well and is also fixated on 1898. It is notable that studies of Cuba done in the Spanish scholarly context almost always end abruptly in 1898, mirroring the way that studies done in the United States so often begin there.<sup>14</sup>

There is no doubt that, as Louis A. Pérez puts it, 1898 “changed everything”: the U.S. occupation and the early republic *were* times of dramatic interruptions, reorientations, truncations, and inertia. Wars are cataclysms, and wars that result in the death of 10 percent of the population, bring to an end four centuries of rule by the same colonial master, and usher in a fundamentally distinct (and in many ways even more potent) type of foreign oversight must be ruptures marking a “before” and an “after.” There are also a number of studies that range across the divide of 1898 and work to incorporate the republic into the logic of Cuban historical evolution. Principal among them are works by Pérez himself, beautifully crafted studies that stand out for their synthetic vision, ability to convey the perspectives of the United States, Spain, and Cuba in the momentous changes of the independence era, and fresh and provocative location of social and political continuities.<sup>15</sup> Notably, however, Pérez's vision of Cuba is often framed in terms of an essential liminality. Cuba seems always in the process of becoming something through contradictions that negate that becoming—eternally “between” (reform and revolution, independence and colonialism, being American and being Cuban). The island is ceaselessly entering moments in which things will never be the same even as hopes will remain unrealized, its ruling class always already reduced to an empty shell. Even his boldly original and erudite ventures into long-term patterns in Cuban climate and social behavior focus on the extreme, catastrophic, and self-negating—hurricanes and suicide.

These three nationally based historical views of Cuba show a strong tendency to frame events in terms of what did *not* happen. Spain failed to find a reformist solution to the colonial question. The United States stopped Cuba from finding a route to national independence and social revolution. Cubans failed to attain clear independence or build a robust, sovereign, and democratic nation-state and national economy. Little wonder that repub-

lican Cuba is predominantly portrayed as constrained and truncated and that we are frequently asked to understand this period principally in terms of failure, discontinuity, deformation, and illegitimacy. The main premise of this collection is that there is a need to revisit the Cuban republic on its own terms, in its own time, and with an eye to all segments of society, and to do so in a way that bridges the three historiographical solitudes discussed above. This is in no way to question the integrity or the value of the historical scholarship that has been done on the republic to date, much of which stands out as among the very finest work accomplished on the history of Latin America and on the history of Spanish and U.S. foreign policy and imperialism. Nevertheless, there is a certain narrowing of vision that comes from seeing periods of history as failures, or as adjuncts to grander historical processes whose subjects lie elsewhere, or in teleological terms as simply anticipations of other more authentic and significant periods.

The historical experiences of the republic were as real as any others, as authentically Cuban as any others. Deserving of infamy as some of its signature episodes are, the republic was also made by a broad spectrum of Cubans who embraced a political and civic culture of national self-realization through citizenship, though they may have remained ambiguous about how precisely to achieve it. In revisiting republican Cuba, our collection shows how this period in Cuban history can be recast as one of deep continuity in processes of liberal state- and nation-building that were periodically upset—but also reinvigorated—by foreign intervention and profound uncertainty. Its contributors explore how Cubans at all levels were urgently involved in the creation of liberal national political communities—imagined and real—and in defining the meaning and practice of a democratic modernity, though times and conditions did not remain long in their favor.

In this sense, we might see republican Cuba as a “tropical Weimar,” for it shared certain important traits with its later and more notorious German sibling. The Cuban republic, too, was born of (and in) military stalemate; it, too, saw the United States enter the fray at that point of stalemate and determine the outcome. In terms of net effect, the Platt Amendment and the Versailles Treaty were also surprisingly congruent. Imposed in the context of postwar occupation, each crippled sovereignty and inserted a wedge that ultimately prevented patriotic people from identifying their sense of national selfhood with the state. Both Weimar Germany and postcolonial Cuba constructed a republican politics in the shadow of foreign intervention legitimized in treaties that were the price of assuming statehood, and both did so in a context of constant political instability that was in good measure a



product of that “legitimate” shadow. Each political experiment was pitched about by volatile economic extremes while vital sectors of national industry suffered domination by foreign capital backed by military occupation or the threat thereof. All the while society was consumed by fits of violent racist paranoia carefully cultivated by political elites and in each case drifted toward political dysfunctionality, inflated nationalism, and dictatorship.

To adopt the perspective of a recent book on Weimar Germany, Cuba’s first republic still speaks to us as a “warning sign”—among other things of what havoc is wrought by opportunistic interventions and occupations that disguise imperial designs behind hollow commitments to democracy-building. Yet both Weimar and Cuban republican political cultures were also transformed by irrepressible boundary crossing, especially in urban spaces associated with cultural and intellectual flowering. And as with the case of Weimar Germany, republican Cuba’s serious political and cultural conflicts and disasters should not erase its significant political and cultural achievements. In Cuba, too, the “destruction of the old imperial order in war and revolution unleashed the political and social imagination.”<sup>16</sup>

A similar comparative point can be made without leaving the hemisphere. In essential ways, late colonial and early republican Cuba fit nicely into what Latin American scholars call the Liberal period, typically understood as running from roughly 1870 to 1930. Curiously, almost without exception, Cuban scholarship eschews this periodization.<sup>17</sup> For many Latin American countries Liberal state-building was based on primary product exports benefiting an alliance of foreign capital and a local ruling class, and it was characterized by autocratic regimes capable of maintaining stability. Cuban historians have tended to avoid the “Liberal era” classification, concentrating on what they see as the uniqueness of the island’s brutal wars of independence and their aftermath, the U.S. intervention and occupation, the torturous experiment with democratic government that was crippled by corruption, patronage, electoral fraud, and gangsterism, and the precious sectors of the economy swallowed up by U.S.-based banks and super-corporations like United Fruit that created an acute agro-export dependency. Yet even a casual student of Latin American history will have noted how readily all these “uniquely Cuban” structuring experiences apply to Latin American states of the era, particularly to Mexico, Central America, and northern South America, all of which shared a geopolitical proximity to the new imperial United States. Cuba’s first war of independence is in many ways analogous to Central America’s struggles against William Walker in the 1850s, and Mexico’s against European reconquest in the 1860s. The strong regional inflection and social

yearnings of Cuba's second war of independence and the interventionist arbitration of the United States are comparable to the experience of revolutionary Mexico, with its northern insurrectionism, its populist nationalism, and U.S. military intervention in Veracruz in an effort to broker a political outcome palatable to U.S. interests. There is also an enormous, and almost entirely unploughed, field of potential comparative study between this era in Cuban history and Brazil's late emancipation of slaves (both coming only at the end of the 1880s) and tardy and curtailed republican experience (in the Brazilian case, the "old republic" of 1889–1930).

Historians of Latin America are acutely aware of the anti-democratic, economically dependent, and militarist polities of the Liberal era. Yet they have not shied away from exploring them as authentic expressions of political cultures and foundational processes of nation-building. Indeed, recent studies tend to take the political cultures of the Liberal period much more seriously and fully than in the past. They are treated with much greater nuance as important for the imagining of national political community, for the constitution of modes of gendered and racialized citizenship, for the launching of modern urban identities, and for the structuring of central-regional dynamics in the modern state, to name just a few areas of current focus. There is no question that the Platt Amendment undermined aspects of state sovereignty and called into question Cuba's degree of national independence in a peculiarly explicit way. However, the main thing separating the Cuban plight from that of most Latin American countries who were also in the United States' sphere of influence may have been its unique (and uniquely awkward) status in international law. The republic became neither a protectorate nor a colony in the formal sense, nor was it a colony of a new kind whose typology had yet to be defined. It is true that an external power limited in some ways the ability of the island's representatives to make decisions about some issues. At the same time, this limitation did not erase the existence of a new juridical framework that provided a normal domestic government with complete powers of rule legitimated through participative mechanisms of citizenship.

Placing Cuba in the Latin American context is revealing and not simply because U.S. expansionism and its voracious Caribbean appetite were visible elsewhere. The Cuban republic had a rocky life, but if it was not the best of political regimes, for a long time it was far from the worst. The country freed itself from its former colonial master, and Cubans were able to provide themselves with their own institutions. The ideals of the revolutionary struggle were partially put into practice, if in some measure sacrificed in the interests of pluralism and the opposition of interests, and for the most part they

suffered a rapid decay. Cuban citizens were able to associate freely and elect their representatives, even if the processes for doing so showed marked deficiencies. Over the first three decades of the twentieth century a very small minority of American nations enjoyed constitutional systems that were respected and authorities who were subject to periodic electoral renewal, and even more rare were those that accepted universal male suffrage and a secret and direct vote. Cuba's representative democracy quickly showed defects in its machinery. Different from virtually all its Latin American sister states, however, the Republic of Cuba was born democratic and endowed with representative institutions that stood in marked opposition to the arbitrary authoritarian rule and political exclusion that the people had been subjected to during the Spanish colonial era.

The Puerto Rican nationalist Pedro Albizu Campos contributed to promoting the expression "república mediatizada" [mediated republic] by using it for the title of a pamphlet on the Cuban situation. The adjective *mediated* fits nicely with the "republic of generals and doctors" that provided the title to Carlos Loveira's famous novel: a state that was nominally free but actually dependent, conditioned less by external dictate than by the threat of intrusion into national life and the imposition of a transitory administration that would reorient politics in a direction conducive to the occupier. The example of the U.S. occupation government of 1899–1902 was ever present. By not establishing with precision the unbreachable limits of Cuban sovereignty, a mirrored conditionality was created in the country's domestic life. On the one hand, this imposed self-limitation and even surreptitious submission to signs and suggestions emanating from Washington and, on the other, it gave different factions the option of going to the American Protector (or threatening to) to resolve internal disputes. This was a double perversion, based on the threat of invoking an international treaty.

Still, the task remains to define precisely the margins of action of Cuba's republican government and the real degree of interference by U.S. diplomatic agents versus the threat of foreign intervention as a domestic political tool. Just as important would be to deepen our knowledge of the effective space of sovereignty that was developed during the republic, one that seems to have had a greater impact on the future of Cubans during the first three decades of the twentieth century than did those limits imposed from outside, no matter how important these latter were. Exploring the evolution of a republican society that it is impossible to reduce to the shrunken figure of dysfunctional politics is a task of considerable historical urgency that we turn to in the following pages. As editors we have chosen to characterize the

main patterns of republican civic life and public culture in terms of ambiguity rather than betrayal, failure, deformation, or liminality.<sup>18</sup> By doing so we mean to acknowledge the hesitation, doubt, and uncertainty of different individual and collective Cuban actors as to the course republican political culture should take. We also acknowledge the dubious and sham qualities the republic all too often exhibited. At the same time, we wish to emphasize that this historical experience must be understood in multiple ways, in terms of many levels of significance, and as the result of choices made and not made by Cuban actors themselves.

The following pages present contemporary work by leading scholars of Cuban history from all three of the “national” historiographical networks mentioned above—the Spanish, the Cuban, and the North American. Many of the authors are based in Canada or Valencia, and the Cuban contributors are distinguished by their contemporary training in historical methods. The ensemble expresses new ways of thinking about the late colonial and early republican period, developed over the past decade or so in overlapping networks that have come together, in varying combinations and with different objectives, in Havana, Trinidad, Matanzas, Cienfuegos, Cárdenas, Ann Arbor, Windsor, Montréal, Toronto, Castellón, Valencia, and Madrid. Whether presenting panels on specific themes, reading documents together in methodological workshops, or building bridges between different tendencies in Cuban historiography at ecumenical seminars, the authors in this collection have coalesced on the basis of a shared historical sensibility and a sense of complementarity in their approach to the Cuban past.

Marial Iglesias begins the collection by exploding 1898. She takes us past the contentious domains of diplomatic, military, and economic history that have focused discussion of the United States’ most egregious acts of imperial excess (which are sovereign Cuba’s most painful episodes of violation).<sup>19</sup> Iglesias instead explores the political and popular culture of the successive exhumations of the “cadaver” of the USS *Maine* from its resting place in Havana harbor where, in 1898, it sank after a mysterious explosion—a blast that ostensibly triggered the U.S. intervention in the Cuban war of independence. Republican Cuba had a forensic obsession, one displayed early in the submission of the exhumed skeleton of Antonio Maceo for anthropometric examination in a racially anxious attempt to de-Africanize a hero of the new Cuba in the interests of creole hegemony.<sup>20</sup> Iglesias draws our attention to this culture of unsettled republican remains: if the United States took possession of certain sacred portions of Cuba’s sovereign history when it brokered and restricted Cuban independence, Cuba also came to possess sacred

“American” relics. The monumentalization of the *Maine*’s remains would take a volatile course throughout the history of the republic. It showed itself capable of signifying a wide variety of public feelings about the fusion of U.S. and Cuban experience, from catharsis and love to hatred for the U.S.-backed dictatorial manipulation of public space. The rupture of relations between the two countries in 1961 at the beginning of the socialist revolution meant that the remains of the ship that stayed in Cuba would fall into oblivion in a corner of Havana’s Malecón, but not before being the object of a wave of anti-imperialist ire unleashed by the new regime. The United States did not simply impose itself on republican Cuba; its material presence circulated symbolically around the country, becoming part of Cuban popular culture in the process, vulnerable to expropriation, possession, and public and private violence and rejection.

Iglesias’s magisterial redeployment of the *Maine* sets up four studies that explore important continuities connecting the late colonial period to the republican era. In many respects, and in good measure because of the essential conservatism of the U.S. occupation government, the republic was more reformulation of an agenda sketched out under Spanish sway by Cuba’s creole elites than a radical break with the past. As the important liberal intellectual José Enrique Varona noted in 1915 (when he was vice president of the republic!), “republican Cuba looks like the sister of colonial Cuba.”<sup>21</sup> Yet it was far from a twin, identical or fraternal. The radical break with the past dreamed of by many in the independence armies was frustrated by U.S. occupation and the room it gave the old creole elites to reestablish themselves in positions of strength in the new republic. At the same time, the reformulation of a late colonial agenda allowed for considerable maneuvering and the launching of novel programs and processes.

Deep continuities linking colonial to republican Cuba can be discerned in the domain of scientific research and debate. Steven Palmer explores the way that research in medicine, health, and the natural sciences were reconfigured in the republic following a creole renaissance in the late colonial era focusing principally on laboratory medicine. The principal players in Cuban science remained practically the same between the 1870s and the 1920s. What changed was their position of power relative to one another and to the state. The U.S. occupation acted as a prism, refracting concentrated scientific energies into a more eclectic dispersal that tended to work within networks defined by U.S. scientific and political needs. The search for scientific sovereignty that had characterized the program of the strongest actors in the late colonial research milieu gave way to scientific pursuits that could be of ser-

vice to the attenuated sovereignty of the Cuban state and creole political society. In this context, laboratory-based medical research was supplanted as the mainstay of original Cuban science by eugenics and agronomy. At the same time, the role of foreign scientists, especially from the United States, increasingly influenced the national research agenda. This did not, however, make science in the republic “less Cuban” or less important in the making of a cosmopolitan and original intellectual culture. Nor did it exclude those who had been the powerbrokers of scientific research in the colonial era from staging a comeback in the republic by regaining control of a wider spectrum of scientific and professional associations.

Among recent historians of Cuba, those who have studied problems of gender and racial emancipation have been most likely to take republican political practices seriously and to explore them as nuanced and profoundly consequential. Lynn Stoner has drawn attention to the formation during the Cuban republic of one of Latin America’s most successful movements for women’s suffrage and legal reform.<sup>22</sup> In a provocative reconsideration of race politics in the republic, Alejandro de la Fuente showed how the dominant political parties engaged Cubans of color as a significant electoral constituency. He revealed the dimensions of the material and political resources that were at stake in this dynamic, as well as the fact that, during periods when democratic politics were severely eroded in the republic, as under Menocal especially, Afro-Cubans had less access to employment, political representation, and other rewards.<sup>23</sup> The nature and meaning of those spaces of freedom for those who fought to open them—the “degrees of freedom” available to people of color in late colonial and republican Cuba for pressing claims on citizenship, stature, and property—are the subject of groundbreaking work by scholars led by Rebecca Scott.<sup>24</sup> Scott’s contribution to this collection is a classic consideration of these “dynamics of the search for political voice”—the emancipatory possibilities that the wars of independence opened up for former slaves and their children in republican Cuba.

Scott, too, locates deep continuities in struggles for political voice among former slaves that date from the era of emancipation itself, through the claims made by societies of colored people for desegregation and for electoral rights during the periods of Spanish flirtation with political opening. Full citizenship, meanwhile, was put squarely on the agenda of the independence armies. The U.S. military occupiers were imbued with the experience of reconstruction after the U.S. Civil War, accepting of segregation and the mechanisms developed to deny the franchise to African Americans. Flying in the face of this, the “tenacity of the claims advanced by ordinary Cubans,”

Scott writes, was such that the battle for full franchise rights for Afro-Cuban males was won. Such claims-making dovetailed with labor activism in Cienfuegos during the U.S. occupation and later in solidarity with striking Havana workers in the early days of the republic in 1902, while former slaves and their descendants emerged as combative and dissenting figures during the second U.S. occupation of 1906–9. The electoral system fell short of true democracy in many ways. Nevertheless, constructed within a framework of Cuban *caudillismo*, it still had to acknowledge many midlevel black and mulatto leaders—a pattern also visible at the level of municipal politics, trade unionism, and police forces. Among its many foibles, the republic also had spaces of vigorous struggles for “expanded citizenship.”

Reinaldo Funes offers an environmentally considered take on new health and production technologies that transformed Cuban life in the latter years of the colony and first three decades of the republic. His study delves into the applied scientific guts of milk and meat processing, inspection, and distribution. Funes focuses on a forgotten but key social group in the changing relationship with animals and animal products that defines modern urban civilization—veterinarians and their politically and economically sensitive tours of the slaughterhouses, stables, and milk factories of the capital city. The implementation of these processing and distribution systems made possible dramatic gains in life expectancy and decreased infant mortality in the first two decades after independence, but by the late 1910s these systems were degenerating alongside the political culture of the republic.

As José Antonio Piqueras argues in his meditation on the urban material and symbolic culture of late colonial and republican Havana, there was more continuity than rupture in the periodic reinvention of the capital. If the “Americanization” of Havana’s architecture and spatial layout after 1900 is often pointed to as evidence of the U.S. “takeover” of Cuba, Piqueras shows that similar processes were visible as early as the 1850s. Colonial Havana was readily becoming “American” even as it tasted its first moments of sugar splendor, while republican Havana readily reembraced Spanish colonial styles—whether real, imagined, or newly popular in the United States (for example, the missionary style that rapidly took over in early twentieth-century California and Florida). Piqueras paints a transitory, ephemeral capital city for an “austere republic.” Havana was always undergoing demolition and reconstruction, ceaselessly reproducing an emergent modernity in a second city arising beside the old “colonial” one and *against* a “vast third city that was neither modern nor traditional, but simply deprived.” Neither the colonial nor the republican incarnation of Havana had

much time for public planning or grand edifications of statehood. The social contours and architectural expressions of urban development were for the most part left for the market to determine—even if these sometimes needed a helpful nudge from the forces of order to empty out sectors of the city targeted for building. What type of city did the capital of a new republic require? And what type of city was it possible to make or construct in accordance with the state of public funds, the island’s political status, and the idiosyncrasies of the ruling class?

There are a number of excellent studies of radical worker organizations in Cuba, most of them concerning the 1920s and 1930s when working-class organizations were led by the Cuban Communist Party (organized in 1925 and a member of the Third International). In these studies, the culmination of working radicalism and combativeness is the revolution of 1933, the maximum expression of class and national ideals that led all workers to struggle together independently of nationality or skin color and under communist leadership.<sup>25</sup> Amparo Sánchez Cobos shifts attention to an earlier phase of working-class struggle during which anarchist currents were among the most dynamic. The anarchist newspaper *¡Tierra!* was a staple of the radical press during the first two decades of republican life, spreading news and interpretation different from the “bourgeois press” and serving as a network in its own right bringing together contributors, editors, and readers. Sánchez Cobos looks at the newspaper as a nexus of anarchist discourse that linked reader-workers throughout Cuba with an Atlantic community of anarchist thought, news, subscription, and solidarity. This community was concentrated in certain parts of the United States and Spain, but understood as a transnational network free of divisions based on nationality, skin color, and other markers. Such an analysis views the reorganization of workers after independence in terms of a different internationalist and ideological tradition from that of the later communist stage. Ironically, the new blood of the new republic was drawn in large measure from massive immigration from Spain, an immigration wave promoted by a creole elite eager to dilute the Afro-descended makeup of the population. This massive influx of almost a million Spaniards between 1900 and 1930 also reestablished and developed “old” Atlantic networks of popular solidarity. It was a process in which migrant worker intellectuals, many of them from Spain, played a significant role, and the meshing of Cuban and Spanish anarchist energies in the production of *¡Tierra!* serves as an example of the originality and cosmopolitan horizons of working-class culture in the early republic.

Imilcy Balboa takes us into the island’s agrarian history and to the heart



of one of the great debates over the fate of Cuban republicanism—namely, whether or not the absence of a rural middle class doomed republican democracy. She explores the finer points of the restructuring of the sugar industry that began with the creation of the great *centrales* (large-scale processing factories) at the end of the nineteenth century. In part driven by the arrival of more intense capital investment from the United States, the phenomenon would have profound social consequences after independence. The idea that the expansion of this latifundium system choked off the possibility of the birth of a rural middle class in Cuba that could have been the principal social base for the republic has given rise to a historical explanation of the “failure” of the new political system of the independent country. Without a middle class to support it, politics became a parasitic business for a Cuban elite dispossessed of the economic production that was now in the hands of foreigners.<sup>26</sup> Against such presumptions, Balboa’s study focuses on demonstrating the existence of a middling agrarian bourgeoisie during the first decades of the republic, one that allied itself with the upper classes and assumed political offices that, in spite of the apparent contradiction this involved, shared interests and needs with the large *centrales* and sugar companies and benefited from the policies imposed by their representatives.<sup>27</sup> In the context of the crisis of the 1920s, some notable figures of this agrarian petit bourgeoisie—among them the intellectual and politician Ramiro Guerra—invented the figure of the Cuban *colono* destroyed by the evils of the *latifundio* that should have provided the bases of the new nation and republican system.<sup>28</sup> But according to Balboa, the image of the *colono* created by Guerra and the other ideologues of the nation is an image of a *colono* who is white and—dressed in guayabera, mounted on his steed, a regular at the cockfights, and touring about on Sundays—symbolically one with the old colonial *hacendado*, reflecting a colonial past that resists disappearing with the economic crisis.

Maikel Fariñas looks at forms of sociability related to the early arrival of the Rotary club in “District 25” (Cuba). This is a pioneering study that looks at social clubs outside of the capital and during the republican era. Fariñas proposes that the Rotary clubs acted as authentic centers of power and as pressure groups. Though their membership was principally among the white middle classes, it permeated the middle and upper strata of Cuban society.<sup>29</sup> The Rotary club networks in Cuba extended to all the productive lines of the island, and their technical superiority was based on the support given by the national and international networks of the club and also by the important

links that they maintained with the press, providing them with the attendant possibility of mobilizing public opinion. This turned them quickly into pressure groups with the capacity to intervene in local, regional, and national issues and even, as Fariñas shows, to exercise influence outside the borders of Cuba in matters under negotiation with the United States.

Alejandra Bronfman tunes our attention to the Cuban ether, asking how a public for broadcasting emerged in the republic and under what conditions. In seeking to identify the first audiences for this novel medium of the public sphere, Bronfman understands the public and the machinery of radio as “artifacts of mutual intervention,” in a constitutive moment of great contingency, unevenness, and incompleteness when the seamless selling of hygiene products and romantic radio novelettes was still part of an unimaginable future. The radio had yet to be wrestled into its serviceable shape by those who would make it accessible and profitable, and in its beginning it threw up unruly practices of listening in the street and other public places. Amateur operators constructed equipment and searched for “an esoteric variety of emanations from multiple locations”—among them the 9 P.M. cannon shot over Havana harbor that began the two-hour PWX broadcast each Wednesday and Saturday, followed by a weather forecast. Immediately political—the first official broadcast was an awkward presidential address by Alfredo Zayas—the intromission of foreign signals in Caribbean skies echoed the fragility of Cuba’s sovereignty. Inexorably, the audience that came into being was constituted by private capital exhorting listeners to listen from private, domestic, moneyed spaces, but the process, insists Bronfman, was incomplete and left alternative publics in its wake.

One such alternative public was the Cuban Folklore Society, one of many new intellectual coteries and associations that fleetingly flowered in the *década crítica* of the 1920s. Ricardo Quiza explores the society as an articulation of a dynamic civil society and vehicle for the emergence of new social actors. Although propelled by luminaries—in particular Fernando Ortíz—Quiza shows that the society made possible the creation and circulation of novel symbolic goods that expressed the complex racial and gender reformulations of the public sphere. The membership of the society and authorship in its journal included a notable participation by women, while it brought together an eclectic group of mature cultural figures with a star-studded cast from the first generation of intellectuals who grew up entirely in the context of the republic, oriented by a new populist nationalism and, frequently, an embrace of leftist ideologies. From 1923 to its demise in 1927, the Folklore

Society expressed the dialectic between tradition, change, nationalism, and social science that burned brightly during the 1920s in a Cuba in search of national reconstruction. It also explored the margins of tolerance and dissidence within a civil society brushing up against increasing authoritarian moments.

The volume closes with Robert Whitney's work on the way Afro-Antillean migrants were kept from the enjoyment of labor and political rights during the Batista-dominated regimes of the 1930s. It is a fitting end to our consideration of Cuba's ambiguous republican state. Whitney documents an explicit effort by a more sophisticated, if considerably less democratic, Cuban state to bring certainty to bear on the island's population: in a tight labor market, hiring preference had to be given to "Cubans." But shearing Cuban nationality of its many ambiguities—over half the 4 million inhabitants were migrants who had arrived since independence (mostly from Spain, Haiti, and the British Caribbean)—and establishing with certainty who was a worthy Cuban was a process fraught with discrimination. Between 1936 and 1940 Batista oversaw the successful implementation of the nationalization of labor laws passed by the revolutionary government of 1933. Perhaps the most dramatic episode in this process was the mass expulsion of thousands of Haitian and West Indian workers.<sup>30</sup> As Whitney shows, making the labor laws real also involved a deep institutional transformation: establishing civil registries and labor exchanges throughout the country, especially in eastern Cuba where state power had remained weak during the buildup of the enclave economies of the vast sugar estates owned primarily by U.S. corporations. The late republican state was able to "nationalize" a working class that had, until then, retained an eclectic and frequently extra-Cuban repertoire of cultural characteristics, tendencies, and ties.

These eleven chapters propose new approaches to the study of the history of the early twentieth-century Cuban republic. They tackle issues such as the circulation of urban material and symbolic culture in new civic institutions and public practices; modes of sociability and self-representation among an emerging middle class; changes in scientific and technological practices to regulate humans and animals; and the repercussions of slave emancipation, agrarian reform, and labor organizing on struggles over citizenship and the making of social identities. No collection of this nature can be comprehensive. Many crucial themes and episodes certainly remain for future exploration, but there is no doubt that such exploration is overdue. In introducing or reintroducing readers to the political culture broadly conceived of the first

Cuban republic, *State of Ambiguity* reframes central concerns of civic and cultural life and rehangs them in the gallery of history so that the period can be considered on its own terms.

## Notes

1. Academia de Historia de Cuba, *Constituciones de la República de Cuba*. One institution that the republic did not have was an army. The U.S. occupation authority disbanded the independence armies, and political elites initially hoped that police forces and a rural guard in conjunction with U.S. protection at the international level would obviate the need for a standing army. The absence of a military had complex consequences and did not seem to promote political stability; an army would be created by the second U.S. occupation authority of 1906–9.

2. Autonomism was the ideology of the main Cuban creole followers of liberalism during the interwar years when Spain had allowed a limited democratic opening in Cuba and toyed with the idea of greater self-government by colonial elites. This model sought to acquire sovereignty slowly from Spain (along the lines of Britain's white settler colonies) in order to attain local self-government without risking social and "racial" upheaval. See García Mora and Naranjo Orovio, "Intelectualidad criolla y nación en Cuba, 1878–1898." In Cuba, *creole* means Cuban-born but tracing lineage exclusively to Spain on both sides of the family (and hence, supposedly, of pure European ancestry).

3. On this point, see Zeuske, "1898: Cuba y el problema de la 'transición pactada,'" and Piqueras, *Sociedad civil y poder en Cuba*, 318–28.

4. The progressive democratic nature of this formative period is the subject of Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*.

5. This history is comprehensively captured in Helg, *Our Rightful Share*; see also Fuente, "Myths of Racial Democracy: Cuba, 1900–1912," and for a trenchant Cuban view, Fernández Robaina, *El negro en Cuba, 1902–1958*.

6. Rojas, "Otro gallo cantaría: Ensayo sobre el primer republicanismo cubano." Santí proposes that these intellectuals may have contributed to killing the republic with "an overdose of idealism": "Primera República," 131.

7. Principal among them is Pérez, *Cuba under the Platt Amendment, 1902–1934*. For a detailed view of the understanding of the amendment within the constituent assembly, see López Rivero and Ibarra, "En torno a 1898."

8. See Zanetti Lecuona, *Los cautivos de la reciprocidad*.

9. The era is brilliantly captured in Jenks, *Our Cuban Colony*, though the title is misleading in that Jenks gives considerably more autonomy and responsibility to Cuban actors in the unfolding of politics prior to the 1920s than most scholars have been willing to give them, and he even provides the basis for a revisionist rereading of the Zayas presidency as politically astute and, despite massive corruption, able to provide some forward-looking coherence to republican politics.

10. A fate registered in the title of the superb study of the fall of Machado by Aguilar, *Cuba 1933: Prologue to Revolution*.

11. Riverend, *La República: Dependencia y revolución*; Yglesia, *Cuba, primera república, segunda ocupación*; López Segrera, *Raíces históricas de la revolución cubana*. Pino-Santos, “Lo que fue aquella República: Protectorado y neocolonia,” differentiates between the first phase, from 1902 to 1934, which he designates a protectorate, and a second phase from 1934 (after the Cuban abrogation of the Platt Amendment following the overthrow of Machado) to 1959, which was a neocolony with distinct characteristics, but this is not a differentiation apparent elsewhere in this special issue devoted to a discussion of the first republic.

12. Armas, *La revolución pospuesta*; Figarola, *Cuba 1900–1928: la república dividida contra sí misma*; and Ibarra, *Cuba: 1898–1921: Partidos políticos y clases sociales*.

13. A comprehensive consideration of this historiography is Pérez, *The War of 1898*.

14. An excellent discussion of this focus, and an expression of it, can be found in Naranjo Orovio and Opatrny, “Estudios cubanos a fines del milenio,” 11–22.

15. Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution; On Becoming Cuban; To Die in Cuba: Suicide and Society*; and *Winds of Change*.

16. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy*, 2.

17. Notably, though a Liberal era periodization, common for the rest of Latin America, is rarely used for Cuba, when it has been “forced” onto *cubanistas*, the fit is rather comfortable; see, for example, the two superb contributions to volume 5 of *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, Aguilar, “Cuba, 1860–1934,” and Moreno Friginals, “Sugar in the Caribbean, 1870–1930” (with Cuba discussed as part of a regional context).

18. The notion of the wars of independence as an “ambivalent revolution,” particularly in terms of the vacillations in imagining the racial equality of republican subjects, is threaded through Ada Ferrer’s *Insurgent Cuba*.

19. A new cultural history of this relationship, pioneered by Pérez (see especially *On Becoming Cuban*), is also apparent in recent works such as Iglesias, *A Cultural History of Cuba during the U.S. Occupation, 1898–1902*, and Casimir, “Champion of the Patria.”

20. The Maceo postmortem would have a ghoulish echo a decade later in the autopsy performed on the body of executed Partido Independiente de Color leader Evaristo Estenoz, the intention apparently to demonstrate a pathological and degenerate negroid constitution.

21. “Cuba republicana parece hermana de Cuba colonial”; Varona, “Recepción en la Academia Nacional,” 248.

22. Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*.

23. Fuente, *A Nation for All*.

24. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom*; Scott and Zeuske, “Property in Writing, Property on the Ground”; Bronfman, *Measures of Equality*.

25. See, for example, Carr, “Mill Occupations and Soviets”; Carr, “Identity, Class, and Nation”; and Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba*.

26. For example, see Ramos, *Manual del perfecto fulanista*, and Carrión, “El desenvolvimiento social de Cuba en los últimos veinte años,” cited in López Segrera, *Raíces históricas de la revolución cubana*, 298–300.

27. One of the first works to tackle this question was Ibarra, *Cuba: 1898–1921*.

28. Guerra, *Un cuarto de siglo de evolución cubana* and *Azúcar y población en las Antillas*. An insightful analysis of this issue is Díaz Quiñones, “El enemigo íntimo.” On the reply of Fernando Ortiz to Guerra’s criticism of the latifundio during the crisis of the 1920s, see Santí, “Fernando Ortiz, o la crítica de la caña,” 138–44.

29. Joaquín Añorga, “El rotarismo en Cuba: Su origen, sus características y sus obras.”

30. Mcleod, “Undesirable Aliens: Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism in the Comparison of Haitian and British West Indian Immigrant Workers in Cuba, 1912–1939.”