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## State of Ambiguity

Palmer, Steven

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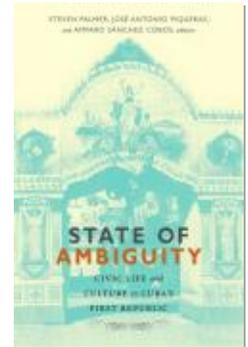
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## CHAPTER 5



### Attributes for the Capital of an Austere Republic

José Antonio Piqueras

In the new city growing next to the old city of Havana, the traces of Spanish civilization were slowly and relentlessly disappearing. According to notes made by a foreign traveler, they were being replaced by “modern American civilization, which callously invades everything.” The narrow streets with elevated sidewalks and large, old houses “built in the pure Spanish style” were things of the past in the urban area that was expanding to the west of the city. Of course, the past had not disappeared, and numerous observers declared that it was still alive, displaying the idiosyncrasies to which Havana owed its fame as a major Atlantic metropolis of Caribbean vocation. The city was a large street theater with a multicolored cast of hawkers and shopkeepers, artisans and wholesalers, public functionaries and animals pulling carts laden with goods from the docks. Atop filthy cobblestones, breathing a thousand city smells, they were all mixed together in a city radiating out from the large inner bay that, in the classic conception of the artists and historians fascinated by the great urban markets of the nineteenth century, was both “the belly and the lungs” of a commercial metropolis. Havana, however, was changing. Modernity was rising alongside it, in a second city that the traveler went on to describe as having “beautiful” roads—wide, spacious, straight, and well designed—with “buildings constructed in the style of the United States” on tree-lined avenues with parks nearby, markedly different from the older buildings. The new city housed modern cafés, theaters, the railway station, industrial establishments, and the “most reputable” schools. Travelers, then, were presented with two opposing cities: one modern, one traditional. The modern city displayed the clear influence of the Anglo-American North. The old city,

apparently unmistakably “Hispanic,” was in fact a mixture of Spanish and creole—indeed, almost entirely creole, with little real originality beyond its syncretism, its humbler homes built in interstitial spaces and in outlying neighborhoods next to the docks and warehouses. This old city inherited the legacy of large public buildings, fortresses and palaces, convents, churches, and large stone houses.

The image we have just evoked could apply to the dawn of the twentieth century, to the first years of the republic when a paradigm of American modernity began to take shape that contrasted itself with a supposedly traditional Spanish colonial order. The birth of a national state provided the perfect opportunity to open the city to other influences—especially given the decisive defeat of an enemy, Spain, that surrendered once on the battlefield and again in the Treaty of Paris—and to introduce the latest advances from one of the most economically advanced nations of the age, the United States. The United States was the country closest to the New Cuba in practical and functional terms because of the tight commercial links that had already been established, because it was the main destination for Cuban political and industrial emigration, and because it was where the majority of the heirs of Havana’s elite received their higher education. Marial Iglesias has elegantly explored discourses and symbols that reveal a desire for change and an identification with a certain imaginary of modernity among ordinary people during the limbo years of the U.S. occupation when the past was dead, the future still to be constructed.<sup>1</sup> The most advanced sectors of society had idealized images and models of this future that they hoped to introduce, as if it were possible to disregard the reality of the existing society and ignore its natural impulses and inertias.

But let us return to our traveler and his tale of a city being ruthlessly invaded by “modern American civilization,” an urban image characterized by its duality. The account actually refers to a visit made in 1853 by the Colombian Nicolás Tanco. The author, who shortly afterward began to import indentured Asian workers for work on the main sugar plantations (a new modality in an ancient form of exploitation), contrasted traditional Havana with the new Havana growing outside the city, on the other side of the Paseo del Prado and the Paseo Isabel II, together constituting the main thoroughfare beginning at Castillo de la Punta and ending at the Campo de Marte (see map 5.1). Two different styles of life were gradually taking shape, even in terms of the physical appearance of a city which was, in the words of Tanco, suffering from the ambiguous nature of two civilizations (Spanish and North American) competing with each other.<sup>2</sup>



**Map 5.1** Havana, 1853. Courtesy of the Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Mapoteca.

Yet these changes were themselves prefigured by the urban expansion plan of 1819 and the reforms promoted by General Tacón (the most important of the reforms carried out during the colony), though they still conformed to the “European style.” The sewer system was developed, the main arterial roads were created, and the construction of new emblematic buildings in the area outside the city walls was promoted. This could be seen in the construction of the Teatro Pancho Marty (later the Teatro Tacón), built in the style of the Teatros Principales found in Spanish cities, and in the way avenues were designed and decorated in the European style. The Palacio Aldama was the first major building constructed outside the city walls. It was a splendid residence in the style of the neoclassical aristocratic palaces of the early nineteenth century and before (that is, “in the old style”). It was an accurate reflection of the pathos of an old Spanish American slave trader, the Basque Domingo Aldama, who found inspiration in the homes of the *aristocracia hatera* (livestock owning aristocracy) and the *sacarocracia criolla* (creole sugar barons) of the previous century.<sup>3</sup> The finishing touches were baroque features that forged a link with the more refined mansions of the day.

In contrast to the above, the creole middle classes, who were not involved in the sugar industry, had specific channels of prosperity. These channels

were by no means exclusive to creoles, given that the mixing of Spaniards and creoles was a permanent affair that Cubanized the second generation of immigrants from mainland Spain and the Canary Islands. With military careers relegated to a secondary position and high-level administration ruled out, the cultivation of a professional culture became one of the safest means of achieving social mobility. In Cuba, there was a certain model of specialization that provided income and status through higher education and enabled professions to be practiced in several very specific areas: medicine, agriculture, and the law. Some technical professions such as land surveying and construction were also acceptable, with engineering restricted to a large extent to the colonial military corps. Yet in no way did these classes cease to have a hand in commerce and particularly in property speculation.

The conflict between a new city that looked to the north and an archaic city trapped by its physical walls (which began to be demolished in 1863) and by the social and cultural barriers that shackled it to the past and to the colonial administration, as Tanco highlighted in 1853, was more a metaphor than a reality at the time he wrote. From about 1900 on, things would be different, but let us note that it was a question of degree more than one of tendency or essence. 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 status, the state of public funds, and the idiosyncrasies of the ruling class? There was more continuity than there were ruptures in the periodic reinvention of Havana. Indeed, the only real exceptions to this were the Master Plan commissioned from Jean-Claude Forestier in 1925 (although never fully implemented, it included landscaping the city, creating scenic views, and designing the Capitólio in the image of the Capitol building in Washington) and the *proyecto batistiano* (Batista's urban reform project).<sup>4</sup> In spite of the overwhelming consensus against such a claim, there is evidence to support it.

### **The Second Hispanicization of Havana's Urban Landscape**

Havana emerged from the war of independence in 1898 as the city that best symbolized Cuba's colonial era. The premises of political moderation, social control, and adapting the conditions of the country to democracy faced an acid test in a capital that was almost ten times bigger than the country's next largest city. In 1899, the census registered 235,981 inhabitants, almost one in five of the island's residents. By 1907, the figure had risen to 300,000. The following decade witnessed a more modest increase, with 363,000 inhabitants in 1919, one out of every six residents of Cuba, while from that date on the city population grew considerably until reaching 520,504 inhabitants in

1931. Home to the new institutions and to cultural life, as it had been during the colony, during the first decades of the republic Havana had to create and accommodate various cities: the political, intellectual, financial, working-class, marginal, and speculative cities, but above all the city which housed the middle classes who demanded progress and moderation. The physical creation of the “new Havana” was an accurate reflection of this trend, in which residential neighborhoods stood out more than the emblematic buildings characteristic of a big city, whose construction had to wait until the 1920s. Starting with the U.S. occupation, an image of immediate modernity spread, but took a long time to become a reality and often did not coincide with the political times. Modernity was closely related, on the one hand, to a feeling of fervent hope, and on the other hand to a mirage, an image that never became a tangible reality.

When beginning to organize the Constituent Assembly, General Wood had attempted to lay the foundations for a “stable, well-organized, free government.” Stable and well organized, not subject to another foreign sovereignty but instead under the tutelage of the United States—this was a situation that obviously challenged full sovereignty. Stable and well organized, following the natural chaos of the war, with the active participation of social and ethnic actors who had to be included in the new democracy since, even though it was the subject of debate, the republic could not adopt a system that restricted people’s rights and freedoms.<sup>5</sup> It was at this point that the middle and upper classes looked forward not to a modernist North American style but rather to the tastes of the past in order to establish once again visual differences marking the social hierarchy, in opposition to the inevitable democratization, to the theoretical dominance of the masses—the people—most of whom were from rural communities, small villages, and the tenement buildings of the Havana slums.

Let us take a look at some examples. Construction work on the Palacio de la Asociación de Dependientes began in 1903. It was a four-story building with a concrete structure, but the style chosen for the building was Venetian Renaissance.<sup>6</sup> Such historicism was all the rage, and the style, inspired in Old Europe, soon became a permanent feature of the cityscape. Whatever was not built in an eclectic style could be classed as Italianized academicism. Large mansions and corporate buildings went even further or looked even further back and drew upon neo-Spanish styles: neo-Mudéjar, so-called Andalusian architecture and decoration, Herrerian Renaissance, and plateresque neobaroque.<sup>7</sup> The stylistic influence after 1900 was of Spanish origin and even more so during the 1910s and 1920s when the same international

fashion spread to California, Florida, and the Hispanic South of the United States. The influence was therefore twofold. It came directly from Spain, and it was also reinterpreted in the so-called Spanish style, which the illustrated magazines and the cinema made popular; the style was shown on the screen and also used in the villas owned by the stars.

The adoption of these styles in Cuba began almost as soon as the Spanish flag had been lowered over the metropolis. It was first seen in the Cuban pavilions at the World's Fairs in Paris and Buffalo in 1900 and 1901, respectively. And it was used in two of the major constructions of the first republican period: the train station and the port customs office in 1912. Residential houses were built with porticos and plateresque façades. The national style looked for inspiration in the colony and in the eighteenth century, with additional features taken from popular culture. From 1917 onward, the neo-Hispanic, Californian-style bungalow became popular, with the sloping roofs and angled towers found in Vedado (and Nuevo Vedado) and on the sea front in Miramar.

According to Roberto Segre, one of the best contemporary experts on Latin American architectural history, the architecture of the first decades of republican life missed the opportunity to build a creative interpretation of cultural roots and instead became an artificial façade, a decor that replaced the search for a national style.<sup>8</sup> It could be said that the early “Americanization” of Havana’s urban design under Spanish colonial rule was followed by a late “Hispanicization” during the first two decades of the Republic.<sup>9</sup> To a large extent these took place simultaneously and, as we shall see below, Americanization returned as a paradigm after 1920 with the avalanche of capital from the United States. This met opposition (just as it had met opposition from Rodó in Uruguay) from a type of Hispanicity that acted as a line of defense while Cubanizing culture.

Did Hispanic elements mix with modern elements? It is important not to confuse techniques, comfort, and architectural style. With regard to buildings, and insofar as decoration was concerned, Hispanic elements became a synonym for modernity during the republic. Scholars of architecture in Cuba and in other countries classed the group of styles mentioned above as neocolonial, without according them any political connotations because they extended over such varied geographies, from Porfirian Mexico to San Francisco and Los Angeles. The question is why the style was used in Havana. Neocolonial and neo-Hispanic styles became popular in Cuba just when political links with Spain had disappeared and North American influences prevailed over almost everything else, not least the “mediation” of politics. It was

not a passing phase: one section of the intellectual movement that opposed the republic promoted or was associated with the flamboyant Institute for Hispano-Cuban Culture.<sup>10</sup>

The first large building constructed in the new era was the Lonja de Víveres or Lonja del Comercio. It was built between 1907 and 1909 in the Plaza de San Francisco and was based on a design by the Spanish architect Tomás Mur. The work was carried out by the Cuban architect José Toraya, who had been educated in the United States, and few changes were made. It was the most grandiose building of the time, five stories high and constructed in a neoclassical style. Toraya soon became the most sought-after architect. He renovated the old building of the Marine Headquarters and converted it into the first building to house the Chamber of Representatives, in Calle Oficinas, next to the Convent of San Francisco. He was later involved in the construction of the Banco Nacional de Cuba, in Calle Obispo (1907), and the Hotel Sevilla Biltmore (1908), built in a neo-Moorish style. After leaving the presidency, in 1915 José Miguel Gómez commissioned Toraya to build his home on the Paseo del Prado. Inspired by classical styles, Toraya rejected the baroque style yet still maintained the historicism.

The U.S. construction company Purdy & Henderson was responsible for most of the buildings mentioned and for many others. Modern building techniques were used but, paradoxically, at that time modern styles came under Spanish artistic influence. Again it is worth dispensing with any prejudices that associate U.S. styles with “the modern” and Spanish styles with “the traditional.” Around 1900, one of the most innovative and decorative building techniques was the bricked vault, a structure allowing the construction of large arches which represented a modernist retake on classicism. The technique (which was not used in Cuba until the 1960s) appeared prominently in the United States, used in the Boston Library, in Pittsburgh’s Union Station, and in New York’s Grand Central Station, all works carried out by the Spanish architect and builder Rafael Guastavino, who settled in the United States in the 1880s and patented the system.<sup>11</sup>

Historicism was also a feature of Havana’s large public and corporate buildings. The Belgian architect Paul Belau designed the new Centro Gallego in a Hispanic baroque style, and this was annexed to the Teatro Nacional, formerly the Teatro Tacón. It was also symbolic that an immigrant from the old colonial metropolis was responsible for constructing the first national coliseum, the most famous monument in the country (larger and more solemn than the official headquarters of the republican state). As a result of its success, in line with the tastes of the period, the same architect was com-

missioned to build the Palace of Provincial Government in cooperation with the Cuban architect Rodolfo Maruri. After reappraisal, the project went on to become the Palacio Presidencial, built in a truly varied style, since it included elements of Spanish renaissance and Prussian baroque. The Presidential Palace is possibly, along with the Capitólio, the least Spanish of the official republican buildings. The Centro Asturiano added the finishing touches to the series when it was completed in 1927. It was inspired in the Herrerian renaissance style and had a stone façade with the Spanish coat of arms.

As part of a project to promote tourism, in 1929 Gerardo Machado's government began the restoration of the most emblematic buildings of the colonial period. These included El Templete and the Palacio de Gobierno (Governor's Palace), former seat of the Senate, which had just moved to the Capitólio, thus removing the last symbol of political power from the Plaza de Armas. Restoration work was also carried out on the Plaza de la Catedral. The world of colonial traditionalism was re-created. The work undertaken on the Palacio de los Capitanes Generales was a perfect illustration of the concept of the historic city which the Machado regime was attempting to present: it had everything that a visitor—a modern tourist—could imagine a stately, fortified city should have, with its defenses and noble buildings. For Segre this was “the beginning of a process to invent a colonial ambience to restore a non-existent classical ‘dignity’ or a hypothetical environmental coherence” adapted to the image a foreigner required. The first step consisted of removing the buildings' colored plaster (the layer of plaster and lime wash that was considered too ordinary) to reveal the gray stone underneath. This is the appearance we have come to know and which both travelers and residents now believe to be original and characteristic.<sup>12</sup> Shortly afterward, in 1936, Emilio Roig's *Las calles de La Habana* (The streets of Havana) paid homage to the colonial city, and in 1938 Roig persuaded the city council to restore the old colonial names of hundreds of streets in the historic center.

Obviously the “Hispanicizing” style found widespread support among the Spanish immigrant colony and its descendants. The Centro Gallego and Centro Asturiano were the best examples of this, yet the style also caused a sensation among the creole upper middle classes and in official government spheres. These higher social groups and political authorities became “trend setters” whose prestige and privileged position meant that they were soon copied. In addition, they made the “Hispanicizing” tastes of those originally from the old metropolis, Spain, seem more acceptable instead of appearing to be the continuation of a defeated cause. There were undoubtedly exceptions which favored eclectic academicism, such as the residence which the

Pérez de la Riva family built opposite the entrance to the port, now the Palacio de la Música (Palace of Music), but the style was similar to that used in Spanish cities of the period, to which it bore more of a resemblance than to buildings from any other place.

### **Modernities and Their Expiration Date**

Let us agree that urban modernity is but an instant. In 1975, before an audience gathered at the Central University of Venezuela, Alejo Carpentier introduced himself as a member of a peculiar generation. The acclaimed writer, who was born in 1904 and arrived in Havana in 1915, declared that

Latin Americans of my generation experienced an unusual fate which on its own was enough to distinguish them from European men: they were born, they grew up, and they matured in relation to reinforced concrete. . . . the city I grew up in was still similar to Humboldt's Havana. . . . And suddenly, our sleepy capitals become real cities (anarchic in their sudden growth, anarchic in their design, excessive, disrespectful in their urge to demolish in order to replace) and our men, inseparable from the metropolis, become city-men, twentieth-century-city-men, that is to say History-of-the-twentieth-century-men.

Such was the view of this former student of architecture, author of *La ciudad de las columnas* (*The City of Columns*), a declaration of identity within a framework of time standing still.<sup>13</sup>

The notion that people were aware of change and that they were both “bewildered onlookers and the main actors” was repeated once again. When writing about the São Paulo he knew in 1935, Lévi-Strauss maintained that in America, cities “go directly from luxuriance to decrepitude, but they are never ancient,” and that part of their essence was that they lacked relics. These words could not be applied to Havana, meaning that its modernization did not conform to the model of the new large American metropolis, so taken with the notion of an essentially vertical avant-garde—or at least that such a modernization was delayed until much later on in the 1950s.

In the New World, continued Lévi-Strauss, cities “are in need of restoration as quickly as they are built, or rather badly built.” The anthropologist aimed to highlight the existence of very short evolutionary urban cycles, in comparison with those of the Old World. This “thirst for restoration” of which he spoke was closely related to the cycles of the export economies, in which members of the generation leading the cycle aspired to shape the city and leave their mark on houses, which demonstrated their personal opu-

lence, in other words *social capital* in architecture.<sup>14</sup> On occasion they were also closely related to political cycles, which despite claiming to be reformist, often corresponded to authoritarian formulas, in Havana's case under the aegis of Tacón, Machado, and Batista. David Harvey has provided some valuable reflections on the conflict that underlies the relationship between the imaginative spatial play characteristic of regenerative policies and authoritarianism, and on the nostalgic strain with which the "authenticity" of cities is often established, a combination sought by conservative inertia represented above all by institutional buildings and which is more likely to prevail under authoritarian governments.<sup>15</sup>

Latin American cities periodically reinvented themselves, driven by the price of export commodities and by trade agreements. They presented hints of modernity followed by periods during which they faded away due to cycles of reduced commercial activity—as Lévi-Strauss noted, a permanent "fleeting youth." They were cities that experienced a considerable amount of immigration, attracted by the sparkle of success, and were subjected to the extreme conditions of the tropics, including annual storms and hurricanes. As a result of all these factors, reports by locals and visitors (often the reflections of scholars) continuously bore witness to urban signs of innovation in which modernity was repeated, only to fade away and then reappear once again.

Segre has made Havana the subject of incisive reflections on urbanism, architecture, social hegemony, and political power. He does not hesitate to highlight the *modern* city's rapid transformation after 1899. This modern transformation involved both speculative fervor and the substitution of the symbolic system of the peninsular government—although, as we will see, the same process of speculation could be observed from the 1870s onward in the area of Las Murallas, and the symbolic substitution, which involved moving government buildings to that very area, was a continuation of the same development initiative. It also involved a marked social division, which was perhaps the most unmistakable phenomenon. The bourgeois city (El Vedado, Miramar) was situated in the west, the south was home to the petite bourgeoisie (Santos Suárez, Luyanó, La Vívora), and the poor area of the city was located in the center, in the adjacent suburbs (Jesús María), and in the surrounding areas (Cayo Hueso and the lower part of the bay).<sup>16</sup> However, Segre admits that the division was more a trend than a reality, just as the cited occupation of land and the assigning of symbolic functions were trends, as was the "airborne" republic itself (as Bolívar would have said—without roots or with hidden roots), since the bourgeois and working-class areas were still adjacent to each other. Again, the trend can be detected before 1899.



**Map 5.2** View of Cerro and Jesús del Monte, 1875. Courtesy of the Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Mapoteca.

In 1886, three decades after Tanco's comments and after the city walls had been demolished, another traveler (Peris Mencheta, a well-known Spanish journalist) commented on the city's growth since 1878. Of the twenty thousand buildings registered in the census, he said, over three thousand were newly constructed buildings and over two-thirds of the new constructions were for wealthy families. The El Cerro neighborhood, built as a summer resort at the end of the eighteenth century to the southwest of the bay, toward Vueltabajo, had become a residential area with villas and country houses which to the visitor looked similar to those found in the recent extension of the Paseo de la Castellana in Madrid, although in Havana most were one-story houses. The Paseo de la Reina and Paseo de Carlos III, built by the great urban reformer of the nineteenth century, General Tacón (who was so reactionary in politics), gave way to villas set among tree-covered gardens. The place where these came to an end marked the beginning of the new botanical gardens, after the old ones located next to the Teatro Tacón had been demolished and used as the site for the first railway station, the Estación Villanueva (map 5.2).

The city's two modern markets were located outside the city walls (one

was the Mercado de Tacón in the Plaza del Vapor and the other was the Mercado de Colón), and these were reconstructed in 1876 and 1884, around the time of Peris Mencheta's visit, using metallic structures imported from Belgium. The new barracks had been built in the area, which also housed the Teatro Tacón, Teatro Albisu, and Teatro Irijoa, among others, together with the modern Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes Hospital (the first of three planned hospitals), finished in 1882, which had beds for two hundred patients. Although the reporter did not mention them, the area also played host to the Teatro Payret (a modern building from 1877 with an iron roof), the Teatro Alhambra, and the Circo-Teatro Jané, which was opened in 1881 and had a roof with an avant-garde cast-iron framework. The Teatro Irijoa, on Calle Dragones and Central (later Calle Zulueta), was opened in 1884. It was renovated in 1897, and in 1900, after being renamed the Teatro Martí, it was used as the venue for the Constitutional Convention.

The *casas de salud*, private clinics providing health care and hospital accommodation through subscription, were located outside the city walls in extensive, tree-covered grounds. The model of *mutuas*, originating in the colonial era, was fully developed by the time of the first republican period, almost always promoted by workers' associations and Spanish regional associations from colonial times. In 1885, the Sociedad Gallega contracted the Quinta del Rey clinic to provide a hospital and sanatorium for its members. In 1894, it bought the grounds on which La Benéfica sanatorium was built, which when finished was able to accommodate five hundred patients in various wards. The Asociación de Dependientes del Comercio (Shop Assistants Association), which was founded in 1880 and consisted mainly of Spaniards, commissioned the Quinta de Salud medical center. In 1912, the association's membership had reached the considerable figure of 27,600 and their health care facilities included sixteen wards able to accommodate 680 patients.<sup>17</sup> Around 1925, they had some eighty thousand members, that is to say, one in six inhabitants of Havana.<sup>18</sup>

Mencheta, who was a keen observer of social and material realities, did not fail to notice the existence of a vast third city that was neither modern nor traditional, but simply deprived. It was made up of tenement buildings (the *solar habanero*) and accounted for approximately one in four homes in which, he said, "Chinese, blacks, and dirty whites (mulattos) all lived crowded together."<sup>19</sup> The modernity of the cities, when visible, was a tiny fragment surrounded by a much wider reality of little interest to occasional visitors, left out of tourist guides and ignored by photographers and the tinted postcards that became fashionable during the third decade of

the twentieth century. The history of poor housing, generally occupied by workers, is the history of how the communities living in the areas outside the city walls designated for “modernization,” “reform,” and “the new” were gradually displaced through the use of brutal methods (as brutal as those used by Haussmann in Paris), and their former residents were subsequently confined in unsanitary ghettos within the old city.

The history of the Jesús María neighborhood provides a telling summary. In 1802, the humble dwellings of 11,370 people (1,332 houses and 1,265 out-buildings and back rooms) were burned down. Rebuilding was prohibited. The residents evicted as a result of the fire were black creoles and “mangrove workers.” The fire had broken out simultaneously at various points, an unmistakable sign of arson. In 1828 a second fire destroyed what was left of the neighborhood, which at that time was home to only 3,126 people, two-thirds of them white. The blacks had fled to Horcón and to other outlying neighborhoods. The influx of people into Havana, particularly during the two major anticolonial wars (1868–78 and 1895–98) and as a result of General Weyler’s Reconcentration Policy (1896–98), and the fact that a large proportion of that population settled in the city, resulted in overcrowding in the most dilapidated neighborhoods (which the wealthy people gradually abandoned) and the division of houses. Condominiums and apartments were partitioned off, a trend which continued during the hazardous twentieth century in Havana. In 1919, over fifteen hundred *casas de vecindad* (tenement buildings) or *solares*, as they were generally called, were registered in the census. One type had a dozen rooms to rent (the *casa de vecindad* proper), another from 20 to 30 rooms (the *solar*), and a third up to 100 rooms (the *ciudadela*). Juan Manuel Chailloux estimated that there was an average of twenty-eight rooms per solar in 1945 and that their inhabitants represented a third of the population of Havana, which was undoubtedly an increase with regard to the figures for 1886, when the number of poor houses was estimated to be around five thousand.<sup>20</sup>

In 1899, the census indicated that 43 percent of houses in the capital had a cesspit and no drains. It can easily be deduced where those houses were located. In 1904, there were 2,839 solares housing 86,000 inhabitants, in the region of 30 per house.<sup>21</sup> In other words, one in every three inhabitants lived in this kind of “infra-Havana.” In 1945, Chailloux explained that several families lived crowded together in old colonial mansions, “divided and subdivided” until they held over 100 people in rooms partitioned off with cardboard and curtains to make poky little rooms reminiscent, in the words of the sociologist, “of the holds of slave ships.” In 1910, the first workers’

housing estate, named el Redención (or Pogolotti), was distributed and consisted of 950 houses; in 1945, it had as many as fourteen thousand residents, almost fifteen people per house.<sup>22</sup> That meant that overcrowding and insalubrity increased in Havana during the republic, at least for an ever greater proportion of citizens (at least 33 percent and perhaps as much as 40 percent of the populace were generally left out of the general view of urban modernization). The proletarian city and the city in which ordinary people lived were located in the old urban center and overflowed into the suburbs.

At the same time, the centers of production took on a palatial appearance, as could already be seen in the factories of the late nineteenth century—La Meridiana (1880), Gener (1882), Bances y López (1886)—and in factories that other tobacco dealers constructed in “the ring” (the space made available for urban construction by the demolition of the city’s walls and moat), quite a long time before the construction of the American Tobacco Co. building in 1902 or the provocative Fábrica Partagás in 1929, right behind the Capitólio.<sup>23</sup> There were previous cases of architecture being used to ennoble manufacturing centers. The Palacio Aldama, having served to augment the grace and style of the family that constructed it and after its use as the seat of the High Court following its confiscation in 1869, was eventually given over to the noble industry of tobacco production (“the only remaining virtue of tobacco is that of the people who work with it,” as Martí wrote). It housed the La Corona factory and, from 1898 to 1932, the Havana Cigar and Tobacco Factories, Limited. This was a clear sign that the productive world was devouring the symbols of social prestige, while changing the Spanish trade names for other foreign names. It was certainly true that urban design and social formation bore very little relation to colonial or republican political status.

Commercial life after 1898 was located in the old center and in the center outside the city walls, where buildings were renovated on spaces incorporated more than half a century earlier. The symbolic replacement of the buildings of power, which Segre refers to as a physical reality marking the rhythm of change from a colonial to a republican regime, had to wait quite a long time. The substitution took place during two periods. The first, during the second half of the 1910s, was interrupted by the economic crisis of 1920 and was resumed at the end of that decade and in the early 1930s. The second took place considerably later, in the 1950s, when alongside the establishment of the violent Batista dictatorship, the city underwent its greatest urban renovation. Havana was endowed with public buildings that finally freed themselves from academicism and classicism and experimented with creole functionalism (the Palacio de Justicia and the Palacio de Bellas Artes, the

Biblioteca Nacional and the buildings in Marianao).<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, planning for the city was based on its new role as the capital of tourism and leisure on a large scale. It was carried out in collusion with inadvisable partners in a similar style to that used in Ciudad Trujillo, in the Dominican Republic, except that more resources were available in Havana and there was a more developed environment that was culturally closer to U.S. customers.<sup>25</sup>

### **Urban Renovation in the Late Colony**

In 1853, Nicolás Tanco could not find a good hotel in Havana. A decade earlier, Salas y Quiroga complained about the city's poor restaurants, while noting that a recently established U.S.-style restaurant offered the highest levels of comfort, elegance, and service aimed at travelers from the United States who had gone to spend the winter there for health reasons.<sup>26</sup> In 1875, in the middle of the Ten Years' War, the Hotel Inglaterra opened next to the Louvre and took its name from one of the most modern and renowned cafés of the city. This period witnessed the beginning of the development of the wide strip of land, referred to as "the ring," created by the demolition of the city walls (decreed in 1863) and the filling in of their wide external moat. It was the most sought after area for construction as it served as a link between the old and the new cities and was close to the axis that had been used during the previous fifty years as a promenade, a leisure area, and a place for the upper classes to show off their wealth. Here the new leisure establishments were situated.<sup>27</sup>

The land became known as the Reparto Las Murallas and was the object of speculative fervor for fifty years, the period between the first transfers made to Julián Zulueta (1870) and the construction of the Palacio Presidencial, the Centro Asturiano, and the Bacardí corporation's building (1930). From 1880 onward, the construction of many of these buildings in the ring made use of the reinforced concrete that Carpentier referred to, mistakenly confusing them with the functional buildings built after 1950 because they left the material exposed. The difference, according to Segre, was that the academicism of the period between 1880 and 1920, spanning the end of the colony and the beginning of the republic, concealed the technical innovations that lay beneath it.<sup>28</sup> In short, technical modernity came before aesthetics and began during the old colonial regime.

Zulueta, the "prince of slave traders," realized the potential of the real estate business and commissioned the Spanish architect Pedro Tomé (who created the Palacio Balboa) to construct a large block of commercial premises. Tomé had arrived in Cuba in the mid-1860s to take up the post of mu-

nicipal architect. The building, which from 1894 onward was known as La Manzana de Gómez in reference to its new owner, the sugar tycoon Gómez-Mena, was a one-story building with an inner glazed gallery running diagonally through the building in line with Parisian trends. Between 1916 and 1918, four more stories were constructed for apartment accommodation, giving the building the appearance it still has today.

During the last two decades of colonial rule, advertisements for spacious shops selling foreign articles of the type found in the North were often placed in newspapers. It is worth remembering, however, that most shops were of a distinctly popular nature, with the exception of (most of) the most luxurious outlets in Calle Obispo, O'Reilly, San Rafael, and Galiano. They were not like the shops of the Parisian-style boulevards and plazas of the Second Empire, but were instead closer to the model of the bazaar, with large signs traditionally used to capture the attention of pedestrians and large awnings overhanging the sidewalks. This continued at least during the first decade of the republic, as can be seen in the photos taken of the Parque Central at that time, which illustrate a kind of primitivism that was highly idealized by numerous subsequent reports and analyses.

At the same time, the *fin de siècle* era following the Treaty of Zanjón saw the construction of residential villas to the west, next to the coast, in a new upper-middle-class suburb between El Carmelo and El Vedado. It was completed after 1899 and also given the name El Vedado.<sup>29</sup> The birth of the Vedado residential neighborhood has mistakenly been associated with the republic. This idea was proposed by the geographer and historian Leví Marrero, and he was joined by numerous authors who confused the creation of the neighborhood with its extension toward Marianao and the south (what is known as Nuevo Vedado) into a vast, crowded modern nucleus.<sup>30</sup> The confusion was convenient when all eyes were focused on a foundational, innovative republic that denied or disputed the spontaneity with which civil society, in particular the upper and upper middle classes, designed their own habitat during the colony.

The introduction of an electric tramway improved transport links in the growing city. Distances were measured in traveling time, and the “center” lost its centrality as a result of public transport. However, the greatest impetus to the move toward peripheral areas was when the middle classes renounced the historic city (the old and the new) and turned to the garden-city concept in search of a reflection of harmony, ethnic uniformity, and separation from the lower classes. This was the perfect world to which they aspired; the model inspired the English country cottage, which was transferred to

New England and then suburbanized. Shortly afterward, El Vedado stood out as being the most aristocratic area, with small gardens and unmistakable porticos with Ionic columns a sign of status, a mock classical touch used by the nouveaux rich to pass themselves off as old families while constructing with stucco and limestone.<sup>31</sup> The trend of constructing on a grand scale had been started by Aldama a century earlier when he built his mansion next to the Campo de Marte, then on the outskirts of town.

The early introduction of the automobile to Havana provided freedom of movement to those who could afford it. The phenomenon has been highlighted with regard to other American metropolises, and the experience spread when Fordization allowed the price of cars to drop and made them available to professionals, qualified employees, and traders, but not, for the time being, to those who manufactured them.<sup>32</sup> The city expanded and widened its urban boundaries. The physiognomy of the new outskirts and their exclusivity gave them a select, suburban status that contrasted with the poor, working-class suburban neighborhoods. Transport, both private and public, played a different role for each social group. The introduction of trams in the old city caused countless problems and made traveling difficult for individuals and private vehicles, causing inconvenience and increasing the risk of accidents. In 1945, Chailloux explained that the lack of fuel and spare parts due to the Second World War disconnected the suburbs from the city, leading people to take refuge in urban areas. At the same time, the usual immigration from rural areas continued, giving rise to overcrowding and terribly unhealthy conditions (the same thing occurred half a century later, during the “special period”).<sup>33</sup> With regard to the city acting as a magnet and a shelter, the problem was less circumstantial than Chailloux postulated, since the rate of immigration was constant prior to the crisis caused by international shortages: a lot less was built than was needed, which was the fate of the big metropolises and a permanent stigma of Havana.

The traditional interpretation has it that the expansion of Vedado during the first years of the republic was based on the introduction of the electric tramway. In 1929 Martínez Ortiz proposed that “entire neighborhoods, such as El Vedado, grew as if by magic; . . . the value of property rose incredibly quickly and large fortunes were made overnight with the urbanization of agricultural farms and even land which was previously used as a quarry.”<sup>34</sup> The explanation has since been repeated again and again. However, the creation of this neighborhood and the tendency of a particular sector of the population (the middle and upper middle classes) to converge went back further. The census of 1899 situated El Vedado as practically the sec-



**Map 5.3** Havana, 1900. Courtesy of the Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Mapoteca.

ond neighborhood of Havana in terms of population with almost ten thousand inhabitants, after San Lázaro (twenty thousand) and on a par with El Cerro, Jesús del Monte, and Punta.<sup>35</sup> The difference was that its horizontal, landscaped design meant that it occupied a much larger surface area, with a layout which when finished occupied approximately half the area of the old walled city (map 3).

During the early twentieth century, the Hotel Plaza was constructed in the ring (by redesigning the building previously used as the newspaper offices of *Diario de la Marina*), as was the Hotel Sevilla-Biltmore. On the other side of the Parque Central, the Hotel Telégrafo was built, which was later frequently used as the venue for politicians' celebrations. But before then, in 1876, the Hotel Pasaje was opened next to the Teatro Payret, with its iron and glass-covered gallery, which represented a true innovation. In 1881, the Hotel America was opened, which was later renamed Hotel Roma. In 1908, the Hotel Saratoga was opened behind Teatro Irijoa, opposite the railway station, but the building was actually an apartment block built in 1880, and though remodeled inside, was still modern enough in terms of construction techniques, spatial design, and external decoration to look “modern” three decades later. Trends in fittings, the adoption of new building techniques,

and the introduction of aesthetic forms generally associated with the initial decades of the republic actually began around 1875–80.

The surge in construction, the introduction of new techniques, and aesthetic renovation within eclectic academicism (like the era and the social class that were undergoing changes and adapting) coincided with the period of the highest sugar prices on the international market, between 1869 and 1883, and with record levels of exports from 1868 onward, which offset the loss of capital that sought security away from the island starting in 1868 with the first war of independence.<sup>36</sup> Carlos Venegas has highlighted how it fell to the oligarchy of Havana, who had made their fortune from sugar and tobacco, to give social meaning to the Reparto de Las Murallas given that the state was incapable of planning how to use this space for civil purposes, as had initially been intended. Without considering the uncertainty that the war could generate and fully confident in the triumph of the Spanish army, Zulueta, the Marquis of Balboa, Gener, González del Valle, the Marchioness of Villalba, Jané, and others bought land and built luxurious buildings from 1871 onward. They increased their efforts after 1875, when land could be paid for with treasury bonds, whose value was otherwise not liquid.<sup>37</sup> In 1895, a park and a monument in honor of Francisco Albear were opened in the area where the Puerta de Monserrate stood, a remembrance of the military engineer who had built the city's water supply system (the Acueducto de Vento, 1855–93). Albear was a Cuban creole in the Spanish army who had reached the rank of brigadier and who remained loyal to Spain until his death in 1887.

It is important to remember that through these buildings the representatives of the Spanish elite in Cuba “monumentalized” the architecture of Havana referred to by Venegas. To a large extent the following facts provide the key to what happened. There was a state at war which was unable to invest in civil works and a city council which had sought-after land but which was in need of resources, municipal taxes having been committed to the war effort. There were affluent “patriots” who were able to do business having previously purchased bonds that increased their political influence. They were presented with the opportunity of projecting the image of their opulence in what went on to become the center of the city due to the urban redesign process. Against the backdrop of the abolition of slavery, the start of massive peninsular immigration, the final years of high sugar prices, and the feeling of optimism which, in general, took hold of urban social life, the Ten Years' War and the first decade of the postwar period helped to dissolve the old colony and to increase the prospect of material, intellectual, and political improvement.

The building activity that took place between 1875 and 1915 along the axis formed by Fortaleza de la Punta and the Parque de Colón transformed the sleepy city of previous decades. However, the fact that modernity was identified with North American civilization related to an imaginary that had been slowly constructed during the colonial period by one sector of the island's elites. It found inspiration in the progress of the United States, from the education system aimed at the most privileged groups (which attracted their attention from the 1830s onward) to the urban design of the mid-nineteenth century and the extraordinary levels of material growth following the Civil War and Reconstruction, just when commercial links strengthened between Cuba and its natural market. From the last few years of the eighteenth century onward, close economic relations with the most powerful cities of the United States (those situated on the East Coast and in the Northern states, in other words, the most developed cities) had a major influence on the customs, tastes, and pastimes of the most dynamic sectors of Havana's population, a very wealthy, trend-setting minority. This invisible link was strengthened during the second half of the nineteenth century. The greater the prosperity of the United States, to which trade was linked, the greater the desire to emulate that country. Trade is never a simple exchange of goods: it involves a wide variety of influences and a spread of habits that also guarantees a demand for articles. However, the notion of reciprocity cannot be reduced to balancing the value of trade. The export of raw sugar, honey, tobacco, wood, and fruits did not have the same significance in the target market as the importation of machinery, construction materials, books, clothes, and domestic and work equipment. These were accompanied by new sales techniques: a notion of perfectly divided urban space with large, bright shops that invited passersby to enter, thus requiring wide sidewalks, cafés, and leisure establishments next to the stores whose latest goods had been advertised in the press.

From the late nineteenth century onward, graphic publications became more popular and lithography was introduced in the advertising sections of daily newspapers and weekly periodicals. The era of "new journalism" began around 1870, a revolution in social communication during which the newspaper became the intermediary between individuals and the outside world, in which political news and issues of human interest were mixed with advertising promotions and the glorification of modern progress. Printed photographs transformed and renovated the presentation of periodicals and had a major effect on the transmission of images. Then came the invention and expansion of the photogravure process.<sup>38</sup> Seen from the viewpoint of the

highly visual culture of the twentieth century, it is difficult to understand the changes that immediate and massive increases in the number of images had on the construction of social imaginaries.

Such imaginaries were brought abruptly up to date in 1899 at the beginning of the occupation government. The United States, that idealized agent of progress, was the leading authority and was in charge of overseeing the birth of the republic. The main measures adopted then were related to health and urban hygiene. Hygiene was associated with the civilization of the Protector State, while squalor and filth were linked to the obscurantism of Spanish domination, as Iglesias reminds us. “American-style” modernization had begun.<sup>39</sup> Or rather, it had begun again, according to Louis Pérez’s study, *Ser cubano: Identidad, nacionalidad y cultura*, which details North American influence on Cuba throughout the nineteenth century. However, the elements which in Pérez’s opinion contributed to forming the Cuban personality in the image of a modern United States would appear to be exaggerated, regardless of how attractive the model was to a minority of sectors.<sup>40</sup>

“American-style” modernity could already be seen in the urban expansion outside the city walls during the 1830s and 1840s and in Vedado at the end of the century, still during colonial rule. It could also be seen in certain customs. Even so, it did not have a major influence on society. Around 1870, American-style social and sports clubs did exist, but during the 1880s, young wealthy men who had studied in the United States and returned with new pastimes were presented as strange, ironic figures in literature aimed at popular audiences. In Raimundo Cabrera’s 1885 comedy for the stage, *Viaje a la luna (Trip to the moon)*, the author describes the modern dandy as follows: “He is a young man / educated in Pennsylvania. / He can skate very well / he steals the show when he plays baseball; / he’s a master at Noké, / but he hardly speaks English.” Three years later, in the sequel, *¡Vapor correo! (Mail boat!)*, one of the characters says that baseball is the most fashionable pastime. Still, even if certain pastimes were beginning to move out of the circles of those who had been educated abroad, they could still be subject to mockery insofar as they had not managed to win over the general public.

Exchanges between the United States and Cuba had been a common occurrence for a long time. They included commercial transactions, financial links, and the heirs of the sugar aristocracy undertaking periods of study in colleges and work experience placements in companies.<sup>41</sup> The best known case was that of Cristóbal Madan in the 1820s, yet it was by no means an exception. Between 1860 and 1895, exchanges also included migrant workers and exiled people, together with people returning to their own country. Emu-

lation became more widespread among the cultured classes after 1878, particularly among pro-independence supporters, the country's self-proclaimed regenerators who were the only ones capable of promoting potentially successful change that would advance society without dragging the country toward another destructive war. These regenerators—*cum*-reformers chose a model of Autonomism: modernization controlled from above which at the same time curbed the signs of social breakup attributed to the prolonged slavery of blacks and the Spanish colonial government's lack of foresight in light of the new reality of a multiethnic society, which they believed suffered from a major gap between civilization and barbarism. Indeed, *¡Vapor correo!* was dedicated to the Autonomist leader Rafael Montoro. Raimundo Cabrera, the era's most successful writer of light-hearted plays, while describing the chaos and abuses of the colonial administration and criticizing Spanish Americans, reminded audiences how in Havana it was often possible to come across thieves and witness fights among *ñáñigos*—members of the Afro-Cuban men's fraternity, Abakua—which he identified as a “clandestine institution of savages.” Such prejudices were also evident in Fernando Ortiz's first major work, *El negro esclavo*, written in 1916, in which he revealed that for a certain cultured section of society, the enemy of civilization (the Afro-Cuban criminal underworld) coexisted in the city and, as a result, occupied certain areas and shared other spaces with exemplary citizens.

### **The Republican City**

If improving hygiene was the most visible measure undertaken by the U.S. occupation government, it was also an efficient propaganda instrument. The census taken in 1899 paid particular attention to this issue—and with good reason, given the conditions found in the city and its renown for insalubrity.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, in addition to the usual unhealthy conditions, ever since the years of the war (1868–78) the public roads had not been cleaned, no investment had been made in sanitation, and there was insufficient urban policing. The situation got worse from 1895 onward with the addition of refugees and the *reconcentrados* (people forced to emigrate to the capital from rural areas). Conditions of hygiene were definitely much worse in 1899 than they had been five years earlier, and in relative terms conditions in 1895 were worse than in 1868. By contrast, in terms of its urban design and buildings, in 1895 the city had a level of modernity which, despite continuing to develop after the end of the war, was not surpassed for a long time. A walk down the Paseo del Prado to Reina and then to the bay along Calle Zulueta is enough to confirm this, since the vast majority of the noncorporate buildings belong

to the end of the colonial era and those were the buildings that gave the city its character in 1900.

General Leonard Wood's government was characterized by its ability to draw up balanced budgets during its two years in power (1900–1902). During that time, spending on health represented 20 percent of the budget; spending on hospitals and nursing homes 5.5 percent; primary education 16 percent; higher education 4 percent; and public works 7.8 percent, most of which was assigned to the docks. Health, assistance to the poor, and education accounted for 45.5 percent of spending.<sup>43</sup> Nonepidemic mortality rates in Havana fell from an average of 36 per 1,000 between 1870 and 1899 to 22 per 1,000 during the first decade of the republic, which represents a dramatic decrease.<sup>44</sup> However, in order to obtain the average figure, the census took into account the decades of the wars (when conditions were different for obvious reasons) and periods of peace, without considering how this would distort the figures. For example, the figures ranged from 29 per 1,000 in 1889 to 89.19 per 1,000 in 1898.<sup>45</sup> If yellow fever and smallpox deaths are removed from the equation, in the 1880s the mortality rate in Havana was 28 per 1,000, which is not so different from the figure for 1908.

There is no doubt that the sanitation works undertaken after 1899 were substantial and essential. But in addition to providing an account of the progress made, statistics became a political instrument aimed at partially concealing reality and presenting the best possible image of the protection provided by the United States. The census ordered by Governor Charles E. Magoon in 1906, at the beginning of the second intervention, bore witness to this.

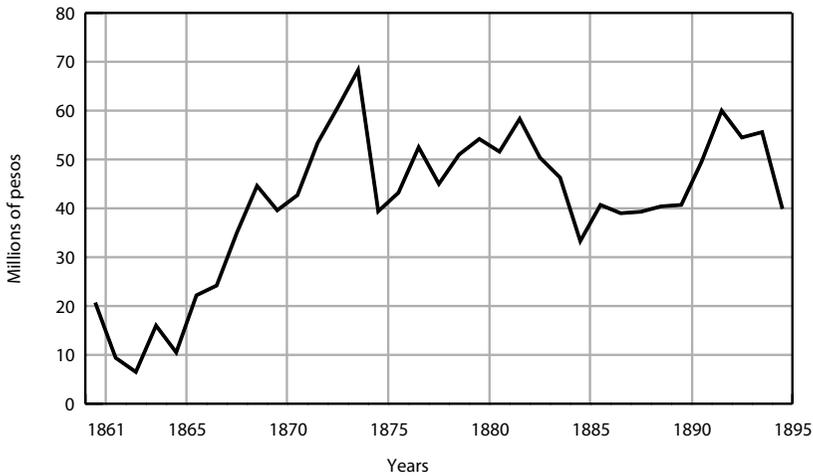
The first investment made in hospitals after 1898 involved renovating buildings and providing them with equipment and medical instruments. According to Martínez Ortiz, the “unsanitary and gloomy hospitals of the old regime became pleasant, hygienic places,” and the new wards were equipped with “all the latest advances.”<sup>46</sup> The most important building work involved conditioning the Hospital de las Mercedes, which in 1886 (four years after it was opened) was classed as modern and became the clinical hospital of the university, which was built nearby. The biggest building project, the Hospital Calixto García, was carried out between 1914 and 1917 under Menocal's government, which expanded the scope of the project and also built the main buildings of the university. The new 625-bed hospital incorporated the latest technological advances, but it was built on land made available after the demolition of the Alfonso XIII Spanish military hospital (which had only been built in the 1890s during the war) and continued a project which had

begun in the early 1860s to build a hospital complex with nine hundred beds. At the end of the period of Spanish rule, the only part of the complex to have been built was the Hospital de las Mercedes. The joint capacity of these two hospitals corresponded approximately to the forecast made half a century earlier, but there was now a much larger urban population to cater for.

Let us concur that modernity was selective and provisional. After some repair work, the Hospital Alfonso XIII was used as a military hospital for North American troops during the intervention, and in mid-1900 it was opened to the public as Hospital No. 1. In 1906, the Cuban Congress authorized the president to spend 650,000 pesos over four years to build the Hospital Nacional on that land.<sup>47</sup> On numerous occasions when referring to hospitals for infectious diseases, hospitals for women, charitable hospitals, and so on (either new or built during the colonial period), the medical historian of the early republic, Jorge Le Roy, repeatedly states that they were “equipped with the most modern facilities.”

The occupation government took responsibility for the health service, for education, and for sanitizing Havana, in addition to attending to the hospitals and looking after the maintenance of the city’s streets, all areas for which the city council was normally responsible. Under its authority, in 1900 work began on the Malecón (the city’s oceanfront esplanade), the Academia de Ciencias (Science Academy), and the Escuela de Artes y Oficios (School of Arts and Crafts). In the meantime, the city council was responsible for policing the city and resorted to expeditious methods that sent offenders to correctional institutions. The deterioration affected not only buildings and roads but also customs as a result of the habits and the extremely rural nature of the inhabitants. This was also a sign of people’s voluntary or forced immigration from rural areas. Drastic measures were then taken to “reeducate” — that is, they were forced to urbanize their way of life.

The first governor of the U.S. occupation administration, John R. Brooke (1899), suspended the city council’s contract with the Banco Español, freeing it from the debts that the municipal corporation had been burdened with, which were the original reason basic services were no longer provided. Wood began construction of the sewer system and paved the main streets, continuing the projects of his predecessor. It was during this period that the “modern sanitation system transformed the concept of cleaning services through the construction of drainage and sewer systems, regular rubbish collections, and hosing down the streets.” Up to 1.5 million pesos per year were spent on such measures.<sup>48</sup> Chroniclers generally pointed out that the city council limited itself to increasing employees’ wages without undertaking any

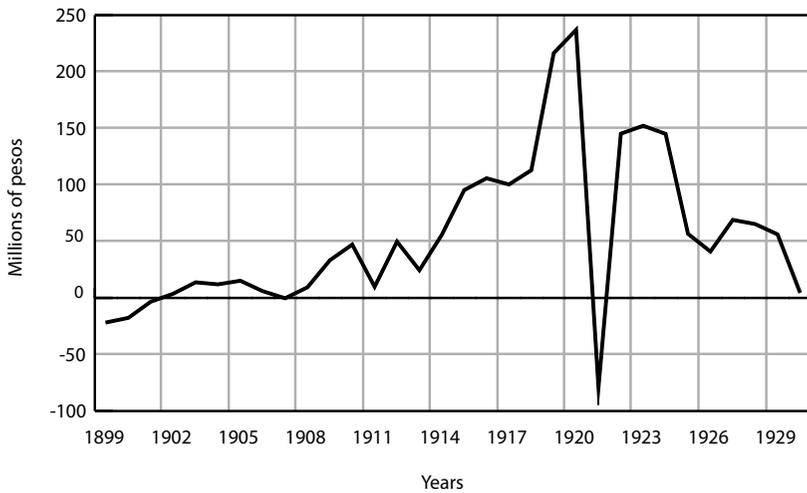


**Figure 5.1** Balance in Cuba's favor. *Source:* Author collation of data.

major works. No monumental buildings were constructed, nothing that, in the words of Martínez Ortiz, “demonstrates the sublimity of design, high spirit, broad-mindedness, and breadth of aspirations.”<sup>49</sup>

Of course, the person who wrote this also dedicated his book to President Machado (1925–33), the promoter of the Carretera Central (the Central Highway, which had been the object of various projects since the mid-nineteenth century, one of them the work of the military engineer Francisco Albear) and the Capitólio Nacional, among other monumental buildings. According to Martínez Ortiz’s compelling analysis, this increased Machado’s political stature in contrast with the modest beginnings of the republican regime, though he fails to mention the fact that Machado and his minister of public works, Carlos Miguel de Céspedes, were shareholders in Warren Brothers, the company contracted to build the Carretera Central. Neither was there any mention of the loans taken out with the House of Morgan, which were used to fund some essential infrastructure and other structures that were purely symbolic, in conditions that very soon made it difficult to pay off the debt.

In a letter in 1901 describing the philosophy with which he aspired to preside over the new state, Tomás Estrada Palma wrote the following: “*when setting up* the republic, so to speak . . . it is necessary to bear in mind . . . that we are a new nation with moderate resources; that it will be more dignified to remain within the limits of prudence, as modestly as possible . . . and we must therefore carefully combine the organization of public services and their allocation with the financial capacity of the island, in moderation.”<sup>50</sup>



**Figure 5.2** Trade balance. *Source:* Author collation of data.

In 1904, when conservative political elements regrouped and attracted the president to their ranks to back his reelection, they took the name of the Partido Moderado, a name which reflected the obsessive concerns of José Martí’s former collaborator: moderate resources, prudent and modest limits, services in moderation.

In synch with the profits of the sugar industry and the waves of material accumulation, investments were made in order to make a new city and to construct new and generally privately owned buildings. However, public spending was moderate, in line with the spirit of the presidency (and more importantly the fiscal policy), in particular with regard to public works. A state that collected little revenue could spend little on infrastructure and services. And the republic, because of its opposition to the tax system of the colony and its predisposition to facilitate private investment and the reproduction of capital, adopted a “prudent” (in other words weak) fiscal policy. It was fundamentally based on raising funds through customs duties, thus extending the abusive taxation policies of the colony. Customs duties provided over 50 percent of the money collected, and during the early years these were affected by the drop in trade and by reductions in exportation rights due to the temporary drop in the price of sugar.

The 1907 census acknowledged that prior to 1906, budgetary spending on repairing and extending state buildings was “very small.” Between July 1906 and September 1907, a period that included the first twelve months of the second U.S. occupation government (which started in September 1906),

double the amount was spent on such things than during the period between 1902 and 1906.<sup>51</sup> In 1913, after calculating the balance of what today would be referred to as capital endowment and calculating the balance by sectors, the head of information of the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Labour stated that in fifteen years, between 1898 and 1913, 61.5 million pesos had been invested in new buildings, residences, and premises. Government investment in public works had been 57 million pesos. Whereas the second figure could be confirmed in the state budgets, the first was only a low estimate. “In fifteen short years, the island of Cuba has risen like a phoenix from a vast wasteland of ashes and ruins to high levels of prosperity and financial prestige,” he concluded, after adding that the value of landownership in Havana had increased by 144 million pesos and that foreign capital invested in Cuba during that time amounted to 112 million, half of which corresponded to British companies.<sup>52</sup>

Analysis of the activities of the legislature reveals that in July 1903 a small loan for the construction of a building for the House of Representatives was approved and then the executive branch was granted authority to use a plot of land belonging to the state for that purpose. No further progress was made in this respect. The legal authorization for the presidency of the republic to acquire the Teatro Nacional in 1905 was put on hold by Estrada Palma.<sup>53</sup> The result was that in the republic, the configuration of the urban area was still dominated by the old city and the adjacent area, as well as by the functions undertaken by administrative centers, commercial hubs, and services. The transition toward republican sovereignty and the formation of a hegemonic social and political bloc under the effective tutelage of the occupation government was clearly correlated to the construction of the new capital and the way in which it was conceived.

The Liberating Army—the Cuban independence forces—never entered Havana; even more symbolically, the House of Representatives of its government-in-waiting had to meet in Cerro, a Havana suburb used by the now modest middle classes, instead of choosing a central location that offered the kind of dignity that the occasion demanded. In symbolic terms, the previous Autonomist government of 1898 (convened by Spain as a last-ditch effort to undercut the independence rebellion) had been equally unfortunate: the Casino Español was chosen as the headquarters of its parliamentary chamber, and the headquarters of the executive branch were situated in the Palacio de los Capitanes Generales (Palace of the Captain General) and in the Palacio del Segundo Cabo (Palace of the Second Lieutenant), the very locus of Spanish colonial power in Cuba. The latter was also the scene

of the transfer of powers between the North American commission and the Spanish authorities, which included Autonomist leader Rafael Montoro “as a member of the Cuban Government,” a fact that is generally omitted.<sup>54</sup> Special witnesses to the effective transfer of sovereignty, this time in the Palacio del Gobierno (Palace of Government), included the General Staff of the Liberating Army: Generals José Miguel Gómez, Mario García Menocal, and Mayía Rodríguez y Lacret, the future usufructuaries of the republic.

With regard to the new public buildings that were representative of the republic, the austerity of the first Occupation Government and, above all, of Estrada Palma’s presidency delayed the creation of buildings that symbolized the new state. The initial decision to house the House of Representatives in the old marine headquarters (a modest building in terms of size and appearance even after it was extended and renovated), the Senate in the Palacio del Segundo Cabo, and the presidency of the republic in the Palacio de los Capitanes Generales (where it shared the building with Havana’s city council) was a means of reasserting the traditional areas of power, which were now occupied by the institutions of the new nation-state. Not until 1910 did the legislature plan the new Palacio de Gobierno Provincial, and not until the plan was reviewed in 1915 was the building used as the headquarters of the executive branch, fueled by the first multimillion-dollar revenue from the sugar industry and also by large loans taken out by García Menocal (up to \$52 million during his term of office, \$1 million more than the loans taken out by his two predecessors put together, though \$2 million less than the debt run up by Zayas in half the time during his presidency of 1921–25).<sup>55</sup> Only then did the republic finally begin to rid itself of its initial austerity and assert its physical presence through buildings that symbolized power.

The creation of scenographic frameworks that represent the functions of the state (referred to by Segre with regard to the Master Plan that Machado commissioned from Forestier) is as old as the transformation of the palatial court of the Renaissance into a truly complex, bureaucratic state.<sup>56</sup> The same was true of the multiplication of the number of public servants in twentieth-century states: in Cuba the number increased to 25,600 in 1907 and to 51,400 in 1930; over the next twenty years the figure grew to 130,000.<sup>57</sup> The creation of the city of Washington, D.C., was the first republican example of a scenographic framework of power and the first example of the modern era. Emulating the U.S. Capitol, irrespective of the political nature of the regime that promoted it, clearly demonstrated the desire to make the authority and dignity of the institutions visible through their monumentalization. Without doubt this also helped to formalize them, to grant them the appearance of

institutions that were above the government of the time and to distract attention from that government's actions.

At that time and afterward, the city was in private hands, partly inherited and partly fostered by private interests. From the very beginning (and with no significant resistance) these prevailed over the general will. The fact that such a public renovation project was never carried out became the basis of successive laments for "the republic which could have been," a powerful myth under permanent construction during the twentieth century. Around the time that Fernando Ortiz wrote about the Afro-Cuban criminal underworld as an enemy within the city (1916), in other Latin American metropolises which were experiencing strong growth, the lumpen, together with workers (to a large extent immigrant workers) and those excluded from society through poverty, tended to be defined as "dangerous classes" and were the target of measures of control, in addition to being pushed out of the city center, confined to working-class suburbs, and subjected to disciplinary rules. This happened during the expansion of São Paulo over the first two decades of the twentieth century, when it became clear that efforts were being made to establish clearly demarcated neighborhoods according to social classes. The aim, in line with the orders of the city's mayor, Washington Luís (1914-16), was "to purify [the city] morally and physically" and to eradicate the "vicious mixture of scum of all nationalities, all ages, all of them dangerous."<sup>58</sup> At the same time that the mansions of the city center were being demolished to make way for offices and commercial areas, laborers were being moved out to working-class colonies. Washington Luís, a lawyer and historian with little sensitivity to urban history, was able to extend the scope of his ideas when he was elected state governor in 1920 and president of the republic in 1926.

The process of confrontation with workers organized in trade union or socio-ethnic groups in the urban environment of Havana progressed at the same time as the businesses and organizational capacity of the subaltern classes also progressed. The economic opportunities ushered in by the First World War, with increases in the price of sugar and the subsequent multiplication of the island's other activities linked to the sugar industry, also led Cuba to stigmatize and marginalize any social sectors that were not integrated and any labor sector that adopted a more aggressive position during Mario García Menocal's first term in office (1913-17). It was this period that witnessed the deportation of unwanted anarchist trade union leaders, claiming that it was due to their status as foreigners.<sup>59</sup> The increase in exports between 1915 and 1917, when the volume doubled that of 1914, was followed by

the “boom years” between 1916 and 1919, which attracted North American capital to the sugar industry and made wealthy Cuban businessmen richer than they could have ever imagined. Menocal noticed the rapid urban development of Havana toward the west, beyond Vedado and the barrier that the River Almendares represented, and commissioned the construction of a second bridge (there was a recently constructed but obsolete bridge at Calle 23). The bridge reached the 5<sup>a</sup> Avenida in Miramar and was opened in 1921.

The real estate business was at its height. Powerful real estate and urban development companies had just been set up offering exclusive plots at the Playa de Marianao and between Miramar and the Country Club. A newspaper advertisement from 1920 stated that “Traders, landowners, and industrialists who have made their fortune . . . can improve their good luck even more and multiply their capital by investing in land at the Alturas del Country Club, where mansions are being built that are worth over \$1,200,000.” The ad went on to use the slogan “It’s the modern Havana! An elegant, aristocratic Havana!” Once again, as always, there was the claim of a renovated, modern Havana compared with the old one, just as there had been in 1835 and 1853, just as there had been in 1875 and 1900. The developers stated that they were looking to create “a meeting place for elegance” which would welcome those who due to their position and education formed part of an elite, offering them mansions in accordance with their status and with the “insurmountable barriers between different social classes.” Social and residential segregation was finally expressed in very clear terms, with suburbs that were inaccessible to groups with less spending power, with special urban designs and styles that partially distanced themselves from the Hispanicizing trends that could nevertheless still be seen in the “tropical-style” mansions. One year after his presidency, García Menocal became a shareholder in the company that developed the Miramar area and together with his family he went on to take control of the Board of Governors.<sup>60</sup> Havana (this time a private, exclusive Havana hidden from public view) began to be reinvented with its sights set, once again, on a modernity that could always be sensed but that remained elusive.

## Notes

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1. Iglesias, *Las metáforas del cambio en la vida cotidiana*.
2. Tanco Armero, *Viaje de Nueva Granada a China y de China a Francia*, 110–11.
3. *Hatos* were large areas used for extensive livestock farming, and from the sixteenth century onward they determined the distribution of land on which the island's first oligarchy was founded. The historian Manuel Moreno Fraginals used the term *sacarocracia* (sugarocracy) to refer to the aristocracy whose fortunes came from owning land and selling sugar, mainly from the end of the eighteenth century onward.
4. See Segre, "El sistema monumental en la Ciudad de La Habana, 1900–1930," 187–200. I am grateful to Carlos Venegas for recommending this text to me.
5. This subject was examined in Piqueras, *Sociedad civil y poder en Cuba*, 295ff, in the chapter "La obstinación por gobernar el orden."
6. Venetian Renaissance refers to the style of art and architecture produced in the Venetian republic in the sixteenth century.
7. Neo-Mudéjar refers to the revival of styles characteristic of Muslim architecture; Andalusian to the style characteristic of Muslim Spain; Herrerian Renaissance to a sober style characteristic of late sixteenth-century Spain; plateresque neobaroque to the revival of Spanish architectural styles of the early modern period; and Hispanic baroque to the later Spanish art and architectural styles of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
8. Segre, *Arquitectura antillana del siglo xx*, 128.
9. The synthesis in the form of a paradoxical succession was suggested by Adrián López Denis.
10. La Institución Hispano-Cubana de Cultura. See Puig-Samper and Naranjo, "Fernando Ortiz: Herencias culturales y forja de la nacionalidad," 197–226.
11. On Guastavino's influence, see Collins, "The Transfer of Thin Masonry Vaulting from Spain to America," 176–201. For the effect on Cuba, see p. 200. Pérez Echazábal et al., "Escuelas Nacionales de Arte de Cubanacán: Diagnóstico y proyecto de restauración de artes plásticas," 45–51. Guastavino's technique and style would only be used in Cuba for one of the most original and emblematic constructions of the first period of the revolution: the National Schools of Art were designed in 1961 by the architect Ricardo Porro and are now in a condition of neglect due to construction defects and lack of maintenance.
12. Segre, *Arquitectura antillana del siglo xx*, 130.
13. Carpentier, "Conciencia e identidad de América," 5–6.
14. Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes trópicos*, 81–82.
15. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 163–69.
16. Segre, *Arquitectura antillana del siglo xx*, 77.
17. Lloyd, *Impresiones de la República de Cuba en el siglo xx*, 440.
18. "Habana," *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada Europeo-Americana*, 434.
19. The descriptions quoted are translations from Peris Mencheta, *De Madrid a Panamá*, 97–109, 125–26.
20. Chailloux Carmona, *Los horrores del solar habanero*, 96–97 (Jesús María), 112–13 (census of 1919), 116 (typology of the solar).

21. Scarpaci, Segre, and Coyula, *Havana*, 58.
22. Chailloux Carmona, *Los horrores del solar habanero*, 105. The neighborhood was also known as “Pogolotti Lots” soon after the first houses were built, in reference to Dino Pogolotti (father of the Cuban painter Marcelo Pogolotti, who originally owned the land and was one of the housing developers).
23. Chailloux Carmona, *Los horrores del solar habanero*, 46.
24. Academicism denotes the Greco-Roman revival; Classicism Greco-Roman style itself; and creole functionalism refers to local architecture displaying a preference for function over decoration.
25. Santo Domingo, capital of the Dominican Republic, was renamed Ciudad Trujillo during the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo (1930–61).
26. Salas y Quiroga, *Viages*, 148–51.
27. Venegas Fornias, *La urbanización de las murallas*.
28. Segre, *Arquitectura antillana del siglo xx*, 46.
29. An informative monograph has been written on the neighborhood by Pavez Ojeda, *El Vedado*.
30. Marrero, *Geografía de Cuba*, 472: “El Vedado, the first of the big residential neighborhoods constructed during the republic, stretched over 5 km.”
31. *Impresiones de la República de Cuba en el siglo xx*, 413.
32. Wolfe, *Autos and Progress*.
33. Chailloux Carmona, *Los horrores del solar habanero*, 108.
34. Martínez Ortiz, *Cuba. Los primeros años de independencia*, 333.
35. Sanger (dir.), *Informe sobre el Censo de Cuba, 1899, 192*.
36. Sugar prices in Deerr, *The History of Sugar*, 2: 531. Exports in Moreno Friginals, *El Ingenio*, III: 71. The economic context and the strategy of diversifying assets in Piqueras, *Cuba, emporio y colonia*, 187–214.
37. Venegas Fornias, *La urbanización de las murallas*, 48–53, 62.
38. Following Bordería, Laguna, and Martínez Gallego, *Historia de la comunicación social*, 319–46.
39. Iglesias, *Las metáforas del cambio*, 41–44.
40. Pérez proposes that U.S. culture and life shaped the making of Cuban national identity before 1898, but considers U.S. influence after the occupation practically boundless, calling it a “design without a plan” or “the order of the new.” However, the architectural examples that he mentions, and the buildings that he reproduces, though sometimes the product of U.S. builders, correspond to styles that were already present in the island during the colonial period and that were of European and Spanish inspiration.
41. See Ely, *Cuando reinaba su majestad el azúcar*, epigraph 26.b.
42. Sanger (dir.), *Informe sobre el Censo de Cuba, 1899*; Salas y Quiroga, *Viages*, 239–40.
43. Martínez Ortiz, *Cuba: Los primeros años de independencia*, 337–39.
44. Olmsted (dir.), *Censo de la República de Cuba bajo la administración provisional de los Estados Unidos 1907*, 164–66.
45. Le Roy, “Sanidad pública,” 139; see pp. 140–41 for deaths due to yellow fever, malaria, typhus, etc.

46. Martínez Ortiz, *Cuba: Los primeros años de independencia*, 337.
47. *Impresiones de la República de Cuba en el siglo xx*, 144.
48. Clark, “Obras públicas,” 331. The author was the head of the Department of Public Works.
49. Martínez Ortiz, *Cuba: Los primeros años de independencia*, 340.
50. In Martínez Ortiz, *Cuba: Los primeros años de independencia*, 363.
51. Olmsted (dir.), *Censo de la República de Cuba bajo la administración provisional de los Estados Unidos 1907*, 90.
52. *Impresiones de la República de Cuba en el siglo xx*, 520.
53. Chamber of Representatives, *Compendio legislativo*, 18–47.
54. Martínez Ortiz, *Cuba: Los primeros años de independencia*, 21.
55. Pino-Santos, *El asalto a Cuba por la oligarquía financiera yanqui*, 134.
56. Segre, “El sistema monumental en la Ciudad de La Habana,” 189. See also for Machado and Céspedes’s participation among the shareholders of the concessionaire.
57. Ibarra Cuesta, *Cuba: 1898–1958*, 90–92, which the author identifies as unproductive, client-based expenditure.
58. Wolfe, *Working Women, Working Men*, 9.
59. Sánchez, *Sembrando ideales*.
60. On the expansion toward the west and the boom of the real estate business, see del Toro, *La alta burguesía cubana*, 15–23. The advertising slogan and the social reasoning can be found on pp. 15–16. On the River Almendares as a barrier, industrial area, and main artery toward urban expansion, see Zardoya, “Ciudad, imagen y memoria,” 63–75.