BUILDING CROSS-RACIAL ALLIANCES IN THE AFTERMATH OF EMANCIPATION:

RURAL COLLECTIVE ACTION IN LOUISIANA AND CUBA, 1865-1912

Rebecca J. Scott
Department of History
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan
USA 48109

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The island of Cuba was one of the world's major producers of cane sugar in the mid-nineteenth century, with an output of some 720,000 metric tons of sugar in the year 1868. It was with great reluctance that its elite relinquished the institution of slavery in the 1870s and 1880s. The state of Louisiana was a less notable player in the world sugar market, though it produced a bumper crop of about 240,000 metric tons in 1861. The following year its sugar planters would be forced, even more reluctantly, to abandon the system of slave labor as the Civil War engulfed the South and Union troops occupied the "sugar bowl" of southern Louisiana.[1]

During the decades after slavery, each region saw tremendous turmoil. In Cuba in the 1890s there emerged a powerful anti-colonial movement, aimed at ending Spanish rule on the island. Black, white, and mulatto rebels served side by side under black, white, and mulatto officers, and a central ideological tenet of the nationalist leadership was the repudiation of racism. Louisiana in the years after slavery saw the emergence of an electoral majority of newly-enfranchised freedmen, and a series of tumultuous strikes in the cane fields, some of them carried out by coalitions of black and white workers. In both cases, there had evidently emerged after slavery the social basis and ideological building blocks for cross-racial alliances, alongside the equally apparent social divisions and ideological constructs that nourished racism and white supremacy.

This essay examines the building of alliances and the mobilization of collective action
[illegible] two postemancipation societies, focusing on the sugar sector. The aim is to explore
nourished cross-racial collaboration and those which, by contrast, led to

the construction and politicization of what was long referred to as the "color line." A full understanding of these phenomena would require a detailed examination of class relations, a close analysis of racial categories and the definition of identity, and a study of the larger political context in which each sugar region was embedded. Here I can only sketch the lines of such a comparison. But even such a brief sketch may begin to suggest the range and variability of paths out of slavery, and provide evidence for the argument that both cross-racial alliances and bitter racial conflict are contingent phenomena, powerfully shaped by evolving patterns of class relations and by the conscious choices of political leaders.

A few initial words about method may be in order. Much has been written by social scientists about comparative perspectives, comparative approaches, and what is sometimes denominated "the comparative method." I will not attempt to situate this comparison--or the larger study of which it forms a part--in any of the taxonomic categories advanced in that debate. This essay simply takes as its starting points the observation by Barrington Moore that comparison can provide "a rough negative check on accepted historical explanations," and the conviction that the history of one case can importantly inform the reading of another.[2] It is not a matter of fully explaining variation--there is enough difference in previous history, politics and culture to more than explain the divergent paths of Louisiana and Cuba. But juxtaposing them may have the salutary effect of making the history of each look less "natural."

National and regional historiographies tend to have powerful underlying structures. The history of postbellum Louisiana generally culminates in the collapse of Reconstruction and the triumph of white supremacy. The history of late-nineteenth-century Cuba builds

toward the development of a cross-class and cross-racial nationalist movement, with an epilogue on its suppression and manipulation under United States military occupation. One value of comparison may be to help expose the flaws in the hidden structures of such national narratives, casting some doubt on their implicit teleologies.

Thus the model of comparison employed here is not the retrospective scientific experiment in which variables are identified, their values determined, and outcomes explained. Rather, it is one of repeated re-readings in which old evidence is examined in the light of new questions, pointing the way to areas in which new evidence may be unearthed. These new questions and evidence, in turn, may draw attention to the paths not taken, and change the perception of the paths that were taken. What follows is an effort to "problematize," as the current clumsy phrase goes, the familiar narratives of "racial conflict" and "cross-racial alliance," through a re-reading of the histories of the cane regions of southern Louisiana, and central and eastern Cuba.

LOUISIANA

In the spring of 1862, Northern forces occupied the Confederate city of New Orleans and began to push their way up the Mississippi River. Within a few months, virtually all of the major sugar-producing parishes of Louisiana were under federal control, and federal officials attempted to improvise labor arrangements that would maintain production even as slavery was collapsing.[3] Shortly after the war ended, the establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau gave authority to a new set of federal officials, who then supervised and, to a lesser

extent, enforced, labor contracts. Bureau agents sought to impose a specific concept of "free labor" on employers and workers who had very different ideas of what freedom should mean. The freed people struggled to try to ensure physical mobility, access to productive resources, and adequate wages, while planters aimed to reassert control over the pace of work and the deportment of workers.

In the early stages of the transition, some of the freedpeople found space in which to experiment with cooperative agriculture and independent leasing. But both planters and Bureau agents were firmly committed to annual wage labor contracts, and the predominant form of organization of production remained the work gang, now paid in wages. Planters often withheld wages to try to ensure compliance with the plantation work regime. The result was uncertainty and vulnerability for sugar workers.

Each year freed men and women, hoping for better terms, delayed signing contracts, and planters sought to persuade them, or to find substitute workers. At the same time, small strikes of workers on individual plantations provided some upward pressure on wages, and occasional informal work stoppages asserted the laborers' new autonomy. Paul DeClouet, a plantation manager in St. Martin Parish, wrote scornfully that the workers were "too pious" to work on Good Friday, and that they took time off on election day in 1868.[4]

With capital short, labor more demanding, and planters initially reluctant to replant, production was slow to recuperate. Most male former slaves, however, seem to have continued to work year-round on the plantation, and women returned to paid work at the harvest. Planters hired some workers from out-of-state to substitute for those who left, but the work force remained predominately African-American. Planters seem to have been

thoroughly committed to a model of long-term, resident, low-wage labor, subjected to a strict plantation discipline. Though some sharecroppers and smallholders might join the plantation work force at harvest time, there was little to attract long-distance migrants. Once can trace through Paul DeClouet's daybook, for example, his experiment with hiring workers from Virginia--and their successive departures following day after day of ditch-digging in the cold and the rain.

The initial catastrophic decline in sugar production was arrested, though output in 1870 was still less than two-thirds of the average annual output for 1855-59.[5] In 1873 a national and worldwide economic crisis challenged this fragile recovery. Again, the question of how to respond was widely contested. Agricultural reformers, among them the vocal Dan Dennett of the Daily Picayune, argued throughout the 1870s that the sugar regions should turn away from reliance on wage labor and look to smallholdings. He envisioned a system in which plantations would freely subdivide their land into small leaseholds, and cane farmers would provide cane to a central mill for processing.[6] But instead of subdividing the land, larger planters generally sought to compress costs. And the conspicuous element that seemed liable to compression was wages.

Faced with generalized deflation, and a decline in sugar prices, planters in individual parishes began to collaborate in the 1870s to try to cap or lower monthly rates of pay. One employer from St. James Parish candidly wrote to the Daily Picayune to announce that while wages the previous season had been $18 monthly and rations, he and his neighbors were now paying $13 per month. "Please publish this, so that the change may be made in other districts, as, by being general, it may become permanent at least until better times.[7]

Workers responded with organized anger. In Terrebonne Parish several hundred laborers met in Zion church to form an association, refusing to work for less than $20 month, and seeking to form sub-associations that could collaboratively rent lands to work on their own. Then they went on strike. Planters were alarmed, spread rumors of murder and mayhem, called on the governor to send in the militia, and had the leaders arrested. Eventually an agreement was reached, but workers did not get the right to rent lands collectively.[8]

In trying to arrange to lease land, workers in Terrebonne were reiterating a demand that had been made unsuccessfully several times before. During the Union occupation, groups of former slaves had often sought to rent lands and produce subsistence and market crops. In the 1860s, the editorialists of the New Orleans Tribune, representing certain sectors of the urban gens de couleur, had called for the subdivision of lands among the freedmen. Some delegates to the Louisiana Constitutional Convention of 1868 had proposed breaking up large estates by limiting the size of tracts that could be bought at distress sales, as a means of facilitating the purchase of land by freedmen, but their initiatives were defeated.[9]

Efforts to build land distribution into social policy had been unsuccessful, but the desire for land had not disappeared. The sugar workers of Terrebonne seem to have been adopting a strategy of seeking multiple sources of support: garden plots, leasehold land if possible, and reasonable terms of work when they did work on estates. In this respect they closely resembled their counterparts on the postemancipation sugar plantations of Jamaica, Cuba, and Brazil, who often sought some mix of wage labor and independent production.[10]

In 1874, however, neither the wage demands nor the request for lands to lease were granted. Workers had to adjust to the lowered wages, and the New Orleans Price-Current observed smugly that the fieldhands, "having been taught the necessity of thrift and economy, have really saved more from their two thirds, than they formerly did from full pay while the relations between them and their employers, have been more satisfactory than at any time since the war." Planters in St. Mary Parish attempted wage reductions the following year, and wages of $13 a month were common during 1875 and 1876.[11] Nevertheless, competition among employers, combined with resistance by workers, tended to undermine planter-imposed wage caps, and wages recovered slightly in 1877.[12]

In the 1870s, planters also collaborated in establishing paramilitary forces that could be turned against strikers, using many of the same mechanisms of vigilante violence that were already being deployed to intimidate black voters. Paul DeClouet's father, Alexandre, was active in the formation of a local Ligue Blanche, or White League, in St. Martin Parish in 1874.[13] Later, in the 1880s, Donelson Caffery, a planter from St. Mary's parish, took similar initiatives in founding a "Law and Order League" that could be used against strikers.[14]

Workers' challenges were thoroughly intertwined with Reconstruction politics and with the broader pattern of assertion by the freedpeople and their allies. One African-American legislator was reported to have addressed "inflammatory" speeches to the Terrebonne strikers, urging them to resist wage cuts.[15] Two months later, in March, 1874, the formation of a black militia in Lafourche Parish caused equal alarm. Lewis Benjamin, described as "of mixed negro and Indian blood, the Indian in him clearly predominating," led the militia unit.

The local paper of the town of Thibodaux later recalled the mid-1870s as days of "sable terrorizers" and evoked a picture of "the wives and sisters and mothers of those licensed banditti, going about our town armed with cans of coal oil and cane knives. . ."[16] The imagery of terror and murder was part of the standard white-supremacist demonology, but in this case it is unclear which was thought more dreadful--the fact of armed African-American men, or the brazenness of the African-American women.

For the white elite, relief came with "Redemption" in 1877, as the state government reverted to the Democratic Party, federal troops withdrew, and groups like Baldwin's militia were disbanded. But the years of African-American assertion were not erased, even by the paramilitary and vigilante violence that could now be exercised with impunity. Although the ideology of white supremacy seemed to be riding high, the next major efforts at collective action in the sugar cane fields would openly cross the color line.

In 1880 an estimated 500 black workers went on strike in St. Charles Parish, moving in a body from estate to estate to stop work. The group was apparently an imposing one, with some workers on horseback, and many armed with sticks. Planters appealed successfully to the governor to call out the militia.[17] Then, in 1881, in St. Bernard Parish, black workers and white workers joined forces to press for wage increases. Similar strikes emerged in the years that followed.[18]

Despite their renewed power in the political realm, some planters expressed the fear that control over labor was shifting to their workers. One planter wrote that black field workers "are becoming more and more unmanageable. By degrees they are bringing the planter to their way of thinking in regard to how they should work and no telling at what

moment there will be a serious move to compel the planter to comply with any request. . ."[19]

In 1886 the Knights of Labor began organizing black and white locals among railway workers in Louisiana, opening the way for a more formal cross-racial alliance. The Knights' "anti-monopolist" platform rapidly gained adherents, and candidates affiliated with the order won elections in the town of Morgan City, where the railroad monopoly rested heavily on the population. The Knights soon moved out into the sugar plantations, organizing around a theme of worker unity, cooperativism, and opposition to monopolies. The task of organizing among black and white sugar workers highlighted the strategic value of the Knights' commitment to cross-racial alliances, while raising the question of just how far that commitment extended.[20]

Schreiver Local Assembly was organized in Terrebonne Parish in August of 1886 with a nucleus of black workers, and then transformed itself into the region's first integrated local. The local of Little Caillou similarly had 32 black charter members in July 1887, but 80 members, black and white, male and female, by October. Other assemblies, however, were segregated. The leaders of the local assemblies in the sugar region included black, mulatto, and white laborers, farmers, artisans, and at least one plantation school teacher. Most were literate, and their work experiences generally reached beyond the plantations, creating important linkages to small farmers, who could provide food during strikes, and to nearby towns, which could provide refuge in case of evictions.[21]

In the fall of 1887, in the face of new efforts by planters to reduce wages, District Assembly 194, in Morgan City, proposed negotiation. When planters refused, the assembly

called together workers from the Parishes of St. Mary, Terrebonne, and Lafourche, and formulated a series of demands. These included an end to payments in scrip, and more regular payment of wages due. Leaders at this point seem to have been uncertain as to whether a strike would be necessary. They declared themselves willing to compromise, but set a deadline of October 29 for planters in Lafourche, Terrebonne, St. Mary, Iberia and St. Martin parishes to respond to their demands.[22]

The threat of a strike at the moment of harvest brought Democratic and Republican members of the elite together, and planters formulated a counter-plan, committing themselves to ignore the demands, blacklist fired workers, and evict strikers from their plantations. In the meanwhile, they called for cavalry and artillery to be poised to occupy the district. On November 1, 1887, militia forces under Brigadier-General William Pierce took the train to the town of Thibodaux with the aim of "restoring peace in the sugar districts from Berwick's Bay to New Orleans, then seriously threatened by the beligerent attitude of strikers."[23]

All was in fact relatively peaceful in the region, but work on the plantations had been halted by the strike. Estimates of the number of participants are generally on the order of 10,000, and it is usually said that some 1,000 of them were white.[24] Planters were attempting to oblige strikers to vacate their plantation cabins; at the same time the strikers were attempting to block the importation of strikebreakers. Birdshot was fired from ambush at strikebreakers who tried to operate the plantation; and groups of strikers were apparently prepared to challenge strikebreakers who arrived by train. General Pierce was distressed to find "a very large body of negroes lounging around the depot" at Schreiver. In the town of Thibodaux, a large crowd of strikers "black, white, and curious" watched as the militia

disembarked.[25] Although the presence of the militia could be used to back up arrests and evictions, it did not prevent symbolic challenges: General Pierce reported that when troops arrived on one plantation "the negroes hooted and used violent language, the women waving their skirts on poles, and jeering."[26]

Planters were by now divided and uneasy. Some small-scale planters settled quickly; others brought in strikebreakers. The nephew of one planter in Terrebonne recalled of his uncle:

> He gave in to the demands, not because he wished to, but because he had no other option. He would have lost the crop and everything else, including the place, if he had not done so.
>
> Immediately all the neighboring planters denounced him as 'disloyal to his class,' declaring he should be willing to lose everything in defense of his class interests. But he could not see it.[27]

Similarly, planters in lower Lafourche Parish, where most estates were relatively small, quickly settled with the strikers. The plantation work force of lower Lafourche included black, white, and mulatto workers, some of whom were resident on plantations, and others of whom occupied small farms in the areas. Many of the white fieldworkers who followed the Knights of Labor were apparently located in this zone.[28]

In upper Lafourche, which held the largest and most technologically advanced plantations, employers were not inclined to compromise. Some thought that the workers would respond to the mere presence of the militia and return to work. General Pierce was dubious, and called for the planters to take forceful action themselves.[29] The local press of

Lafourche Parish denounced the leaders of the Knights of Labor as "wolves in sheep's clothing."[30] At one level, events were simply stalemated. From the point of view of the white elite, however, such a stalemate was intensely distressing, and every day that passed brought a crisis closer.

In St. Mary parish, events unfolded very quickly. Evicted strikers took refuge in Patterson ville, where they found themselves isolated from the union leadership in Morgan City because of the military occupation of the railroads.[31] A sheriff's posse, including both planters and local residents, was assembled and moved to confront a crowd of "negro strikers." Accounts of the events varied widely, but at least four, and possibly as many as twenty, strikers were killed.[32] The local planter Donelson Caffery took a leading role in the repression, and wrote bluntly to his son on November 11: "The strike is effectually squelched. It was necessary to apply a strong remedy--and it has been done. The negroes are quiet and have with few exceptions gone to work."[33]

Planters in upper Lafourche continued to carry out large-scale evictions, forcing strikers to move with their families into the town of Thibodaux. Militia units were periodically deployed to estates where there were rumors of violence, or of the imminent arrival of strikebreakers. But by themselves, the militia could not actually oblige anyone to work. Tension mounted and General Pierce continued to emphasize the need for local initiative. Although he believed that the presence of the militia had a salutary effect on the laborers, he emphasized that the time had come for planters to take responsibility for self-defense. The militia forces were withdrawn during the third week of November, and Pierce himself returned to New Orleans on November 20.[34]

By then there were apparently thousands of evicted strikers in the town of Thibodaux, and the local press began calling for strong and confident action. With the departure of the militia, a paramilitary group under planter leadership was formed, and set up pickets at the exits from town.[35] As in the 1870s, the "insolence" of black women was again invoked as evidence of how much the proper order of things had been disturbed. Mary Pugh, the daughter of a planter, wrote to her son that on her way home from church she met "negro men singly or two or three together with guns on their shoulders going down town & negro women on each side telling them to "fight-yes-fight we'll be there" (you know what big mouths these Thib. negro women have. I wish they all had been shot-off) they are at the bottom of more than half the devilment."[36]

At this point, the story takes on some of the characteristics of a Greek tragedy. From the point of view of workers, planters were aiming to drive them into complete submission. Their dream of land division was still thwarted, their hopes of higher wages were being met with intransigence. Unity under the Knights of Labor seemed to promise some recourse. From the point of view of planters, the battle for supremacy was imminent. Mary Pugh wrote in retrospect: "I had seen for three weeks it had to come or else white people could live in this country no longer."[37] A labor struggle was being continually recoded as a racial struggle, and planters were able to draw poorer whites into an alliance in anticipation of trouble from the evicted strikers.

It seems clear that the white vigilantes were waiting only for a sign to "begin the ball", as Mary Pugh put it. On November 22 unknown persons shot at two white men guarding the edge of town, and the posse went into action. In her words:

> ...they began then hunting up the leaders and every one that was found or any suspicious character was shot. Before Allen got back the rifles on St. Charles Street sounded like a battle. . .

She witnessed the capture of one hidden striker:

> they brought them by our side gate. I thought [they] were taking them to jail instead they walked with one over to the lumber yard where they told him to 'run for his life' [and] gave the order to fire. All raised their rifles and shot him dead. This was the worst sight I saw but I tell you we have had a horrible three days & Wednesday excelled any thing I ever saw even during the war. I am sick with the horror of it. but I know it had to be else we would all have been murdered before a great while. I think this will settle the question of who is to rule the nigger or the white man? for the next 50 years but it has been <u>well done</u> & I hope all trouble is ended. The niggers are as humble as pie today. Very different from last week.[38]

When one is faced with a narrative of this kind, it is easy to construct these events as a continuation of the drama of black and white in Reconstruction, and of the irrepressible rise of white supremacist ideology and action. And when we note that unions did not organize again in the cane fields of Louisiana until the 1950s, racial repression and class repression seem to converge quite neatly. In his very fine analysis of the 1887 strike, Jeffery Gould comes to the conclusion that racist repression constituted in some sense the final solution to the longstanding problem of a resistant and mobilized labor force.[39]

But one could also shift the perspective by a quarter turn and see the violence and vituperation in somewhat different terms--as part of the effort to constitute and define a

binary struggle between "black" and "white," and to radically simplify complex socio-racial categories. In this light, the repression that occurred in Thibodaux and Patterson was more than either racist violence or class war. It was a selective combination of the two, synthesized in such a way as to assist in the construction of whiteness as privileged and blackness as dangerous. Covington Hall observes in passing that "during the whole period only one white man, a picket in Thibodeaux, was reported as seriously wounded. All dead were colored and unionmen, though many whites were active members of the Knights."[40] The reality of a work force containing whites, mulattos, and blacks was redefined in the theater of repression as white order versus black disorder.

It could be argued that the salience of whiteness as a component of identity in Louisiana needed no elaboration, that it was a predictable consequence of defeat in war, compounded by black assertiveness after the war. But in fact the process of making white supremacist ideology seem natural was a more contingent one. White Unionists had opposed secession, and a mixed crew of Louisianans, including free people of color, white unionists, and slaves had fought in the Union army. White Republicans had participated--however opportunistically--in many of the processes of African-American political assertion in the state, and some native whites were stronger supporters of black rights in the constitutional convention of 1867-68 than were northern carpetbaggers.[41] These actions did not necessarily imply egalitarianism, but neither did they prefigure white supremacy.

The construction of the events of the 1860s through the 1890s as racially-encoded encounters of civilization and barbarism was an act of interpretation, not an automatic reflex. A newspaper editorial from St. Mary's, written in support of the White League, made the

metaphor explicit, declaring that civilization was the birthright of the white race, "and it is ours, and ours alone. . ."[42] The editors of the Caucasian, published in Alexandria in 1874, called for the formation of a "white man's party" to make the next election a "fair, square fight, Caucasian versus African."[43] These publicists were not simply reflecting existing lines of cleavage. The were attempting to create and give primary meaning to a single line--which would then be portrayed as a timeless and primordial color line.

Race, labor and politics were equally contested and intertwined in the island of Cuba, but in strikingly different ways. The presence of similar elements, and very different outcomes, may help to highlight the contingent nature of white supremacy as a dominating ideology.

CUBA

Slavery had been destroyed in Cuba in a prolonged struggle, one in which parliamentary initiatives from Spain both responded to and provoked slave initiatives in Cuba, in the context of repeated nationalist rebellions against Spanish domination. Throughout this process, Spanish policy-makers improvised and compromised on the organization of labor, while attempting to manipulate the issue of race through invocations of the danger of "race war." Like later white supremacists in Louisiana, Cuban colonial officials tried to modify reality to substantiate this discourse, selectively arresting black nationalists and allowing whites to go free, in order to reinforce an image of the conflict as "racial."[44]

Cuban nationalists of the 1860s and 1870s had repeatedly stumbled in the face of this

maneuver, with conservative white reformists and insurgents portraying themselves as the "civilized" alternative to black domination--and in the process helping to fracture the nationalist movement.[45] By 1880 anti-colonial rebels had been defeated. But abolition could not be removed from the agenda. Slaves and their allies continued to challenge planters' authority, and posed a continuing threat to the maintenance of colonial power.

The Spanish parliament voted to abolish slavery in 1880, placing former slaves under a thinly disguised "apprenticeship" designed to last until 1888. Their strategy postponed the definitive end of slavery, but apprentices themselves provided an accelerating counterforce, pursuing legal and illegal avenues for more rapid emancipation. By 1886, only 25,000 former slaves remained under the "apprenticeship," and the government prematurely liquidated the institution.[46]

Though planters had often stalled the ending of slavery, they adapted quickly to free labor. Eager to expand production for the growing North American market, they invested or borrowed to purchase new equipment, and contracted with independent growers to provide yet more cane. They sought wage workers among former slaves, former smallholders, and the thousands of immigrant workers who came from Spain, some to work seasonally, other to become colonos (cane farmers).[47] Within a few years the field work force was unmistakably multi-ethnic and multi-racial. By the early 1890s sugar production on the island had broken the one-million ton mark.

This seeming success story, however, did not resolve the question of the place of workers in Cuban society, nor of Cubans in an island ruled by Spain. Rural employment was highly seasonal, and estate workers were dependent for much of the year on the product of

small plots elsewhere, at a time when access to land was becoming more difficult. The health of the entire sugar industry rested on exportation to the United States, which in turn was vulnerable to the same tariffs that were a godsend to the planters of Louisiana. The weight of Spanish colonialism--embodied among other things in restrictive legislation and in sporadic and intrusive campaigns against banditry--rested heavily on many rural communities.

Throughout the early 1890s exiled nationalist leaders, including Jose Martí, who was of Spanish descent, Antonio Maceo, who came from a long-free family of color, and Máximo Gómez, who was from the Dominican Republic, sought to lay the groundwork for a new rebellion. In part this represented the reactivation of struggles begun in the 1860s. But the movement of the 1890s was animated by a far more inclusive vision of Cuban nationality, and by an ideology in which social transformation and national liberation were tightly linked.

In February, 1895, insurgents rose up in the eastern end of the island, and drew together small-scale cultivators, urban artisans, former slaves, and some former slaveholders in a massive challenge to Spanish rule. Within rebel lines, white, black, and mulatto officers commanded troops from every socio-racial category. The official goal of the rebellion was Cuba Libre, a free Cuba in which racism and economic privilege would be rejected.

Cuba's population in 1895 probably contained something over 100,000 former slaves. "Race" and the specter of "race war" had long divided politicians in the island, insurgents as well as reformists. It is thus not altogether surprising that nationalist leaders sought to overcome racial divisions as they attempted to organize a movement that could succeed where earlier ones had failed. What is more striking is that this strategy apparently worked at the level of recruitment and mobilization.

Mobilization itself, however, was not a simple matter of responding to an ideology. The large-scale recruitment of rural workers to the insurrection seems to have taken place in waves, as the position of noncombatants became more and more precarious. Initially, rebels sought supplies and recruits from sympathizers within working plantations, addressing themselves to the mixed population of black, mulatto, and white laborers, artisans, and colonos. Then, as cane fires and orders to halt grinding brought production to a standstill, plantation residents and employees had to choose between taking to the hills to join the rebellion or resigning themselves to internment in Spanish concentration camps, which had been established precisely to prevent them from making contact with rebel forces. The perception that rebels were people like oneself, while Spanish soldiers were trigger-happy interlopers, tended to predetermine the outcome. It is hardly surprising that given the choice, many went with the rebels.[48]

This mechanism by which rural dwellers identified with the rebels owed something to shared economic status, to regional identity, and to deep-seated local loyalties to rebel cabecillas (chieftains) in the countryside. Though socio-racial categories may have entered at various points, they generally did not override other elements of perceived sameness. As one man, the nephew of a cane farmer, commented when asked to describe the arrival of a band of insurgents on the estate where he worked: ". . . I saw them and we were even drinking beer with some of them, and . . . I knew that nothing could happen to me as I was like them."[49] The near absence of racial labels in the primary documents that record the process of mobilization makes it difficult to prove that this man from a cane-farming family was categorized as "white," or that many of the insurgents with whom he was drinking beer were

categorized as "black" or "mulatto." But the odds are in favor of both guesses. The process by which workers identified with the rebels was not, as far as one can tell, racialized.

Many of the most admired insurgent leaders were Afro-Cuban, and their troops came from virtually all ethnic and socio-racial groups. The rebel general Antonio Maceo, a mulatto, had as his chief of staff Jose Miró y Argenter, a Catalan, and numbered among his followers white mechanics and professionals, as well as thousands of peasants from Oriente. The staff officers who served his brother José Maceo included the sons of elite white families from Oriente. Together they harassed, confronted, and helped to undermine the Spanish forces.

Spanish colonial authorities still tried to play the theme of "race war," claiming that the rebellion would lead to "another Haiti." But this ideological maneuver was a perilous one, and making it explicit would virtually guarantee the alienation of most of the Afro-Cuban population. Moreover, the rebel leaders were prepared for this claim and could point to abundant evidence of the multi-racial character of their own leadership and followers. Martí also tried to counteract the idea of "race war" by proposing a different image of black and mulatto officers. He employed a language of honor, gentility, and strength to describe General José Maceo, celebrating not only Maceo's leadership, but also the fact that he treated his white staff officers like sons. This imagine of a mulatto officer commanding white troops would not gratify a dyed-in-wool white supremacist, but for Martí it was a stirring picture of social inversion carried out with restraint and "civilization."[50]

Within the first years of the war the nationalists succeeded in gaining control of a large fraction of the countryside. But the Spanish forces held on in the cities. They

deployed large numbers of conscript troops from the Peninsula, and recruited irregular forces among Spanish immigrants and poor urban Cubans, including, it seems, some unemployed Afro-Cubans.[51] The war thus become a bloody stalemate, a ghastly struggle of attrition between city and country in which thousands of noncombatants died from hunger and disease. In effect, by 1898, the Cubans had won. Spain could not sustain colonial power in this fashion indefinitely. But the final military blow, of course, came with the uninvited intervention of United States forces, who arrogated to themselves the authority relinquished by Spain.[52]

With the U.S. occupation of Cuba in 1899, the narratives of Louisiana and Cuba in some sense intersect. U.S. occupying forces brought with them a new and rigorous set of racial distinctions and invidious stereotypes, precisely those that had emerged from the post-emancipation and post-Reconstruction contest over the meanings of race in the United States. Cuba had never lacked expressions of racism, and some Cuban liberals were among the most vocal proponents of all-white immigration. But the North American obsession with whiteness and with the degenerative powers of "mongrelization" was a relatively novel element in a society that had long recognized multiple color categories, sometimes constituted as a kind of socio-racial continuum, including blanco (white), trigueño (dark), pardo (mulatto), negro (black) and so on.

During and immediately following the years of U.S. occupation, "whiteness" and "blackness" took on new and contested meanings in Cuba. U.S. authorities initially sought to limit Afro-Cuban voting rights through the imposition of literacy or property requirements, but were thwarted in that goal by the intense commitment of Cubans to suffrage for those

who had fought in the war. Then in organizing a new force for order in the countryside, the Rural Guard, North American officials were able to use networks of patronage to create an institution that was largely the preserve of those denominated "white." The implications were ominous, not only in terms of the exclusion of Afro-Cubans from coveted public employments, but in the counterpoising of a largely "white" force of repression to an increasingly active multiracial rural labor movement. Although American forces departed in 1902, the Rural Guard remained in place.[53]

Like the Knights of Labor in the United States, the anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists who took up the task of labor organizing in the Cuban cane fields in 1902 championed inter-ethnic and interracial solidarity. But they carried it an important step further, building up their unions through explicit appeal to existing Afro-Cuban groups, and insisting on an aggressive anti-racism in their writings. One of the earliest sugar workers' unions emerged in the town of Cruces, near Cienfuegos, a major sugar-producing region. It was led by Evaristo Landa, a mulatto veteran of the 1895 conflict; held its meetings in the old Centro Africano; and welcomed Spanish workers, who constituted about a quarter of the wage labor force. Indeed, Spanish-born anarcho-syndicalists were vigorous contributors of manifestos and declarations.[54]

The structure of the labor force on sugar plantations tended to subordinate rather than elevate racial distinctions. Within the wage labor force former slaves, long-free Cubans, and immigrants from the Peninsula worked side by side. The rural smallholding population, which provided some seasonal workers to the plantations, included many descendants of free persons of color, as well as Cubans who categorized themselves as white. This is not to say

that distinctions of "color" did not map onto distinctions of class. There were certainly sharp differences in the degree of access to productive resources, and "colored" renters and owners controlled only a small fraction of the island's land. But the daily working experience of most of those who labored in cane was not one of strict segregation. When the members of the Workers Guild of Cruces called for an alliance of all those who sweated to earn a paltry wage, without distinction of nationality, workers responded.[55]

But to stop the story here would be create something of a romantic myth. For while the memories of the nationalist struggle helped to forge a multi-racial Cuban identity, and the ongoing organization of the labor movement reinforced cross-ethnic alliances, there was in Cuba the possibility of bitter division. Planters and property-owners in Cuba, whatever their previous nationalist credentials, were as unwilling as their counterparts in Louisiana to see the development of an assertive working-class movement. Two organizers involved in the 1902 strike were "disappeared," their bodies found more than a year later. At that point, the repression seems not to have had definite racial overtones, though planters did speak with particular hostility about groups of "men of color" who had tried to stop work on the plantations.[56] But a decade later, in 1912, the language of race exploded onto the scene.

A small group of veterans, distressed among other things at the exclusion of Afro-Cubans from public office, had in 1908 founded an "Independent Party of Color." Their self-identification as a racially-based party met with tremendous hostility from white and mulatto politicians and the press, though their platform was a relatively familiar reformist one. And when the party's initiatives gave rise to wider mobilization in eastern Cuba in 1912, the tension grew. Escaping well beyond the intentions of their nominal leaders, hard-

pressed rural dwellers in Oriente began attacking plantation buildings and repositories of land titles, symbols of the expulsions and indignities they had suffered from local and foreign landowners.[57]

It has been estimated that 10,000 Afro-Cubans took part in the uprising, though it is difficult to know whether the perception of the participants as Afro-Cuban is in part retrospective. The rebels robbed and burned, but did not attack troops, and took almost no lives. The army was called out, ostensibly to defend property; constitutional guarantees were suspended; noncombatants were ordered out of the area; and a pitiless repression began. In scenes reminiscent of rural Louisiana, patrols roamed the back roads of Oriente and hanged or macheted any black male whom they found. The army suppressed the revolt, such as it was, through what was in effect assassination, and the conflict was retroactively characterized as a "race war." One observer reported that the army "was cutting off heads, pretty much without discrimination, of all negroes found outside the town limits."[58] The estimates of the number of victims of the repression are entirely conjectural, but range into the thousands.

The events of 1912 sent a terrible chill through the rural Afro-Cuban population, and became an unspoken--and nearly unstudied--chapter in Cuban history. But at the same time, the labor movement continued to grow as an inter-racial movement, and Afro-Cubans held positions of leadership in the major sugar workers union. The widespread strikes of 1917 were built on cross-racial cooperation, and brought dozens of mills to a halt.[59]

The killings of 1912 make it clear that a color line did exist, in fear and in memory. But those fears and memories were not an effective obstacle to the mobilization of workers.

At certain instants the multiplicity of socio-racial categories would be compressed into just white and black, drawing a line that facilitated repression. But in the long run the realities of labor and politics helped to keep the category of race highly unstable.

CONCLUSION

It would be foolhardy to try to draw extensive conclusions about social relations in Louisiana and Cuba from this very brief discussion of selected incidents. But there is an intriguing structure to the comparison that emerges. Both cases remind one of the complexity and fluidity of racial identities; both show instances of cross-racial alliance and of white racist repression. But the balance is different. In Louisiana, the solidarity displayed in the strikes of the 1880s showed glimpses of what might have been, but was quickly buried in the triumph of the "white line" strategy and of white supremacist ideology. In Cuba, a consistent pattern of cross-racial alliances was interrupted by a ferocious repressive episode in 1912, but continued to hold force in a growing labor movement.

Clearly the paths taken out of slavery conditioned a different set of outcomes in the two cases. The structuring of the work force in Cuba, with a multiethnic wage labor force embedded within a multiethnic peasantry in the countryside, helped to open up possibilities that were effectively foreclosed in Louisiana. At the same time, the history and precepts of Cuban nationalism provided a matrix within which to envision cross-racial cooperation. It cannot be proven, but one might hazard the observation that neither the specific pattern of class relations, nor the heritage of nationalist unity, could alone have brought about the kind of cooperation that marked the sugar workers' movement for decades.

In Louisiana, the construction and politicization of a single color line was encouraged by a specific strategy adopted by Democratic party and its allies throughout the South. Even after "redemption" from federal rule was achieved, planters could draw on the demonology of Reconstruction by invoking the image of large groups of black workers challenging their white employers. But that the groups of strikers should have been composed primarily of workers defined as black was itself the direct result of a specific path taken out of slavery: the reimposition of gang labor on former slaves.

In those few areas in southern Louisiana where the work force comprised significant numbers of members of several socio-racial groups the picture was somewhat different. In Terrebonne and lower Lafourche parish, where estates with a multiracial work force coexisted with a network of small farms, some of them operated by people of color, cross-racial alliances fared somewhat better and repression was less severe.[60] But everywhere the sharp distinctions of citizenship imposed under Democratic rule helped to reinforce the color line during strikes, for only whites were eligible for militia service.

In Cuba broad rights to citizenship coexisted with various forms of discrimination, and racism coexisted with antiracism.[61] In the light of the Louisiana experience, it is perhaps the explicit antiracism that stands out as in need of historical explanation. José Martí's claim that antiracism in Cuba grew "from where all good things begin," among the most humble members of society, can be seen as a romantic populist gesture. But there was substantial evidence to support it as well. In the formation of the nation, "race" had been explicitly subordinated to cubanidad--Cuban-ness--not just at the level of ideology but in the field of battle. After the war, the reality of working life in the reinforced the perception that

key interests were not divided along the lines of "racial" groupings.

In the decades after emancipation a self-conscious concept of whiteness did emerge at important moments in Cuba, urged on by the confident supremacist thought of the U.S. occupation government on the one hand, and reinforced by planters seeking "superior" European immigrant workers. But the effect of that immigration, in conjunction with the rapid overall growth of the workforce in sugar, was to eliminate the segregationist alternative. It was a nice irony that Spanish anarchists joined Afro-Cuban veterans to challenge planters who imagined themselves to be Cuban nationalists. These alliances would be repeatedly strained. The events of 1912 in the East must have had a terrible resonance elsewhere in the island, but they seem not to have slowed cross-racial organizing in the sugar fields. The color line could be drawn, but it was not, in the long run, explicitly politicized.

Having made these comparative observations, it may be appropriate to conclude by confessing that there are many aspects of the events that I have described that remain deeply puzzling. It is difficult to understand the goals of the army members, some of whom must have been veterans of the Cuban independence struggle, who turned on black peasants, also veterans of the struggle, in Oriente in 1912. And while it is not difficult to see the interests that were served by formation of the sheriff's posse that fired on striking workers in St. Mary's Parish, Louisiana, in 1887, it is more difficult to envision what was in the mind of A.J. Frere, a white Knights of Labor member, who joined in leading the posse.[62] However carefully we trace class relations and social constructions, there is within racism a kind of vicious "excess," as Thomas Holt has put it, that often defies our attempts to analyze the forces involved.[63]

Recognizing this analytic residuum, however, need not drive one back to the notion that the most murderous forms of racism are the unavoidable consequence of slavery. The very complexity of these two stories should make their most virulent incidents look more contingent, less inevitable and therefore, in a sense, even more troubling. Division and conflict between poor whites and former slaves thus appear not as necessary legacies of slavery, but rather as the result of the specific circumstances in which they encountered each other, and of specific political decisions and initiatives taken by leaders. If this is so, it seems that there is both a heavier weight of historical responsibility to be distributed, and--perhaps--a greater measure of hope for the future.

1. For a discussion of sugar production and the end of slavery in Cuba, see Rebecca J. Scott, Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860-1899 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985). The classic source on Louisiana is J. Carlyle Sitterson, Sugar Country: The Cane Sugar Industry in the South, 1753-1950 (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1953).

2. Barrington Moore, Jr., Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1966), p. xiii.

3. For a careful analysis of this process, and a revealing set of documents, see Ira Berlin, Thavolia Glymph, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland, Julie Saville, eds., Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867. Series I. Volume III. The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South, especially chapter 2, "Southern Louisiana."

4. See Diary, 1867, Vol. 2, Box 2, Alexandre E. DeClouet and Family Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Special Collections, LSU Libraries, Louisiana State University (hereafter LLMVC).

5. Noel Deerr, The History of Sugar, Vol. 1 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1949), p. 250, provides production figures for Louisiana.

6. William Ivy Hair, Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest: Louisiana Politics, 1877-1900 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), pp. 37-38.

7. Letter from H.O. Colomb, dated Jan. 9. 1974, printed in the Daily Picayune (New Orleans), Jan. 11, 1874.

8. The strike is described in detail in the Daily Picayune (New Orleans), Jan. 14, 15, 16, 18, and 20, 1874.

9. See Roger Wallace Shugg, "Survival of the Plantation System in Louisiana," Journal of Southern History 3 (August 1937): 311-325, and Ted Tunnell, Crucible of Reconstruction: War, Radicalism and Race in Louisiana, 1862-1877 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984). Tunnell argues that "the black majority voted twenty-five to eleven against the 150-acre restriction" (p. 133). However, grouping the gens de couleur together with the freedmen as "black" somewhat confuses the picture.

10. See Thomas C. Holt, The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1831-1938 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Rebecca J. Scott, Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860-1899 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); and Jaime Reis, "From Banguê to Usina: Social Aspects of Growth and Modernization in the Sugar Industry of Pernambuco, Brazil, 1850-1920," in Kenneth Duncan and Ian Rutledge, Land and Labour in Latin America (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1977) pp. 369-396.

11. Sitterson, Sugar Country, p. 246.

12. For a general discussion of the fate of planter combinations, see "'Bound' or 'Free'? Black Labor in Cotton and Sugarcane Farming, 1865-1880," The Journal of Southern History 50 (November 1984): 569-596.

13. See the Alexandre DeClouet and Family Papers, especially box 1, folder 13, LLMVC.

14. See Donelson Caffery and Family Papers, vol. 2, pp. 223-224, LLMVC, for a February, 1888, letter on the Law and Order league.

15. See Daily Picayune (New Orleans), Jan. 16, 1874.

16. Weekly Thibodaux Sentinel (Thibodaux, La.), Sept. 17, 1887.

17. The early events of the strike are described in the New Orleans Democrat, March 19, 1880, reprinted in St. Charles Herald, February 15, 1973, p. 22. I am grateful to Robert Paquette for sharing this clipping with me.

18. See Jeffrey Gould, "'Heroic and Vigorous Action': An Analysis of the Sugar Cane Workers' Strike in Lafourche Parish, November, 1887," unpublished. I am very grateful to Prof. Gould for sharing this essay with me.

19. The writer was a planter from St. Mary's Parish. See Louisiana Sugar Bowl, July 15, 1886; cited in Gould, "'Heroic and Vigorous Action'."

20. See Gould, "'Heroic and Vigorous Action'" and Melton Alonza McLaurin, The Knights of Labor in the South (Westport, Connecticut: The Greenwood Press, 1978), especially chap. 7.

21. The description of local leaders is based on the evidence compiled by Jeffrey Gould, and described in "'Heroic and Vigorous Action'." Information on membership of Local Assemblies is contradictory, and needs further work. I have drawn on Gould and on Jonathan Garlock, Guide to the Local Assemblies of the Knights of Labor (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982).

22. The description of the strike that follows is based on the newspapers and manuscripts cited below, and on William Ivy Hair, Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest: Louisiana Politics, 1877-1900 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), esp. pp. 175-184; Jeffrey Gould, "The Strike of 1887: Louisiana Sugar War," Southern Exposure 12 (November-December 1984): 45-55; Gould, "'Heroic and Vigorous Action;'" Covington Hall, "Labor Struggles in the Deep South," unpublished, in the Manuscript Collection, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University. Hall uses family memories as well as printed sources to reconstruct the strikes of the 1880s.

23. See Report of Brig-Gen. William Pierce Commanding State Troops in the Field in District from Berwick's Bay to New Orleans to General G.T. Beauregard, Adjutant General of the State of Louisiana, November 28th, 1887. (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Leon Jastremski, State Printer, 1887), p. 3.

24. These are the figures cited by Gould, "Sugar War." I have had difficulty locating credible estimates of the number of participants in contemporary sources. Covington Hall, a Louisiana socialist who seems to have observed and later studied the events of 1887, quotes the Daily Picayune, November 2, 1887, as reporting that there were 16,000 workers "'intimated' to have answered the strike call." Covington Hall, "Labor Struggles."

25. See Pierce, Report, p. 4, and French-language section of the Weekly Thibodaux Sentinel, Nov. 5, 1887. ("A peu près 500 grévistes noirs, blancs, et curieux assaistaient au débarquement de la force armée. . .")

26. Pierce, Report, p. 11.

27. Hall, "Labor Struggles,"

28. This observation on the distinction between upper and lower Lafourche is Jeffrey Gould's, in "Sugar War" and "'Heroic and Vigorous Action'."

29. See Pierce, Report.

30. See the Thibodaux Weekly Sentinel for mid-November.

31. The name of the town is variously reported as Patterson, Pattersonville, and Pattersville.

32. Gould, "Strike," p. 51, describes the posse as being led by A.J. Frere, a Knights of Labor member. Hall reports that the posse was initially reported to be led by "Don Caffery, a prominent planter and politician of St. Mary's," who denied such leadership, attributing it to another planter, Col. E. M. Dubroca. Caffery did say that he had assumed command of part of the posse to round up "rioters." Hall, "Labor Struggles."

33. Letter from D. Caffery, Franklin, Louisiana, to "my dear son," Nov. 11, 1887, in vol. 6, Donelson Caffery and Family Papers, LLMVC.

34. See Pierce, Report, pp. 22-30.

35. See Thibodaux Weekly Sentinel, French section, November 19, 1887.

36. Letter, Mary W. Pugh to Edward F. Pugh, in Folder 1, Mrs. Mary W. Pugh Papers, LLMVC.

37. Letter, Mary W. Pugh to Edward F. Pugh, in Folder 1, Mrs. Mary W. Pugh Papers, LLMVC.

38. Letter, Mary W. Pugh to Edward F. Pugh, Nov. 25, Folder 1, Mary W. Pugh Papers, LLMVC.

39. See Gould, "Strike of 1887," and "'Heroic and Vigorous Action'."

40. Hall, "Labor Struggles."

41. On the Constitutional Convention, see Tunnell, Crucible, especially p. 150.

42. Quoted in Tunnell, Crucible, p. 173.

43. Tunnell, Crucible, pp. 193-94. The French Le Carillon had earlier made the same point, calling in 1873 for the formation of a Parti Blanc. See Domínguez, White by Definition, p. ___.

44. This process is highlighted in Ada Ferrer, "Social Aspects of Cuban Nationalism: Race, Slavery, and the Guerra Chiquita, 1879-1880," Cuban Studies 21 (1991): 37-56.

45. See Ferrer, "Social Aspects."

46. See Scott, Slave Emancipation.

47. See the forthcoming volume by Jordi Maluquer de Motes on Spanish immigration in Cuba.

48. For an analysis of this process, see Rebecca J. Scott, "Mobilizing Across the Color Line: Race, Class, and Anti-Colonial Insurgency in Cuba, 1895-98." Delivered at the conference, "Slavery and Freedom in Comparative Perspective," University of California, San Diego, October 4-6, 1991.

49. Deposition of Eduardo Vilar, August 12, 1904, Claim 97 (Central Teresa), Pt. 1, Entry 352, RG 76, Spanish Treaty Claims, U.S. National Archives.

50. See Abelardo Padrón Valdés, El general José: Apuntes biográficos (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1975), Section VII, Iconografía, no page number.

51. I am grateful to Louis A. Pérez, Jr., for sharing with me some of his preliminary findings on the socio-racial composition of the pro-Spanish guerrilla. Pérez, personal communication, February, 1992.

52. See Louis A. Pérez, Jr., Cuba Between Empires, 1878-1902 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983).

53. See Pérez, Cuba Between Empires.

54. See John Dumoulin, "El primer desarrollo del movimiento obrero y la formación del proletariado en el sector azucarero. Cruces 1886-1902," Islas 48 (May-August 1974): 3-66.

55. See Dumoulin, "El primer desarrollo," p.18.

56. Dumoulin, "El primer desarrollo."

57. On the Partido and the events of 1912, see Aline Helg, "Afro-Cuban Protest: The Partido Independiente de Color, 1908-1912," Cuban Studies 21 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), and Louis A. Pérez, Jr., "Politics, Peasants, and People of Color: The 1912 'Race War' in Cuba Reconsidered," Hispanic American Historical Review 66(1986): 510-538.

58. Cited in Pérez, "Politics, Peasants, and People of Color," p. 537.

59. See John Dumoulin, "El Movimiento Obrero en Cruces, 1902-1925. Corrientes Ideológicas y Formas de Organización en la Industria Azucarera," in Las clases y la lucha de clases en la sociedad neocolonial cubana (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1981), and Dumoulin, Azúcar y lucha de clases 1917 (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1980).

60. A logical urban comparison would be the New Orleans waterfront, where fragile cross-racial alliances survived for decades. See Eric Arnesen, Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

61. For the most recent general overview of the early twentieth century, see Tomás Fernández Robaina, El negro en Cuba, 1902-1958: Apuntes para la historia de la lucha contra la discriminación racial (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1990).

62. Perhaps his involvement was made more likely by family connections. The papers of the planter Donelson Caffery include an invitation to a wedding in which a Caffery weds a Frere.

63. The phrase is from an unpublished paper by Thomas Holt, on "race and race-making."