CUBAN TOBACCO SLAVERY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

William A. Morgan
Lone Star College-Montgomery

With the seemingly inexorable link of Cuban sugar with Cuban slavery it seems natural to extend the oft-repeated exclamation "*sin azúcar no hay país*" to "*sin azúcar no hay esclavitud*," without sugar there is no country, without sugar there is no slavery. This association was explicitly evoked by a traveler to the island in 1859, who said "I now begin to feel like I am in Cuba; in the tropical, rich, sugar growing, slave-tilled Cuba." Moreover, the author, after visiting a series of sugar plantations, wrote "the plantation life I am seeing and about to see, tells the story of Cuba, the Cuba that has been and that is".[1] This writer was most likely responding to the dominant position that sugar played in Cuba's economy as a result of its similarly outsized role in the institution of slavery, accounting for more slaves than any other economic activity in Cuba.[2] Similarly, most scholars have viewed the varied dimensions of Cuban slavery through the very conspicuous but also very general lens of sugar. Yet, even at its height, sugar is better represented as having a plurality rather than a majority position in Cuba's plantation economy, especially as sugar-based slaves were never the majority of Cuba's slave population

[1] Richard H. DANA, *To Cuba and Back* , Warwick, New York, 1500 Books, 2007, p. 90. With more rhetorical flourish, the scholars Miguel Barnet and Naomi Lindstrom contend, "Sugar made Cuba coalesce. The culture that grew around it is today the national culture. The sugar plantation seedbed – germ cell- contributed to the fusing-together of all the values that gave rise to our country." Furthermore, they contend "Sugar in short, made us what we are… [it] swallowed up everything; it swallowed up coffee, it swallowed up tobacco". Miguel BARNET and Naomi LINDSTROM, "The Culture That Sugar Created", *Latin American Literary Review*, 8/16 (1980), pp. 38-44.

[2] José FRIAS, *Noticias estadísticas de la isla de Cuba, en 1862*, La Habana, Imprenta del gobierno, 1864.

with more slaves employed outside of sugar than in it.[3] Unequivocally, sugar played a substantial role in Cuban slavery during the nineteenth century, yet because other agricultural economies and other slave systems existed, its position in the plantation economy of the island was far less dominant than scholars have previously understood.

Tobacco's importance is particularly highlighted in any framework that privileges slave-based diversity in Cuba's plantation economy of the nineteenth century. Tobacco was the first crop to achieve economic importance in Cuba, while at the height of the sugar revolution in the nineteenth century, tobacco continued to maintain economic relevancy: according to one contemporary estimate, no agricultural economy produced more value, in proportion to the capital and labor employed, than tobacco.[4] Moreover, in the course of the nineteenth century as Cuba's slave-based economy expanded, tobacco became an increasingly valuable crop in relation to Cuba's total agricultural production and other than sugar, tobacco was the only crop to demonstrate positive expansion in this period.

Just as sugar owed much of its economic expansion to slavery, enslaved labor played a pivotal role in tobacco's sustained growth over the nineteenth century. Precise numbers of slaves working on tobacco farms are hard to come by, but multiple accounts at mid-century place the island-wide number of tobacco slaves at 40.000.[5] Notably, the overwhelming majority of Cuban slaves cultivating tobacco were isolated in the province of Pinar del Río. This far western province included the Vuelta Abajo region, arguably the most productive and valuable tobacco growing land in the world, and home to more than 80% of tobacco-based slaves in Cuba.[6] From the Vuelta Abajo outward, tobacco so dominated the economic and social aspects of this region that Jean Stubbs argues, during the nineteenth century, "virtually every man and woman, and many a child too, was involved in tobacco in that part of the country," while Ramiro Guerra claims that the area of the Vuelta

[3] For most of the nineteenth century, the total number of slaves on sugar plantations represented relatively small percentages of Cuba's overall slave population. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, less than 25% of Cuban slaves worked on sugar plantations, with this percentage reaching its peak in 1862 as the sugar sector accounted for 47% of the total slave population according to one of the last official census. Alexander von HUMBOLDT, *The Island of Cuba: A Political Essay*, Princeton, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2001, p. 137; FRIAS, *Noticias estadísticas de la isla de Cuba*, p. 14-37.

[4] Thomas SALAZAR, *Cartilla agraria para el cultivo del tabaco*, Imprenta del Gobierno y Capitanía General y Real Hacienda por S.M., 1850, p. 5.

[5] José GARCIA de ARBOLEYA, *Manual de la isla de Cuba. Compendio de su Historia, Geografía, Estadística, y Administración*, La Habana, Imprenta del Gobierno y Capitanía General, 1852, p. 144; Jacobo de la PEZUELA, *Diccionario Geográfico, Estadístico, Histórico de la Isla de Cuba*, 4 vols., Madrid, Imprenta del establecimiento de Mellado, 1863, vol. 4, p. 573.

[6] FRIAS, *Noticias estadísticas de la isla de Cuba*, p. 38.

Abajo represented "a region where not even during the period of greatest activity would the sugar industry invade."[7] In an area exclusively dominated by tobacco, the existence of a distinct slave community means that the narrative of Cuban slavery must not be limited to the story of sugar.[8]

Introduction

Generally perceived as a crop exclusively cultivated by free laborers, an association predicated on the belief that tobacco required skill and diligence that were beyond the capabilities of slaves, over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries continued misconceptions have downplayed slavery's longstanding, critical and continually expanding link to Cuba's tobacco economy.[9] In reality, the connection between tobacco and slavery in Cuba was profound, since tobacco served as the principal medium of exchange within Cuba's nascent African slave trade. The link between Cuban slavery and tobacco would continue across centuries as thousands of slaves were increasingly forced to labor upon tobacco estates. This trajectory of slave-based growth eventually produced an enhanced reliance on slavery within the tobacco economy that was most pronounced at the conclusion of Cuba's plantation-based economy in the 1880s.

This article highlights several critical factors that help explain the development of tobacco-based slavery including the end of the state monopoly on tobacco production in 1817 and a series of hurricanes in the 1840s that led to the demise of coffee production in western Cuba and the expansion of tobacco in the same region. The direct result of these influences was a conspicuous expansion of slavery in Cuba's tobacco economy—most notably, through the process of *latifundia*, generally characterized by an aggrandizement of farms and slave populations on individual estates. Although this

[7] Jean STUBBS, *Tobacco on the Periphery: A Case Study in Cuban Labour History, 1860-1958*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 65-66; Ramiro GUERRA *et al.* (eds.), *A History of the Cuban Nation*, La Habana, Editorial Historia de la Nación Cubana S.A., 1958, vol. 3, p. 161.

[8] Valentin PARDO Y BETANCOURT, *Informe ilustrado y estadistico: redactó y dió sobre los elementos de riqueza del tabaco en el año 1861*, La Habana, Imprenta del Tiempo, 1863. The 1867 census lists 43.300 slaves in Pinar del Río province; Fe IGLESIAS, "Algunas consideraciones en torno a la abolición de la esclavitud", in *La esclavitud en Cuba*, La Habana, Editorial Academia, 1986, p. 81.

[9] For some, tobacco essentially equaled white and free labor because its intrinsic needs were "associated with the liberty of man, and disdaining the aid of debased workers". Ramón de la SAGRA, *Historia física, política y natural de la isla de Cuba: Historia física y política. Introducción, Geografía, clima, población, Agricultura*, Librería de Arthus Bertrand, 1842, vol. 1, p. LXXVII. See also, Alexander von HUMBOLDT, *The Island of Cuba: A Political Essay*, p. 168. For the twentieth century the most notable example of this can be found in Fernando ORTIZ, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1995.

enlargement was most prominent in the western province of Pinar del Río during the last half of the nineteenth century, its development built upon earlier foundations that took shape in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and that would continue to structure Cuba's tobacco economy until the end of slavery on the island.

Connecting Tobacco and Slavery

To understand the breadth of Cuban tobacco slavery the role of tobacco-based slaves in Cuba's plantation economy, it is necessary to begin at the origins of African slavery in Cuba. It is impossible to overstate the economic and political value of Cuban tobacco in the Atlantic world in this early period as it drove trade into and out of Cuba and among competing empires. A central component of this trade involved African slavery and in Cuba, tobacco, not sugar, was the initial link to the institution of slavery.

The relationship between slavery and tobacco began in the earliest phases of the Spanish conquest of Cuba, with tobacco acting as an early catalyst for the African slave trade to the island. Official attempts, as early as 1500s, designed to increase tobacco's production through the establishment of a dedicated and expanded labor force, reflected this link with the African slave trade viewed as the primary means of replenishing the supply of laborers once the indigenous population had been decimated. Indicative of the initial connection between slavery and tobacco the Portuguese trader Pedró Gómez Reynel promised to bring one thousand slaves into Cuba; notably he was paid mostly from the island's tobacco and that the majority of slaves acquired early on were "put directly" to work in Cuba's tobacco fields. [10]

The relationship between tobacco and Cuban slavery continued into the eighteenth century as the two interrelated institutions simultaneously expanded. According to the early Cuban nationalist Francisco Arango y Parreño, it was tobacco that generated slavery on the island. Arango stated that during the Spanish wars of succession the French visited Havana to exchange slaves for tobacco, awakening the slave industry in Cuba. In this same period, Hubert Aimes also asserted that the French came to Cuba "chiefly" for the

[10] David TURNBULL, *Travels in the West; Cuba, with Notices of Porto Rico, and the Slave Trade*, New York, Negro Universities Press, 1969, p. 484; Richard B. KIMBALL, *Cuba, and the Cubans: Comprising a History of the Island of Cuba, Its Present Social, Political, and Domestic Condition: Also, Its Relation to England and the United States,* S. Hueston, 1850, p. 13; Pedro J. GUITERAS, *Historia de la isla de Cuba: con notas e ilustraciones*, J.R. Lockwood, 1865, p. 378; Diana IZNAGA, *La burguesía esclavista cubana*, La Habana, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1987, p. 64. Mercedes GARCIA, *La aventura de fundar ingenios: la refacción azucarera en La Habana del siglo xviii*, La Habana, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2004, pp. 27-28.

island's tobacco, giving the tobacco industry its "first great impulse," and most importantly, facilitating Havana's ability to buy slaves.[11] Tobacco's connection to French slave trading becomes even more explicit with Ramiro Guerra y Sánchez's claim that the French were dealing directly with tobacco farms or estate owners and that this initiation of a viable slave trade (based upon the exchange of tobacco) was, for Guerra, the most significant general economic development of the colonial period.[12] In addition to the French preoccupation with Cuban tobacco, the English, when granted the right to import slaves, as well did not chose sugar as the principal method of payment. [13] Instead, they chose to be paid in tobacco and other Cuban products that they could not get elsewhere especially as tobacco was considered Cuba's most important and productive crop.[14]

These accounts reflect early international preference for tobacco and the resulting practice of exchanging slaves for tobacco which led to the "golden age of the tobacco trade"—an expansion of the Cuban tobacco industry, which grew to meet new levels of demand. As a result, the expanding tobacco industry formed one half of a cycle that included the subsequent incorporation of newly arriving slaves who had been imported to increase the supply of this valuable product.[15]

---

[11] Francisco ARANGO y PARREÑO, *Obras Del Excmo. Señor D. Francisco de Arango y Parreño*, Impr. de Howson y Heinen, 1888, vol. 2, p. 243. Arango specifically mentioned the French trader Mr. Conchee, who operated in this period with great openness and frankness in exchanging Africans for all different types of tobacco. ARANGO, *Obras*, vol. 1, p. 500; Hubert H. S AIMES, *A History of Slavery in Cuba, 1511 to 1868*, New York, Octagon Books, 1967, p. 21

[12] GUERRA, *A History of the Cuban Nation*, vol. 2, pp. 247-281. Much of this was occurring outside of official channels: in this early period, the "principal contraband import items were slaves," while tobacco was one of the island's chief contraband exports. John Robert McNEILL, *Atlantic Empires of France and Spain: Louisbourg and Havana, 1700-1763*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1985, p. 200. Aimes says that from the early 1700s, English smuggling was "centered around" importing slaves and exporting tobacco. AIMES, *A History of Slavery in Cuba*, p. 22.

[13] For a good overview of the eighteenth-century Cuban slave trade, including imperial relations structuring the trade, as well as the use of tobacco as a principal method of payment, Gloria GARCIA, "El monte de la trata hacia Cuba en el siglo XVIII", in Consuelo NARANJO & Tomás MALLO (eds.), *Cuba. La perla de las Antillas*, Madrid, Doce Calles, 1994, pp. 297-311. See, also José G. ORTEGA, "The Cuban Sugar Complex in the Age of Revolution, 1789--1844", Ph.D., University of California, Los Angeles, 2007.

[14] Julio LE RIVEREND, *Economic History of Cuba*, Ensayo Book Institute, 1967, vol.1, p. 149; José Antonio SACO, *Historia de la esclavitud de la raza africana en el nuevo mundo y en especial en los países americo-hispanos*, vol. 1, La Habana, Cultural S.A., 1938, p. 312. Additionally, Aimes argues "the manufacturing of sugar had practically ceased in Cuba at this time", AIMES, *A History of Slavery in Cuba*, p. 24; SACO, *Historia de la esclavitud de la raza africana*, vol.1, pp.310-311.

[15] McNEILL, *Atlantic Empires of France and Spain*, p. 200.

The Royal Monopoly on Tobacco: The Factoría System

Over the next century, as Spain increasingly sought ways to compete with its imperial rivals in the Atlantic economy, it progressively turned toward tobacco production in Cuba as the primary means to enlarge the royal treasury. The emphasis on tobacco resulted in the 1717 establishment of the *Factoría*, a monopolistic body empowered by the Spanish crown to purchase all available Cuban tobacco. While the Factoría, which continued to exist until 1817, produced uneven results for both Spanish officials and Cuban tobacco farmers, its importance to both parties was immense. For the crown, the monopoly protected one of its most valuable Atlantic commodities to the degree that it was subsidized by another Atlantic resource, silver from New Spain (payments to the Factoría reaching as high as 400,000 pesos per year), which in turn was paid out to tobacco producers in Cuba.[16] Beyond payments for outright crops harvested, Cuban tobacco farmers, *vegueros*, used this influx of resources for the explicit purchase of slaves in order to capitalize on the crown's growing demand for more tobacco.[17] At mid-century, the use of tobacco as a principal payment for slaves proved common enough that Don José Villanueva Pico, the head of a Havana society devoted to procuring more slaves for the city and its environs, presented to the Spanish king a contract to import 1,000 slaves or more as needed per year over a ten-year period. In exchange, the Spanish King ordered Villanueva to export all of the tobacco from the Factoría to Spain without shipping costs.[18] In fact, the demand for slaves to labor in tobacco cultivation was so high that it far outstripped the crown's capacity to supply them. In 1750, the crown authorized the supply of 500 slaves, at 300 pesos each, to farmers in Cuba. This amount proved insufficient for tobacco production as Cuban governor Francisco Caxigal de la Vega protested, arguing the area's vegueros "clambered" for more enslaved workers. Two years later, Alonso Arcos y Moreno, the

[16] For the wealth achieved under the official tobacco monopoly, from 1740-1760, McNeill estimates that the Spanish crown realized up to a 600% return on investment of Cuban tobacco under this system. Noting that the royal monopoly was established because "the trade in Havana leaf could provide the Crown with untold wealth," McNeill further argues that the annual profit from tobacco alone was sufficient to not only cover the cost of administering and defending Cuba, but also to finance the Crown's entire navy. *Ibid.*, pp. 161 and 118.

[17] For an excellent overview of both tobacco's imperial importance and the role of the Factoría in Cuba during this period see Charlotte COSNER, "Rich and Poor, White and Black, Free and Slave: The Social History of Cuba's Tobacco Farmers, 1763-1817", Florida International University, 2008; Inés de MONTAUD, "Spanish Fiscal Policies and Cuban Tobacco During the Nineteenth Century," *Cuban Studies*, 33 (2002); Laura NATER, "The Spanish Empire and Cuban Tobacco During the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries", in Peter A. COCLANIS (ed.), *The Atlantic Economy During the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Organization, Operation, Practice, and Personnel*, 2005.

[18] SACO, *Historia de la esclavitud de la raza africana*, vol.1, p. 313.

governor of the jurisdiction of Santiago de Cuba, wrote Caxigal to suggest that the introduction of more slaves would translate into a greater quantity of tobacco for the Spanish crown. Caxigal concurred, arguing that "the abundance of this fruit" was not possible to obtain without the use of slaves.[19]

The Factoría was so integral to procuring slaves directly for Cuba's tobacco famers that, vegueros considered it "the principal resource" for access to this important labor force and integral to their prosperity and happiness.[20] Yet, Spain proved unable to meet these demands and in 1817, the Factoría was abolished as a result of its failure to address the concerns of both vegueros and Cuban officials regarding the increased use of slaves in tobacco cultivation. The demise of the royal monopoly system in 1817 nevertheless signaled the advent of another golden era of tobacco production in Cuba. As witness to this, Ramón de le Sagra noted the sizeable difference in the production of tobacco during and after the monopoly, noting that total island production went from 371,560 arrobas in 1811 to 500,000 in 1827.[21] This expansion of tobacco production would continue throughout the nineteenth century as official records described a 48% increase in raw tobacco exported from 1826 to 1831 and a 68% increase in manufactured tobacco exported during the same period.[22]

With the end of the monopoly system, tobacco production underwent considerable and sustained expansion which can largely be explained in a

[19] Leví MARRERO, *Cuba. Economía y Sociedad*, Río Piedras, Editorial San Juan, 1972, vol. 7, p. 68. COSNER, "Rich and Poor, White and Black, Free and Slave", p. 87. For another excellent treatment of this early stage of tobacco slavery and one that insists upon a more widespread than commonly accepted emphasis upon Spanish and Cuban officials directly supplying slaves to Cuban vegueros, see Vicent SANZ ROZALEN, "Los negros del Rey. Tabaco y esclavitud en Cuba a comienzos del siglo XIX", in José A. PIQUERAS (ed.), *Trabajo libre y coactivo en sociedades de plantación*, Madrid, Siglo XXI, 2009, pp. 151-176.

[20] This exchange was even more critical when regular payments of silver from New Spain were disrupted; these disruptions left the sale of slaves as the only form of compensation available to the Factoría during these periods. NATER, "The Spanish Empire and Cuban Tobacco", p. 276, n. 64.

[21] Note, one arroba equals approximately 25 pounds. SAGRA, *Historia física, política y natural de la isla de Cuba*, vol. 1, p. 289.

[22] *Balanza general del comercio de la Isla de Cuba en el año de 1826*, La Habana, Oficina del Gobierno, 1827; *Balanza general del comercio de la Isla de Cuba en el año de 1831*, La Habana, Real Hacienda, 1832. Sagra also measured the expansion of the tobacco industry in total Cuban tobacco exports; noting that from 1826 to 1830, raw tobacco exports rose 102% and manufactured tobacco rose by 106%. SAGRA, *Historia economico-politica y estadistica de la Isla fe Cuba; Ó sea de sus progresos en la poblacion, la agricultura, el comercio y las rentas*, La Habana, Imprenta de las viudas de Arazoza y Soler, 1831, p. 176. A comparison with sugar's growth during this period illuminates just how exceptional tobacco's growth was during this period. According to the Sociedad Patriótica in 1835, Cuba's tobacco exports saw a 96% increase over the past year, while sugar exports only increased 4%. Tobacco went from 26.436 to 51,712; sugar, from 4.544.936 to 4.708.670. Numbers are in arrobas and for tobacco, only include raw tobacco. Real Sociedad Patriótica de La Habana, *Memorias de la Real Sociedad Patriotica de La Habana*, La Habana, Oficina del Gobierno y Capitanía General, 1837, vol. 3, p. 471.

simultaneous increase in the use of slaves in the tobacco economy. Beginning in 1816, an estimated 100,000 slaves were imported over a five-year period, more than the total number of slaves imported previously. More precisely, from 1790 to 1820, more than 300,000 slaves were imported into Cuba, with a third of those, 107,696, arriving between 1817 and 1820, and on the heels of the abolishment of the tobacco monopoly.[23] The arrival of so many slaves just after the end of the Factoría, alongside tobacco's increasing economic development, suggests a strong causal link, but the historical record makes it impossible to know exactly where or to what industry these 100,000 slaves were sent. In a state-sponsored report on the agricultural production of tobacco in the 1840s, Tomás de Salazar mentioned that very little detailed information has been written about tobacco to that point, which further limits the accounting of slaves dispersed to Cuba's tobacco fields.[24] Yet, the conditions of Cuba's tobacco economy, in light of the international demand for this crop and the precedent of slaves cultivating tobacco, were conducive to slavery's expanded use in this economy. Additionally, the deep-seated demand for slaves by vegueros throughout the Factoría period suggests that many of these slaves were bound for tobacco cultivation. International demand, local conditions, and veguero needs were not the only factors pulling slaves into tobacco production. Official policies also sought to actively encourage this relationship in light of the claim that no plant produces more in proportion to the capital and labor employed than tobacco does. Furthermore, officials saw tobacco as a primary means to achieve prosperity and tranquility for the island; insisting that the use of slave labor increases the amount of raw tobacco cultivated by "half more."[25]

The Vuelta Abajo in the Nineteenth Century

In this early period of the nineteenth century, the tobacco industry was well placed to expand its production by taking advantage of a renewed slave trade and increasing its already established reliance upon enslaved laborers. This was most notable in the province of Pinar del Río, a region whose exceptionality in the context of Atlantic tobacco production ensured that its growth would coincide with the institutionalization of slavery in Cuba. It was in this

[23] Matt D. CHILDS, *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle Against Atlantic Slavery*, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2006, p. 49; María del Carmen BARCIA, Gloria GARCIA & Eduardo TORRES CUEVAS (eds.), *Historia de Cuba: la colonia. Evolución socioeconómica y formación nacional: de los orígenes hasta 1867*, Instituto de Historia de Cuba, La Habana, Editora Política, 1994, pp. 472-473.

[24] SALAZAR, *Cartilla agraria*, p. 5.

[25] SALAZAR, *Cartilla agraria*, pp. 5-53.

period and region that the demography of tobacco cultivation underwent an important transformation. More slaves were being incorporated into the labor force, and as a result, the racial and class makeup of those involved in tobacco cultivation evolved to reflect a greater dependence upon slaves.

Within Pinar del Río the increasing reliance upon enslaved labor for tobacco cultivation was especially prominent in the Vuelta Abajo region, an area roughly measuring at 97 miles wide by 24 miles long, where "the inhabitants of this jurisdiction are dedicated exclusively to the cultivation of tobacco."[26] The predominance and exclusivity of tobacco cultivation in the Vuelta Abajo marked this region as distinct. Not only was tobacco the singular crop in the region it was one of only a few geographic spaces that successfully prevented the encroachment of sugar, which would eventually invade most all other areas of the island. In terms of slavery, immediately after 1817, this area exclusively defined by tobacco production saw a higher degree of enslavement that corresponded to an overall expansion in this economy. [27] In 1811, before the advent of free trade in tobacco, the population of the Vuelta Abajo was 62% white and 24% free black, leaving only 14% to be listed as slaves. Yet in 1827, just a decade after the end of the monopoly, the number of slaves in the area increased to 26% of the population. [28]

This growth of slavery in Pinar del Río after 1817 led to the creation of a sizeable tobacco-based slave population numbering in the tens of thousands.[29] More precise numbers can be deduced by examining the 1817 and 1827 Cuban censuses and by analyzing individual jurisdictions within the Vuelta Abajo in 1838. According to the 1817 census, Pinar del Río had 3.634 slaves, while in 1827, the number had escalated to 5.104. This represents a 40% increase of the slave population in a single decade.[30] Citing different sources, the historian Levi Marrero argues that in 1827, there were 6.854 slaves in the major tobacco areas of Pinar del Río province, resulting in a

[26] *Cuadro estadístico de la Siempre Fiel Isla de Cuba correspondiente al año de 1827*, p. 54.

[27] Accordingly, Antonio Bachiller Morales noted an "unimpeded" expansion of Cuban vegas in the area after 1817. Antonio BACHILLER MORALES, *Prontuario de agricultura general: para el uso de los labradores i hacendados de la isla de Cuba*, La Habana, Imprenta de Barcina, 1856, p. 4.

[28] SAGRA, *Historia física, política y natural de la isla de Cuba*, vol. 1, p. 156. From the 1827 census the percentage of slaves in Pinar del Río equals, 26.6, while Emeterio Santovenia, citing José de Aguilar the provincial lieutenant governor of Filipina (the former jurisdiction of Pinar del Río) lists the slave population ratio of Pinar del Río at 27.9% in 1819. *Cuadro estadístico de la Siempre Fiel Isla de Cuba correspondiente al año de 1827*; Emeterio SANTOVENIA, *Pinar Del Río*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1946, p. 76.

[29] Aimes argues that in this region there were 36,000 slaves divided among "minor estates such as tobacco farms, cattle ranches and farms." However, as will be demonstrated tobacco increasingly and overwhelmingly dominated the economy of this region. , p. 100.

[30] For the 1817 census see, KIPLE, *Blacks in Colonial Cuba, 1774-1899*. For the 1827 census, *Cuadro estadístico de La Siempre Fiel Isla de Cuba correspondiente al año de 1827.*

staggering 89% increase from 1817.[31] And although the total number of slaves in Pinar del Río in 1827 still fell well below that of other locales and industries across Cuba, the growth of this population was significant, as it either equaled or surpassed the 44% increase in the total slave population for Cuba in the same period.

As a whole, the increase in the number of slaves laboring on tobacco farms, *vegas*, throughout Cuba by 1827 is a reflection of the initial demand by vegueros in the wake of the monopoly's end. This demand began well before the limitations on productivity that followed the establishment of the monopoly, whose end in 1817 would only add to the call for more tobacco slaves as production levels increased. As tobacco evolved along with Cuba's burgeoning slave trade—especially in Pinar del Río—nascent patterns of development defined by meaningful increases in slave use were becoming established. These patterns would continue to structure the Cuban tobacco economy of the nineteenth century.

Partido	Ingenios	Cafetales	Potreros	Hacienda de crianzas	Vegas de tabaco	Grand Total
Consolación del Norte	0	0	0	166	75	241
San Diego de los Baños	36	50	46	68	630	830
Consolación del Sur	0	0	0	168	840	1,008
Pinar del Río	37	0	97	67	975	1,176
San Juan y Martínez	0	0	233	0	856	1,089
Baja	93	0	0	36	84	213
Guanes	0	0	77	28	216	321
Mantua	0	12	0	58	150	220
Grand Total	166	62	453	591	3,826	5,098

Table 1a: Vegas laborers: Vuelta Abajo, 1838, Slaves. [32]

Partido	Ingenios	Cafetales	Potreros	Hacienda de crianzas	Vegas de tabaco	Grand Total
Consolación del Norte	0	0	0	33	21	54
San Diego de los Baños	3	6	22	39	750	820
Consolación del Sur	0	0	0	46	491	537
Pinar del Río	6	0	8	32	424	470
San Juan y Martínez	0	0	15	0	103	118
Baja	6	0	0	59	66	131
Guanes	0	0	16	48	150	214
Mantua	0	1	0	38	188	227
Grand Total	15	7	61	295	2,193	2,571

Table 1b: Vegas laborers: Vuelta Abajo, 1838, Free.[33]

[31] MARRERO, *Cuba. Economía y Sociedad*, vol.11, p. 59.

[32] The following information comes from the Real Sociedad Patriótica de La Habana, *Memorias de la Real Sociedad Patriotica de La Habana*, vol. 7, La Habana, Oficina del Gobierno y Capitanía General, 1838, pp. 72-73.

[33] *Ibid.*

Evidence of this slave-based progression in the tobacco economy can be found in an 1838 report commissioned by the *Sociedad Patriótica de la Habana*. The report demonstrates the degree to which slave labor had penetrated Cuban tobacco farms as well as the magnitude of slave-based tobacco production in the Vuelta Abajo (Table 1A and Table 1B). In this examination of the racial and class makeup of vegas laborers in the eight *partidos*, or jurisdictions, composing the province of Pinar del Río, it is noted that three-quarters of all slaves in this region (3,826 out of 5,098) were devoted to tobacco production (Table 1A). Tobacco represented an overwhelming concentration of the region's slave population, with that community more than twenty-three times as large as tobacco's closest competitor in the use of slave labor in this region. Unequivocally, the primary occupation of slaves in Pinar del Río was cultivating tobacco. In addition to tobacco production having the largest allocation of slaves, slaves represented 64% of the total workforce (3.826 out of 6.019) involved in tobacco cultivation in this area (Table 1B). This indicates that owners of these vegas predominantly relied upon slave labor to accomplish the majority of cultivation.

A closer examination of the three largest *partidos* within Pinar del Río (according to the number of slaves listed on vegas) - Consolación del Sur, Pinar del Río, and San Juan y Martínez—demonstrates that in the area of the Vuelta Abajo where slave labor was most widespread, the use of slaves was particularly privileged. The percentage of slaves as part of the overall workforce for Consolación del Sur, Pinar del Río, and San Juan y Martínez were 63%, 70%, and 89%, respectively (Table 1B). At this point in Pinar del Río's history, in the first two decades after the 1817 end of the Factoría, almost three quarters of all tobacco workers were enslaved. Moreover, in the most prosperous areas of the Vuelta Abajo, the proportion could be almost as high as nine out of every ten workers—a level that would surpass even that of sugar production, elsewhere on the island, at its height.[34]

Mid-Nineteenth Century Changes to Cuba's Plantation Economies

However, in the mid-nineteenth century and approaching the height of Cuba's slave-based economy, there were several important phenomena that had tremendous implications for slavery as it existed on the island. Together,

[34] Bergad writes, "by the late 1870s slaves made up more than 70% of the total work force on Matanzas sugar estates". Laird W. BERGAD, *Cuban Rural Society in the Nineteenth Century: The Social and Economic History of Monoculture in Matanzas*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1990, p. 155. Eduardo Torres-Cuevas has placed the percentage of enslaved workers on ingenios and cafetales as ranging from 58%-67% of the region or estate population, in contrast to his figure of 14% for tobacco zones. Eduardo TORRES CUEVAS, "La sociedad esclavista y sus contradicciones" in *Historia de Cuba: La colonia*, p. 281.

these phenomena led to a labor shortage that would characterize the remaining age of slavery on the island. Outside the country, these constraints included the rising tide of British abolitionism. Internally, Cuban slavery suffered from a series of hurricanes and revolutions which served to further obstruct the expansion of slavery on the island. The immediate effect of these developments was a significant reduction in the ability to acquire new slaves, a constraint which created significant concerns in Cuba regarding both access to slaves and where or how best to employ slaves.

For the most part, historians have placed the expansion of the sugar industry within this period. As a result, sugar's need for labor proved to be profound, yet problematic, as the "industry was generating a massive increase in the demand for labour, of which there was a chronic shortage in the island."[35] Juxtaposed against the diminished availability of slave labor for Cuba's other agricultural economies, with planters everywhere having "an extremely difficult and sometimes impossible time finding alternative labor sources," the traditional evaluation of sugar's importance has served to isolate the scarce resource of slaves exclusively to this industry.[36] The conclusion has been that sugar's expansion occurred specifically at the expense of tobacco's reliance on enslaved labor, as all available resources, including slaves, were singularly devoted to the insatiable needs of sugar (compounded even more by the reduction in supply). This conclusion is responsible for the representation of tobacco cultivation as having a limited form of slavery over the remaining decades of the nineteenth century.

According to this traditional interpretation, the ensuing impact of a reduced availability of slaves upon the tobacco industry was devastating. Looking at expansion of Cuban slavery through the lens of rising slave prices, David Eltis points out the correlation between the rise of sugar and an increase in slave prices, which, Eltis argues, resulted in a move away from slave-based labor in both coffee and tobacco cultivation. He concludes that in the nineteenth century "Cuban tobacco producers very likely were not able to afford slaves."[37] However, this claim fails to account for the reality that tobacco was the only other agricultural product to match the percentage increase of sugar's value between 1827 and 1862 (as measured in terms of total value of Cuba's agricultural economy). Cuba's production of tobacco more than quadrupled during this period, making its increase in production "almost as

[35] Jonathan CURRY-MACHADO, "How Cuba Burned with the Ghosts of British Slavery: Race, Abolition and the Escalera", *Slavery and Abolition*, vol.25/1 (2004), p. 74.

[36] BERGAD, *Cuban Rural Society in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 191.

[37] David ELTIS, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 192.

explosive as sugar" over the same period."[38] As a result, it is in this very period that Cuban vegueros successfully attempted to increase the number of slaves working in tobacco cultivation.

The general deficit of slaves was problematic for all sectors of Cuba's plantation economy and as a result, the thousands laboring in tobacco fields must have held a pointed meaning for both sugar planters (who proved incapable of pulling in all available slaves) and tobacco farmers (who were effective at maintaining a sizable labor). That tobacco did not just preserve its own slave labor force but also continued to absorb additional laborers from other slave sectors is an important observation about both the economic viability and availability of slave labor in Pinar del Río.

Coffee, Tobacco, and the Hurricanes of the 1840s

Vegueros were able to increase their number of slave laborers in part because of the 1840s transfer of slaves on coffee farms, *cafetales* to vegas, especially in the principal tobacco-growing region of Pinar del Río. In this period, the sudden and rapid demise of Cuba's coffee industry, the third branch of Cuba's slave-based agricultural-export economy, helped define the parameters of slavery's expansion in the last half of the nineteenth century. The first quarter of the nineteenth century was a boom time for Cuban coffee, and historians consider it to have been a true rival to sugar, in relation to the allocation of land and labor as well as potential profits. [39]

All of this changed as a result of three major hurricanes in 1842, 1844, and 1846, which together led to a pivotal restructuring of land use and labor practice in Cuba's agricultural economies.[40] According to Louis Pérez, the "magnitude of disruption of the cafetales was incalculable and in many instances permanent", while Levi Marrero describes the impact of these hurricanes as nearly eliminating the production of coffee as a basic element of Cuba's economy.[41] In this context it has been argued that after the hurricanes, the sugar industry absorbed the land and resources that had been dedi-

[38] From 1827 to 1862, the production of sugar as a percentage of Cuba's total agricultural value rose by 139%, while tobacco's production similarly increased by 131%.

[39] William C. VAN NORMAN, *Shade-grown Slavery: Life and Labor on Coffee Plantations in Western Cuba, 1790-1845*, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2005, p. 45; BERGAD, *Cuban Rural Society in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 46-48; MARRERO, *Cuba. Economía y Sociedad*, vol.11, pp. 97-135.

[40] For the most comprehensive analysis of the hurricanes of 1840s and their impact upon Cuba's society and economy, see Louis A. PEREZ, *Winds of Change: Hurricanes and the Transformation of Nineteenth Century Cuba*, Chapel Hill, N.C., University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

[41] PEREZ, *Winds of Change*, p. 86; MARRERO, *Cuba. Economía y Sociedad*, vol. 11, p. 121. Van Norman suggests the damage was significant, but less so than the larger historiography has proposed. VAN NORMAN, *Shade-grown Slavery,* p. 118.

cated to coffee production. Pérez, in particular, claims that the combination of a destroyed coffee economy and a lack of slaves allowed sugar planters, in the aftermath of the hurricanes, to find "a new supply of slaves from among the failing coffee estates" and thereby secure the future prospects of sugar production in Cuba.[42] In this narrative, the hurricanes and their consequences for the coffee industry in Cuba were directly responsible for a significant enlargement of the sugar industry during this period.

A closer analysis (one that maintains a crop-specific focus especially in relation to viable zones of production) suggests that sugar was not the exclusive recipient of coffee's resources; tobacco farms also directly benefited from the redistribution of land and labor formally associated with coffee production. This was especially true in the Vuelta Abajo where there was a direct causal relationship between the hurricanes and an increase in tobacco-based slaves, a development that has previously been understood as occurring only within the sugar industry. A broad range of statistical data demonstrates that in the geographic heart of Cuban tobacco cultivation, the decline of the coffee economy coincided with an expansion of tobacco production in the Vuelta Abajo, as more land became available for use by tobacco's growing economy. At the same time, the coffee industry's decline also acted as a significant catalyst for the enlargement of the slave-based labor force in tobacco cultivation.

The coffee industry in Cuba was ravaged by the impact of successive hurricanes in a concentrated period, the extent of which can be seen in the difference between coffee production and number of slaves before the hurricanes and after the hurricanes. In 1862, the coffee industry employed just fewer than 26,000 slaves, in contrast to the 50,000 slaves it employed in 1827. In terms of production, in 1862 the coffee harvest had dropped by almost 75% of 1827 levels. The western half of the island suffered the worst of the damage, as the impact of the hurricanes was particularly pronounced in this area with the cultivation of coffee in the Vuelta Abajo cut by more than half in the aftermath of the last hurricane in 1846.[43] Remarking on the level of devastation, José María de la Torre wrote in 1855 that as a result of the hurricanes, there were "no coffee plantations" in the province of Pinar del Río and by 1862, only one cafetal had emerged in the jurisdiction of Pinar del Río. [44]

[42] PEREZ, *Winds of Change*, p. 104. Pérez's account of the hurricanes' impact upon tobacco, although short (coming in at just two pages), is exceptional, especially in noting how this event significantly transformed the industry. Pérez states, that in the long run, "tobacco benefitted from the demise of the cafetales, particularly in the western region of Vuelta Abajo," and that this "outcome reinforced the dominant position of the ingenio and the vega at the expense of the cafetal". PEREZ, *Winds of Change*, pp. 94-95.

[43] MARRERO, *Cuba. Economía y Sociedad*, vol. 11, pp. 114, 130 and 132.

[44] José María de la TORRE, *The Spanish West Indies: Cuba and Porto Rico: Geographical, Political, and Industrial*, 1855, p. 75.

This lone cafetal also illustrates the extreme decline in the number of slaves devoted to coffee cultivation in the region: although this was a particularly large estate with 152 listed slaves attached to it, these slaves represented the total measure of listed coffee slaves in the entire region. [45]

The contrast of coffee with tobacco in this area in regard to production, number of farms, and extent of slavery is illuminating. As coffee growers abandoned their farms en masse and were forced to sell anything remaining of value, including most of their land and labor, vegueros located in the same area of Pinar del Río as many of the cafetales also faced widespread destruction. However, conditions unique to tobacco production served to mitigate the degree of devastation. For example, tobacco yields a seasonal harvest, whereas coffee yields an annual harvest, and an initial coffee crop can take up to seven years to cultivate. As a result, tobacco production only suffered a temporary setback, and since it inherently required fewer initial costs, recovery was much more immediate. As the contemporary traveler Carlton Rogers noted, hurricanes appeared to affect tobacco farms less than it affected cafetales.[46]

Another factor also suggesting a direct transfer of coffee's resources to tobacco is the reality that coffee and tobacco closely resembled each other in terms of scale of production, labor requirements, and slave demographics. Their similarity was heightened when the tobacco industry in the Vuelta Abajo underwent a general aggrandizement of its production model to more closely mirror the larger coffee estates of the period. The ease with which tobacco could readily co-opt coffee's similar resources was noted by several individuals in the nineteenth century, including Wenceslao Ramírez de Villa Urrutia. Ramírez, a Spanish nobleman, politician, and estate owner, had previously argued that even if slaves were not necessary for the production of tobacco, their use nevertheless would "grow and multiple" tobacco's products to the point that it would rival sugar. Writing in 1844, he explicitly framed this argument in the context of Cuba's coffee economy by claiming that the introduction of more slaves could be achieved with relatively little effort if Cuban planters would transfer only one-third of the slaves currently employed in the unproductive coffee industry.[47] Based upon shared similarities in land and labor use, officials in Spain were also attuned to the feasibility of replacing coffee with tobacco, maintaining in 1845 that if tobacco was "protected

[45] FRIAS, *Noticias estadísticas de la isla de Cuba*, pp. 133-138.

[46] Carlton Holmes ROGERS, *Incidents of Travel in the Southern States and Cuba with a Description of the Mammoth Cave*, General Books LLC, 2010, p. 127.

[47] As quoted in MARRERO, *Cuba. Economía y Sociedad*, vol. 11, p. 59. Similarly, the contemporary writer Maturin Ballou remarked that with the demise of coffee, not all planters devoted their farms to sugar production; many turned to tobacco cultivation. Maturin Murray BALLOU, *Due South; or Cuba Past and Present*, Boston/New York, Houghton, Mifflin and co, 1885, p. 246.

with an absolute freedom from duties by the supreme government, [it] could perhaps supply in the same manner the deficit that should come very soon from the depressed and almost expiring cultivation of coffee." In fact, as the report also notes, this was already occurring as many cafetales were being planted with tobacco seeds, resulting in an "advantageous change to how the land was used as these smaller crops proved more profitable."[48]

The viability of the transfer of coffee's resources to tobacco can be also seen on a macro and micro level in Pinar del Río with longstanding and immediate changes to the fundamental structure of tobacco cultivation in this region occurring in the wake of the hurricanes' destruction. In terms of production, the hurricanes of the 1840s were followed by rapid and significant gains in tobacco production, as measured by exports of raw leaf. In fact, tobacco had its most productive cycle of the decade in the four years surrounding the last of the three hurricanes, from 1845 through 1848, with tobacco's two biggest years, 1846 and 1847, occurring in the immediate aftermath of the last hurricane.[49] This nearly instantaneous recovery of Pinar del Río's tobacco economy was also identified by one of the preeminent authorities on Cuban tobacco writing during this period, Miguel Rodríguez-Ferrer. Rodríguez-Ferrer located the revitalization of tobacco primarily in its return to positive production, in contrast to the more destructive impact of the hurricanes on other agricultural sectors, citing a nearly 40% increase in quantity of raw leaf exports from 1845 (6.674.873 libras) to 1847 (9.309.500 libras).[50]

In addition to export values, the inverse relationship between the demise of the coffee industry and the growth of the tobacco industry in Pinar del Río is further demonstrated by the impressive long-term growth in overall numbers and percentages of listed vegas in the area. In the jurisdiction of Pinar del Río and the immediate surrounding area in 1846, the year of the last major hurricane of that decade, there were zero cafetales listed, in contrast to 1.635 tobacco farms. By 1861, the number of vegas had risen to 2.138,

[48] Superintendencia General Delegada de Real Hacienda Spain, *Informe fiscal sobre fomento de la población blanca en la isla de Cuba y emancipación progresiva de la esclava con una breve reseña de las reformas y modificaciones que para conseguirlo*, Madrid, Imprenta de J. Martín Alegria, 1845, pp. 40 and 90. Additionally, this report noted the desirability of tobacco as a substitute for coffee based upon tobacco's suitability for small-scale production and the high profit available relative to low land and labor use.

[49] The impact of the last hurricane in 1846 was diminished in the tobacco fields, and the coming crop was not expected to be "as small as one might think." Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País, *Memorias de la Sociedad Económica de la Habana*, vol. 20, 1845, p. 342. Diario de la Marina de la Habana., *Estado Político y Económico de La Isla de Cuba En 1851*, 1852.

[50] RODRIGUEZ FERRER, *El tabaco habano*, pp. 57-58. One libra is roughly equivalent to 2.2 lbs.

representing a 32% increase.[51] In 1862, the number of official tobacco estates in the area around this region of Pinar del Río had risen to 3.616, with an overall increase of more than 122% between 1846 and 1862.[52] For comparison, Pinar del Río had just one cafetal in 1862, while the number of sugar mills, *ingenios*, grew from four in 1846 to five in 1862.[53] The production-specific geography of Pinar del Río, especially the Vuelta Abajo region, when combined with rising international market for Cuban tobacco, served to exclude any inroads the sugar industry might have made as a result of the area's cafetales disappearing, leaving tobacco and its vegas as the sole expanding enterprise in the province.

Illustrative of the transfer of coffee estates and production resources to Robert Paquette notes that "already sick coffee estates succumbed" to the first hurricane, a statement supported by Marrero, who dates the process of decline for coffee as having begun in the 1830s.[54] Further backdating coffee's demise, contemporary author Abiel Abbot claimed that Cuban planters in the 1820s, especially those who had previously grown coffee, were devoting a larger percentage of their land to tobacco cultivation. With respect to coffee planters, many of whom, Abbot argued, "may repair their fortunes" by cultivating "the fascinating weed for which master and slave, and in this country, I might also say, ladies and gentleman, are equally eager." [55] As a result of this evolution, there is a strong case for tobacco surpassing coffee much earlier than the 1840s. If that is the case, it is likely that many of the cafetales' former slaves were purchased for tobacco, especially considering that crop's expansion in the 1840s occurred on the heels of coffee's demise.

In addition to economic and vega expansion, tobacco in the Vuelta Abajo had also shown extraordinary growth in its use of slaves just before the hurricanes. Beginning in 1819, the more than three thousand slaves in Pinar del Río accounted for 28% of the region's total population.[56] This is not a vega- or slave-specific statistic, but as has been demonstrated, tobacco cultivation in this region encompassed nearly all the area's economic activities and resour-

---

[51] The number of cafetales listed for the entire province was also zero. *Cuadro estadístico de la Siempre Fiel Isla de Cuba correspondiente al año de 1846*, p. 85. Félix ERENCHUN, *Anales de La Isla de Cuba: Diccionario administrativo, económico, estadístico y legislativo. Año de 1855*, La Habana, Imprenta La Antilla, 1859, vol. 4, p. 2262.

[52] FRIAS, *Noticias estadísticas de la isla de Cuba*, p. 134.

[53] *Cuadro estadístico de la Siempre Fiel Isla de Cuba*, p. 41; FRIAS, *Noticias estadísticas de la isla de Cuba*, p. 133.

[54] PAQUETTE, *Sugar Is Made with Blood, The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict Between Empires Over Slavery in Cuba*, Middletown, Conn., Wesleyan University Press, 1988, p. 232; MARRERO, *Cuba. Economía y Sociedad*, vol.11, p. 121.

[55] Abiel ABBOT, *Letters Written in the Interior of Cuba*, The Black Heritage Library Collection, Freeport, N.Y., Books for Libraries Press, 1971, pp. 137-139.

[56] SANTOVENIA, *Pinar Del Río*, p. 76.

ces, including slaves. By the next census in 1827, the number of slaves had increased by 41% (3.634 to 5.104), yet the ratio of slaves to overall population in the area remained steady at 27%.[57] Nevertheless, this pattern of slave expansion would continue as the number of slaves in this area escalated from 5.104 in 1827 to 12.137 in 1846. In this later period however, an increase in the number of total slaves in the region now corresponded to an increase in the percentage of slaves, who in 1846 were 30% of the total population of Pinar del Río. This expansion represents an astounding increase of 138% in the growth of this community in less than two decades, justifying the claim that that by 1840 "the use of slaves in cultivating tobacco was widespread from the Vuelta Abajo all the way to the far east of the island."[58]

Remarkably, the rate of growth for the slave population of Pinar del Río would sustain such elevated numbers in the years before the next census in 1862. In 1862, the number of slaves located in Pinar del Río province had risen to 28.882. In a striking contrast to an island-wide rate of growth in number of slaves (13.8%), Pinar del Río's expansion of its enslaved population again experienced a 138% rate of growth in the provincial slave population between 1846 and 1862.[59] Largely a consequence of the hurricanes' effect upon the tobacco industry in the western region of Cuba as well as dynamic growth in its export sector, the trend of expansion in the use of slaves for the tobacco industry in Pinar del Río would continue for the rest of the century. Moreover, during a critical junction in the restructuring and expanding plantation economy of Cuba, the slave population in Pinar del Río (especially the prime tobacco-growing regions) not only maintained an extraordinary rate of growth over nearly four decades but actually outpaced the national rate of growth for the same demographic.

The transferal of slaves into the expanding tobacco economy of the Vuelta Abajo had important consequences for the scale of production in this area.

---

[57] *Cuadro estadístico de la Siempre Fiel Isla de Cuba correspondiente al año de 1827*, pp. 45-60.

[58] Ibid., pp. 45-60; *Cuadro estadístico de la Siempre Fiel Isla de Cuba correspondiente al año de 1846*, p. 86; MARRERO, *Cuba. Economía y Sociedad*, vol. 13, p. 203. In numbers that I have been unable to verify, Torres-Cuevas cites 7.927 slaves laboring in vegas in 1827, a number which rose to 14.263 in 1841, and resulted in an 80% increase in this population during this period. TORRES CUEVAS, "La sociedad esclavista y sus contradicciones", p. 284.

[59] The total save population from 1846 to 1862 rose from 323.759 to 368.550. Note, in addition to the two main jurisdictions of the Vuelta Abajo, Pinar del Río and San Cristóbal, I have included within Pinar del Río's provincial totals the jurisdiction of Bahia-Honda whose slaves totaled, 6.115, but excluded Guanajay, whose slaves equaled 17.145. While both of these locales are within the political territory of Pinar del Río province and both can be considered prime tobacco growing land, only Bahia-Honda can be judged to have an economy that is primarily devoted to tobacco so that the majority of its slaves are deemed to be used in the cultivation of tobacco, while Guanajay does not exclusively meet this criteria. FRIAS, *Noticias estadísticas de la isla de Cuba*, p. 14.

Building on contemporary reports as well as the gains in tobacco production, numbers of vegas, and the tobacco slave population, historian Julio Le Riverend argues that the fall of coffee "opened the way for the conversion of the coffee plantations into…the first large tobacco plantations of the capitalist type, with great number of slaves."[60] Sharing this perspective, Pérez also explains the advent of large-scale tobacco production in Pinar del Río as occurring when "producers converted defunct coffee estates into large vegas, relocating slave labor to tobacco production."[61] Levi Marrero is even more emphatic in his assessment of the impact of the 1844 hurricane. Arguing from a more tobacco-centric perspective, Marrero states that the hurricanes ruined almost all the cafetales in the western part of the island and insists that this directly "favored the cultivation of tobacco in the Vuelta Abajo in the following years." Marrero goes on to link this salutary effect on the tobacco industry with an immediate increase in the slave population of the region; he argues that some coffee farmers sold slaves to the owners of ingenios, while "others preferred to form vegas of larger dimensions than traditional." [62] Because of coffee, Cuban tobacco in the Vuelta Abajo underwent a fundamental evolution towards increased production scales on individual estates. This explains the general trend toward latifundia in tobacco's production structure beginning at the midpoint of the nineteenth century; a process marked by an enlargement of estate size and enhanced dependence on a larger number of slaves.

The fact that the vegueros in Pinar del Río were expanding tobacco production with slaves alongside sugar's expansion meant the two were competing directly for the land and slaves of defunct coffee farms. Rather than be subsumed by that competition with sugar and its rising profits or "induced [to] a switch of coerced labor from tobacco into sugar" as Eltis has argued, tobacco producers continued to successfully expand the number of slave holdings in opposition to sugar's demands. Moreover, because the trajectory of tobacco's expansion continued unabated throughout the nineteenth century as a result, it is absolutely untrue that the "*ingenios* must have absorbed almost all of the 250,000 *bozales* that arrived in Cuba in these years, particularly after 1835." [63] In this case, the existence of an expanding tobacco

[60] Julio Le Riverend in GUERRA, *A History of the Cuban Nation*, vol. 3, p. 160. The author offers a contradictory statement (one that is perhaps influenced by an overarching focus across the volumes that generally dismisses tobacco-based slavery in Cuba) when he states that tobacco "was maintained as a lesser crop, and with little participation of slave labor" even after the end of the monopoly in 1817, when despite attempts to introduce slaves into the vegas, the effort to transform the plant into a plantation crop "was never really achieved." *Ibid*, p. 172.

[61] PEREZ, *Winds of Change*, p. 95.

[62] MARRERO, *Cuba. Economía y Sociedad*, vol. 11, p. 50.

[63] ELTIS, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, p. 192.

economy, and one increasingly dependent upon slave labor, not only influences the depiction of sugar slavery and its growth but also the larger understanding of Cuban slavery during this period. In reality, tobacco saw significant increases in land, labor, and most significantly, slaves in the immediate aftermath of the 1840s hurricanes that decimated Cuba's coffee economy. Consequently, the origins of latifundia in Cuba's tobacco economy are explicitly located in the aftermath of the hurricanes in the 1840s; a process made possible by the land and enslaved labor that tobacco took over from coffee. These findings suggest a new narrative concerning Cuba's plantation economy in the nineteenth century. After the demise of the Cuban coffee industry, tobacco, through increased land acquisition and labor, emerges to "regain importance"; it then fundamentally influences the institution of slavery on the island by helping maintain a diversified slave-based economy.[64]

The Tobacco Economy of the 1860s: The General Expansion of Vegas and Slaves

Historical accounts and statistical data show the impact of the 1840s hurricanes on tobacco production. The expansion of tobacco and its slave population in Pinar del Río during the mid-point of the nineteenth century was not only an economic issue, however. It took place in a context of broader social and political developments that significantly influenced the parameters of tobacco-based slavery. The most pressing concern during this period was the impact British abolitionists' measures were having in Cuba. Slavery was coming under question just as the supply of available slaves within Cuba was severely reduced. The result produced a state of crisis for Cuba's plantation economy and left estate owners across Cuba facing an "abysmal state of plantation force" and a larger sense of "urgency" to replace these workers.[65] In a measure designed to address the perceived insufficient supply of slaves for Cuba's plantation-based economy, the Cuban government suggested a variety of new taxes for slaves not working in agricultural production, along with a reduction of taxes for planters in rural export sectors who encouraged the natural reproduction of their slave populations.[66] Outside the country,

[64] Grupo Cubano de Investigaciones Económicas, *A Study on Cuba; the Colonial and Republican Periods, The Socialist Experiment, Economic Structure, Institutional Development, Socialism and Collectivization*, Coral Gables, Fla., University of Miami Press, 1965, p. 63.

[65] Michele Bernita REID, "Negotiating a Slave Regime: Free People of Color in Cuba, 1844--1868", The University of Texas at Austin, 2004, p. 131.

[66] Fe IGLESIAS, "Algunas consideraciones en torno a la abolicíon de la esclavitud", p. 76.

international pressure meant that "African imports had virtually ceased."[67] As a result, "slave prices increased more between the mid-1840s and early 1860s than in any other comparable period in the history of Cuban slavery," with some Cuban historians placing the rise in prices at 103%.[68]

For both contemporary and current observers the effect of prohibitions on Cuba's slave population were most pronounced in Cuba's sugar industry as the perception was that all available land and labor had an "irresistible tendency" to be directed towards the sugar economy.[69] According to this perspective the inevitability of sugar expansion translated into the exclusive allocation of Cuba's slaves to the ingenio such that "by midcentury only sugar producers could afford to pay the prices of slaves." [70] In this view, the tightening of resources in Cuba only allowed sugar, Cuba's most profitable economy, to exist as the plantation economy on the island. But Cuba was not uncompromisingly or implacably moving to sugar production. Thousands of slaves were involved in tobacco cultivation in Pinar del Río, and their numbers continued during this period to grow as vegueros expanded their estate holdings. Pinar del Río's slave population statistics in this period demonstrate the viability of enslaved labor for tobacco cultivation despite the push of multiple constraints and the pull of sugar's "inexorable" needs. At the midpoint of the nineteenth century Pinar del Río's slave population would continue to grow, both as a proportion of the total population and in raw numbers with a 36% increase from 1846 to 1853.[71] As testimony to the expansion of tobacco slavery in the midst of Cuba's abolitionist crises, a British diplomat in the 1850s argued that once slave smugglers had "crossed the barriers of the law, the slaves were divided into a thousand parts and

[67] Laird W. BERGAD, "The Economic Viability of Sugar Production Based on Slave Labor in Cuba, 1859-1878", *Latin American Research Review*, 24/1 (1989), p. 95. The following authors cite a figure of just 8.700 slaves introduced into Cuba from 1863 to 1867: María del Carmen BARCIA and Eduardo TORRES CUEVASs, "El debilitamiento de las relaciones sociales esclavistas. Del reformismo liberal a la revolución independentista", in *Historia de Cuba: La colonia*, p. 405.

[68] ELTIS, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, p. 193; BERGAD, IGLESIAS and BARCIA, *The Cuban Slave Market*, p. 55.

[69] Mariano TORRENTE, *Bosquejo económico político de la Isla de Cuba: Comprensivo de varios proyectos de prudentes y saludables mejoras que pueden introducirse en su gobierno y administración*, vol. 1, Manuel Pita, 1852, p. 149.

[70] Eltis writes, as a result, the "orientation of Cuban society shifted inexorably toward the ingenio." ELTIS, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, p. 193. Italics in the original.

[71] In 1853 the jurisdiction of Pinar del Río had 9.998 slaves (28% of the area's total population), while the other central tobacco jurisdiction, San Cristóbal, had 6.548 slaves (33% of the total population). In combination, the two areas had 16,546 slaves. DE LA TORRE, *The Spanish West Indies*, p. 118.

although most of those went to the sugar mills, more than a few went to the coffee and tobacco estates."[72]

Although pressure to abolish the importation of slaves into Cuba would remain, paradoxically, this pressure initially led to an escalation of the number of Africans imported into Cuba. As a result, the last significant period of slave importation occurred in 1855-1865, just before the final Spanish decree of abolition for Cuba in September of 1866. In this era, roughly twelve thousand slaves were imported per year, with a high of twenty-five thousand in 1859--1860.[73] The combination of so many arriving Africans, many of whom would be used in tobacco cultivation, and sustained growth within the tobacco economy effectively concentrated the wealth of this industry in certain areas and among certain producers. As a result, the growth of Cuba's tobacco economy over the course of the nineteenth century was characterized by an increase in the size of vegas. A corresponding increase also occurred in both the overall number of slaves devoted to tobacco cultivation and the number of slaves within individual, estate level populations, *dotaciones*. As a result, the continuing growth of the population of Cuban tobacco slaves further consolidated the institution of enslaved labor in the Cuban tobacco economy. By the 1860s, Marrero declared the argument that tobacco and slavery were "exclusive terms" was "unsustainable," especially in the major growing areas of the Vuelta Abajo.[74] Marrero's assertion is largely based on the evolution towards latifundia in the industry where the true extent of this process is reflected in increases in land use and value, capital investment, production capacity, commodity price and in the augmented value and use of slaves.

Jurisdiction	Area devoted to tobacco cultivation as measured in caballerias (rounded to the next number)	Value of land as measured by cost per caballeria (rounded to the next number)	Total land value in pesos	Harvest produced in bales	Value of harvest in pesos	Number of slaves employed in each area	Value of slaves at 800 pesos each
Vuelta-Abajo: Pinar del Río	3,200	1,238	3,960,000	198,000	9,900,000	33,000	26,400,000
Vuelta-Abajo: San Cristóbal	900	711	640,000	48,000	1,440,000	8,000	6,400,000
Semi-Vuelta or Partido	1,716	600	1,030,000	103,000	2,132,000	17,165	13,732,000
Vuelta Arriba	5,553	400	2,221,333	333,200	5,384,200	55,535	44,428,000
Grand Total	11,369	2,949	7,851,333	682,200	18,856,200	113,700	90,960,000

Table 2: Latifundia: The Value of Land and Labor in Cuba's Tobacco Economy, 1861.[75]

[72] Mariano TORRENTE, *Memoria sobre la esclavitud en la isla de Cuba con observaciones sobre los asertos de la prensa inglesa relativos al tráfico de esclavos*, C. Wood, 1853, p. 68.

[73] ERGAD, IGLESIAS and BARCIA, *The Cuban Slave Market*, p. 27(fig. 3.1) and p. 31.

[74] MARRERO, *Cuba. Economía y Sociedad*, vol. 11, p. 58.

[75] PARDO y BETANCOURT, *Informe ilustrado y estadístico*.

One of the best indicators of the changes in Cuba's tobacco economy is provided by Valentin Pardo y Betancourt. In 1861, the Major General of the Army and Treasury ordered Pardo y Betancourt to complete an official report on the state of Cuban tobacco production (Table 2).[76] In his account, Pardo y Betancourt enumerated several critical indicators of the riches of Cuban tobacco production, each of which demonstrate a general expansion in agricultural production, especially in the province of Pinar del Río.

Pardo y Betancourt's report, which referenced data from 1859, categorizes jurisdictions by tobacco-growing region in descending order of importance and quality. It begins with Pinar del Río and San Cristóbal in the Vuelta Abajo. It then describes Guanajay, Bejucal, San Antonio de los Baños, Bahia-Honda, and San Antonio de las Vegas, all in the Semi-Vuelta or Partido, areas within Pinar del Río province but north and east of the Vuelta Abajo. It ends by describing the Vuelta Arriba, east of Pinar del Río Province.[77] According to the report, much more land was devoted to tobacco cultivation in the province of Pinar del Río than in the rest of the island. The first three jurisdictions, all located within the single province of Pinar del Río, account for more than half of all tobacco land in Cuba. As a result, Cuban tobacco production was concentrated in the select, well-defined, and limited area of Pinar del Río. According to Pardo y Betancourt, the province included 3,300 vegas and 5,816 caballerías devoted to tobacco cultivation; this amounts to 1.76 caballerías per vega.[78] While most historians estimate that vegas were smaller—less than one caballería—the extended average for the Pinar del Río province is not the true extent of the value of land holdings per vega.[79] Multiple contemporary accounts indicate that traditional tobacco land use by vegueros only represented one-half of actual land holdings—the category specifically measured by Pardo y Betancourt. The other half was traditionally devoted to the production of food staples. When both halves are taken together, the average total land holding was more than three and a half caballerías, or more than 177 acres, per vega in Pinar del Río province.[80] This is a significantly larger average land holding than historians have acknowledged.

[76] The following information comes from the appendix #2 in PARDO y BETANCOURT, *Informe ilustrado y estadístico*.

[77] This is the only occurrence in the historical record where discussion of the Vuelta Abajo is divided between Pinar del Río and San Cristóbal. It is unclear why the separation exists, however, it does indicate how land in this growing area is apportioned and the importance of San Cristóbal within the overall Vuelta Abajo.

[78] For number of vegas PARDO y BETANCOURT, *Informe ilustrado y estadístico*, p. 15.

[79] Rebecca J. SCOTT, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860-1899*, Pittsburgh, Pa., University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985, p. 11.

[80] Among others see, p. 142.

The true scale of latifundia however, emerges when the value of land is also taken into consideration.

Land values in Pinar del Río province were exceptional. This was especially true in the Vuelta Abajo and the jurisdiction of Pinar del Río, where cost per caballería was more than two times that of the Semi-Vuelta and more than three times that of the Vuelta Arriba. Pinar del Río province not only held the majority of Cuba's tobacco land, 5,816 caballerías, but also contained the most expensive tobacco land by an overwhelming margin. The jurisdiction of Pinar del Río alone held the second largest amount of tobacco land, 3,200 caballerías (second only to the entire combined rest of the island outside of Pinar del Río province). Also, at 1,238 pesos, the Pinar del Río jurisdiction has the single highest cost per caballería. This information suggests that the vegueros in the jurisdiction of Pinar del Río were buying large quantities of land at prices far exceeding all other areas of tobacco cultivation in Cuba. The combination of more land at higher prices suggests impressive wealth and expenditure in this area by the most elite tobacco planters.

Just as land in Pinar del Río province was uniquely valued, investments in this area greatly outpaced the rest of the island. Capital investment in land holdings for the province of Pinar del Río amounted to 5.630.000 pesos, representing 72% of total tobacco-land value in Cuba. Yet, the province only held slightly more than half of all tobacco land, resulting in the reality that land here was valued more highly than land elsewhere. The same divergence from the rest of Cuba holds true for the smaller jurisdiction of Pinar del Río, whose total land value of 3.960.000 equates to slightly more than half of all total Cuban tobacco land value, while its land area was only 28% of the total tobacco area in Cuba. Essentially, the value of tobacco land, both within the jurisdiction of Pinar del Río and on a larger scale within the same province, far outweighed the physical allocation of tobacco land in the same areas. This inverse relationship demonstrates the degree to which the most profitable tobacco land was concentrated in a limited area.

Pardo y Betancourt's analysis of Cuba's tobacco industry continues by calculating the agricultural production of each region in terms of the number of bales harvested. And although the specific nature of "bales" as a unit of measure lacks precision here, it is consistently applied across all tobacco growing regions and therefore allows for a comparison of Pinar del Río province, and the jurisdictions within it, to the rest of Cuba.[81] According to Pardo y Betancourt, the total number of bales produced in 1859 was 682.200,

[81] Hazard suggests that one bale is equivalent to one hundred pounds and that one bale goes for twenty dollars, although he stipulates this is a low estimate, since many of the bales in the best regions reach as high as four hundred dollars. Samuel HAZARD, *Cuba with Pen and Pencil*, Hartford, Conn., Hartford publishing company, 1871, p. 333.

of which Pinar del Río province was responsible for 349.000. The province of Pinar del Río accounts for more than 51% of production, and the jurisdiction of Pinar del Río is credited with 29%, almost one-third of the island's total production. Because the report only gives the number of vegas for Pinar del Río province, it is not possible, from the number of bales listed, to determine which area—Pinar del Río or the rest of the island—held higher levels of production per vega (the difference being a potential indicator of large-scale tobacco farming), especially as the two regions were producing roughly the same 60 bales per caballería. However, since the number of vegas for Pinar del Río province was 3.300, it remains that in this area, vegueros were producing more than 105 bales per vega.

This number takes on more relevance when the value of each bale is measured by region. The total value of the bales harvested is listed at 18,856,200 pesos, but Pinar del Río jurisdiction holds 53% of that total and Pinar del Río province, at 71%, nearly mirrors its total percentage of tobacco land value. It should be noted that Pardo y Betancourt's listed prices reflect an average price corresponding to perceived value in each geographic section; in reality, within each area, prices per bale could vary widely.[82] However, it is possible to ascertain the value he assigns to each section by dividing the value of each harvest by the number of bales, resulting in approximate prices of 50 pesos per bale for the jurisdiction of Pinar del Río, 30 pesos for the jurisdiction of San Cristóbal, 20 pesos for the Semi-Vuelta, and 16 pesos for the Vuelta Arriba. The profits attached to the two regions that make up the Vuelta Abajo, suggest that a much higher income is possible in this region than in other regions. This higher income potential effectively separates small-scale vegueros throughout Cuba from the tobacco planters in Pinar del Río.

One of Pardo y Betancourt's more important contributions to understanding latifundia in Pinar del Río was his inclusion of the degree to which slave use was prevalent. Without any equal, the total number of slaves listed, 113,700, represents the extreme limits of tobacco slavery. As such an extreme outlier, it should be taken with a related degree of skepticism.[83] However, archival examples, census reports, and contemporary accounts all locate the heart of tobacco-based slavery and large-scale slave dotaciones in Pinar del Río instead of in the much smaller farms in the far east of the island. Judging from these records, if Pardo y Betancourt errs, it is in his overestimation

[82] Pardo y Betancourt explains that values of bales could range from 25 to 200 pesos within the same region, pp. 14-15.

[83] Rivero Muñiz cites the same figures for the slave population based in tobacco production. José RIVERO MUÑIZ, *Tabaco. Su historia en Cuba*, La Habana, Instituto de Historia/ Comisión Nacional de la Academia de Ciencias de la República de Cuba, 1964, vol. 2, p. 290, n. 7.

of 55,535 slaves working on vegas outside of Pinar del Río.[84] According to Fe Iglesias García in 1867, there were 42,900 slaves listed in the provincial accounting of Pinar del Río, a number that corresponds to Pardo y Betancourt's 58,165 tobacco slaves within the same province.[85] From these calculations the number of slaves per caballería in Pinar del Río province yield the following results: 10.3 slaves per caballería for the jurisdiction of Pinar del Río, 8.9 for the jurisdiction of San Cristóbal, and 10 for the Semi-Vuelta within the province of Pinar del Río. Much like the average caballería per vega, these numbers do not initially suggest large-scale cultivation through the extensive use of slave labor. Yet since vegas in the area averaged 1.7 caballerías, each vega in Pinar del Río was using an average of more than 17 slaves.

While not comparable to the modern sugar mills elsewhere in Cuba, these dotaciones were sizeable and raised their owners' economic profiles significantly. Moreover, Pardo y Betancourt's report demonstrates just how much of that wealth was dependent on the use of slave labor. Based on his calculations of the average slave price of 800 pesos, it is possible to determine the extent of capital investment concentrated in the purchase and use of slave labor among these tobacco planters. In all areas of the Pinar del Río province, the value of slaves surpassed all other financial indicators, including land and harvest value. As an illustration of this, within the jurisdiction of Pinar del Río, the significant investment of slaves represented a 167% increase over the value of harvested tobacco and a 567% increase over total land value in the same area. Beyond the vast expenditures in land, the investment in slave labor constituted the heart of tobacco-cultivation operations and the source of the wealth of the Vuelta Abajo. Combined, this data indicate, in Pinar del Río, large-scale operations in Cuba plantation production of tobacco during the 1850s, 1860s, and beyond.

Conclusion

The use of slaves of tobacco cultivation in Cuba has a long history that begins with the initiation of the slave trade into the island. Slaves were particularly important in Pinar del Río and the Vuelta Abajo during the nineteenth century. In this area, the use of slave laborers was not only widespread but also particularly privileged. Numbering in the tens of thousands and with

[84] Pardo y Betancourt's calculation of 58,165 tobacco slaves in the province of Pinar del Río are not far off the general estimates of 40.000 slaves that other contemporary observers arrive at in formulating the number of slaves in Cuban tobacco cultivation. GARCIA DE ARBOLEYA, *Manual de la isla de Cuba*, p. 144; PEZUELA, *Diccionario Geográfico, Estadístico, Histórico de la Isla de Cuba*, vol. 4, p. 572.

[85] IGLESIAS, "Algunas consideraciones en torno a la abolicíon de la esclavitud", p. 81.

continual expansion throughout the nineteenth century, slaves often represented the primary choice for vegueros in the Vuelta Abajo. Moreover, as tobacco cultivation exponentially expanded to become a critical contributor as an export economy and as a consumer of available slaves, it is possible to conclude that Cuba's economy was neither as uniform as has previously been thought, nor is its slave society solely defined by the slave experience on the sugar estate. Rather than being removed from Cuba's developing plantation economy, tobacco's economic expansion, as seen through land and export values, and a consolidation of the enslaved population among vegas, particularly in the Vuelta Abajo, firmly marks it as integral and inseparable from Cuban slavery during the nineteenth century.