

Racial Geographies, Imperial Transitions: Property Ownership and Race Relations in Cienfuegos, Cuba, 1894–1899

BONNIE A. LUCERO

On June 19, 1835, the *moreno* Bruno Leblanc purchased an urban estate in the southwestern corner of the city of Cienfuegos, Cuba from Santiago Yzurrieta.¹ This area of the city was peppered with the humble homes of free people of color, many of whom, like Bruno, were the children or grandchildren of Africans.² Born in Havana, Bruno probably arrived in Cienfuegos as a slave, brought by his former master during the initial wave of migration to city in the 1820s, and gained his freedom early in his life.³ He was only 23 years old when he bought this estate, and he retained it for the next six decades, earning his living as a farmer.

At the height of plantation slavery in the Spanish Caribbean, Bruno was a black property owner, living in a racially integrated neighborhood just a few blocks from the central plaza in what would become one of the most important cities in Cuba. This seemingly paradoxical scenario would be unthinkable in many other nineteenth-century slave societies, especially the United States, which has long been recognized for its particularly virulent racial discrimination.⁴ Indeed, it even seems at odds with the Cuban society of a century later, the same society that rejected its own president from the most prestigious social clubs because of his allegedly mulatto racial ancestry. What transformed Cuba from the racially integrated society of the nineteenth century, to the racial segregation of the early twentieth century? Part of the answer can be found in the inauguration of US military rule in Cuba at the turn of the century.

The transition from Spanish to US rule in 1898 triggered a shift in race relations in Cuba.⁵ The objective of this article is thus to assess the extent of change in race relations occurring after the establishment of US rule in Cuba in 1898 through a case study of Cienfuegos, a growing city on the southern coast of central Cuba and

one of the island's largest ports. The extent of change is examined through the lens of inter-racial property sales involving people of African descent.⁶ For the purposes of this paper, property will be defined primarily in terms of land owned by a person or a group. This refers mainly to *solares*, *fincas*, *casas*, but also includes any whole or portion of a *quinta*, *fábrica*, *botica*, *hotel*, *central*, *colonia*, *terreno*, *guairo*, *potrero*, or *establecimiento*. Property transactions, thus, refer to notarized sales of these plots of land.

Land ownership and sales serve as a basis for the analysis of change in racial relations, particularly race as a lived experience. I analyze sales of land and other territorialized property as opposed to smaller scale property,⁷ like livestock because land ownership illuminates the spatial attachment and distribution of populations – the social production of space.⁸ Land also serves as an indicator of social relations because it has a market value implying differential access to property based on status and prestige reflected in prices. Analysis of property values and geographic locations can cast light on the level of social and racial integration with regards to living and working arrangements, the spatial distribution of certain segments of the population, their patterns of property acquisition, and the value of their holdings.

These property transactions, tracked over time, illuminate how men and women of African descent in Cienfuegos engaged with the established order to accomplish their needs and desires in the material world. Through an analysis of notarized property transactions between the formative years of 1894 (just prior to the outbreak of the final war of Cuban independence) and 1899 (the term end of Governor General John Rutter Brooke⁹), I argue that the initial inauguration of US imperial rule in Cuba did not result in immediate transformations in the *structure* of racial relations in Cuba. Nevertheless, the experiences of several men and women of color who were increasingly marginalized from the market in land suggest that shifts in race relations were beginning to occur by 1899 and would continue during the next three years of US rule.

Table 1. Notaries of Cienfuegos, 1894–1899¹⁰

Name of Notary	Start year	End Year	Trained in:
José Joaquín Verdaguer ¹¹	1825	1898	Matanzas
Demetrio López Aldazábal	1898	1904	Matanzas
Antonio De Leon	1870	1895	Havana

Map 1. Military Map of Cuba, US Intervention 1898¹²



Cienfuegos in the History of Cuba and Empire

The US occupation of Cuba (1899–1902) has captured the interest of scholars in Cuba and the United States, in part because scholars in both countries realize the tremendous political, ideological, even moral, stakes involved. For this reason, historians have tended to approach research on this period from diplomatic and political perspectives, defined by emphasis on the nation-state.¹³ In so doing, they have underappreciated the regional variation that has proved so integral to analyses of other epochs in Cuban history. Even fewer specifically examine the experience of Afro-descendants. This article contributes to studies of US military occupations by taking a local focus to examine the implications of empire for race relations.

Scholars have all but ignored this pivotal juncture in the history of Afro-descendants. The extant literature on Afro-Cubans indicates a greater scholarly willingness to explore Cuban history directly before and after the American intervention.¹⁴ Although these authors often incorporate the years between 1898 and 1902 into their narratives, the silence on this period has been pronounced in comparison to both studies of other historical epochs in Cuban history as well as scholarship addressing this period in Puerto Rico.¹⁵

This article challenges this periodization of the history of Afro-descendants bounded by emancipation in 1886 and race war in 1912, by examining the social role and status of Afro-descendants in Cienfuegos during the transition of empires. Recently, scholarship on central Cuba has proliferated. Much of this scholarship has focused on the experience of Afro-descendants, most studies taking one of two

approaches: exploring the participation of people of color and former slaves in the wars of independence,¹⁶ or examining post-emancipation degrees and understandings of freedom, mainly in rural sugar districts.¹⁷ This article departs from this tradition by taking a primarily urban focus, and by problematizing writing the history of Afro-descendants solely in terms of slavery and abolition. Indeed, slavery was significant and had long-lived consequences for the status of people of African descent; but Cienfuegos, like much of Spanish America and Brazil, was home to a substantial contingent of free people of color, who were active in the local economy and society, well before emancipation. This article explores the quotidian interactions of people of color with other *cienfuegueros* and imperial agents to begin to understand the lived experience of race.

This article approaches the history of Afro-descendants in Cuba from the perspective of inter-racial real estate sales in the specific geographic and social context of Cienfuegos. I contend that the US occupation is a critical juncture in the history of Afro-descendants because it introduced different visions of race into Cuban society—those formed in the context of Jim Crow in the southern United States.¹⁸ By focusing on the implications of the first US occupation for inter-racial property transactions, I will investigate the ways in which this sector of property-owning Afro-descendants experienced race in their daily lives.

Inter-racial Property Transactions in Cienfuegos, 1894–1899¹⁹

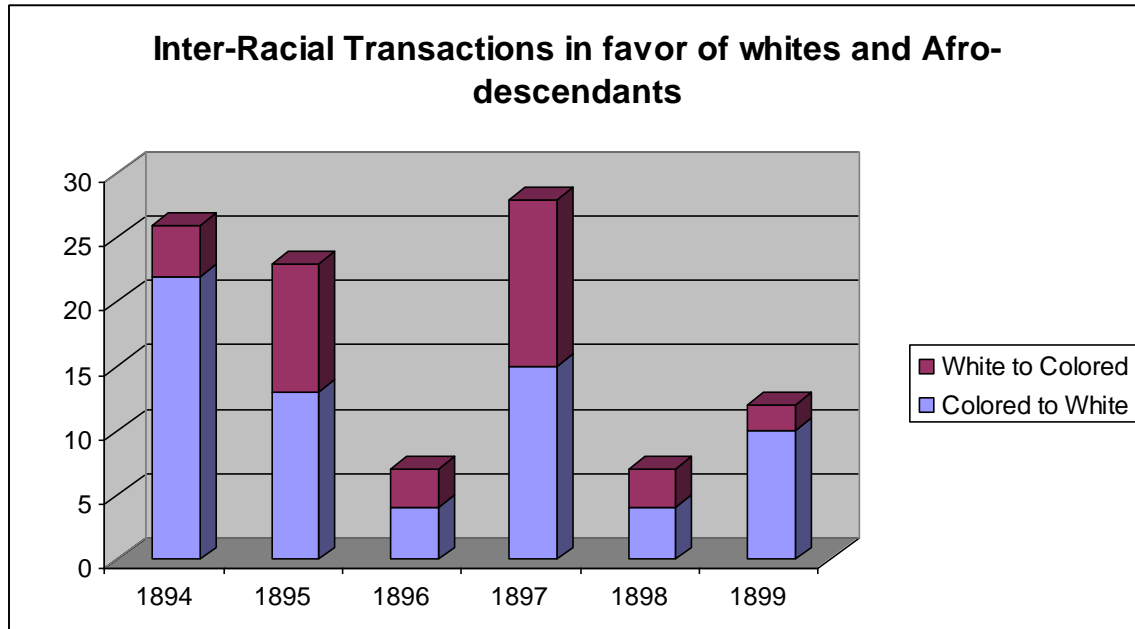
On January 11, 1894, *pardos* Cosme and Juan Calderón y Castillo sold an urban finca to Rosa Amat y Valdés.²⁰ Cosme, 46 years old, was from Trinidad (Cuba) and Juan, 40 years old, was from Cienfuegos. Both worked as carpenters in the vicinity of Cienfuegos. The finca was located in the eastern wing of the city of Cienfuegos.²¹ The nearest neighbors were *moreno* Pablo Lara y Borrell, Jacinto Cotera, Hipolito Mora, and Serafín Ros.

Cosme and Juan inherited this property from their father, Félix Calderón, who purchased a large part of it from his own sister, Celestina, in 1870. Cosme and Juan sold their family property to a young widow, Rosa. She was moving into the racially integrated working class neighborhood. This transaction highlights a key pattern for inter-racial property transactions in pre-war Cienfuegos: many more Afro-descendants sold their properties to whites than vice-versa (*see Graph 1*).

The war of independence presented both difficulties and opportunities for men and women of African descent in Cienfuegos. The threat of insurgent raids in the countryside and maritime attacks through the port made certain properties particularly vulnerable.²² At the same time, these dangers enticed some groups – those who were able –to relocate to safer zones or even to seek exile in foreign countries, especially the United States. This in turn increased the number of property owners wishing to sell their estates, which provided opportunities for less wealthy

individuals to purchase land. Thus, the war appears to have had a positive net effect on enfranchisement of men and women of African descent in Cienfuegos.

Graph 1.

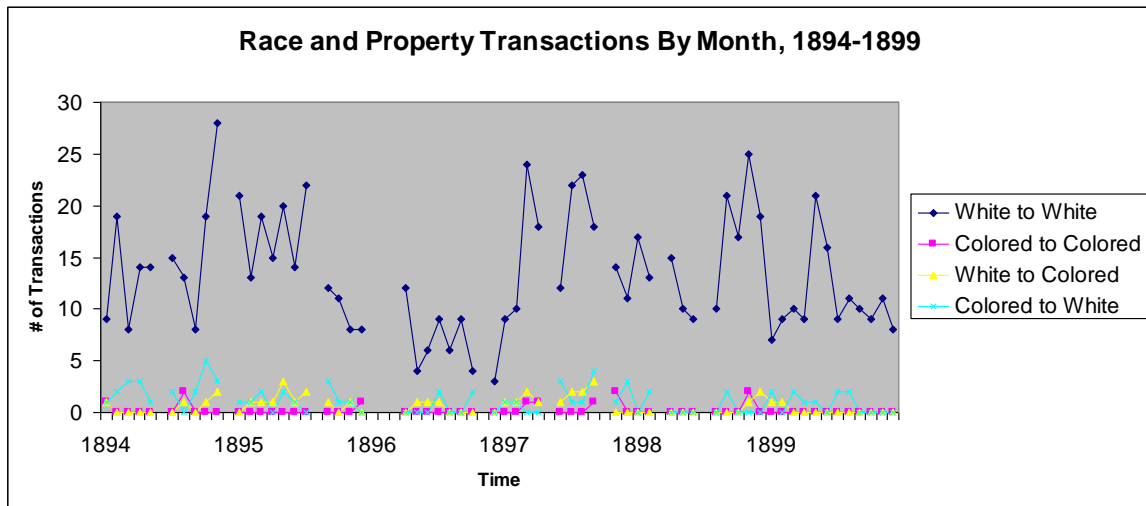


Just as property transactions involving whites plummeted to their lowest number by 1897, transactions involving Afro-descendants reached their peak. The total property transactions steadily declined between 1895 and 1897 as the war gradually penetrated Cienfuegos and its surroundings. During this same period, property transactions involving Afro-descendants not only increased, but a higher proportion of these transactions they made were in their favor. That is, Afro-descendants bought more property from whites during this period than they did in 1894 and 1895. This proportion of property purchases to sales forced thousands of rural Cubans into urban concentration camps in 1897, the very year in which Governor General Valeriano Weyler's policy of *reconcentración* reached its peak,²³ and the year before the American intervention (*see Table 3*). This implies that the war may have provided greater opportunities for others to buy property, many for the first time.²⁴

A remarkable decline in the number of transactions undertaken by Afro-descendants characterized the years 1898 and 1899, as well as a striking decrease in the proportion of purchases to sales made by Afro-descendants. The situation reflected in the notarial records for the activity of Afro-descendants in property transactions mirrors that of pre-war Cienfuegos. One might expect a resurgence in the number of transactions after the official end of war and transition of power in January of 1899, especially because the previous years had witnessed a number of political measures that would be expected to deter property transactions: Weyler's

reconcentración, the US naval blockade of the port of Cienfuegos, and appropriation of the lines of transportation to Havana, including railroads (April 22 and 29, 1898, respectively). Nevertheless, the low volume of property transaction in 1899 suggests that the population of Cienfuegos may have still been experiencing everyday life as if it were a time a war, despite the official announcement of peace. This also suggests that the population generally interpreted the US intervention, not as a permanent state, but rather as a temporary arrangement amidst the chaos of war.

Graph 2.



Source: APC, Fondo de Protocolos Notariales, 1894–1899.

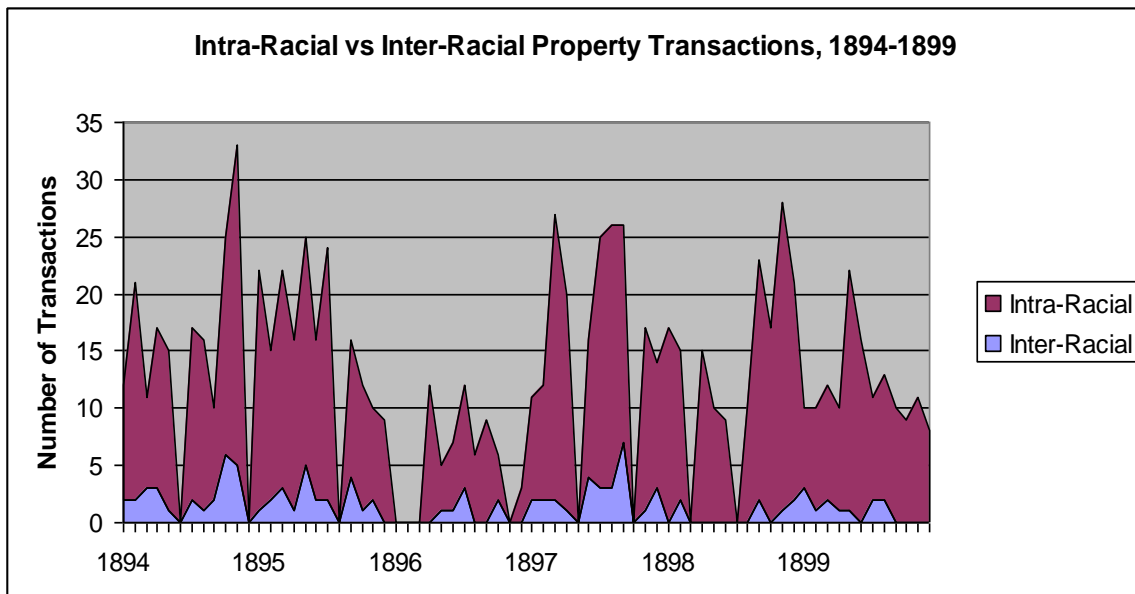
Table 2. Race and Property Transactions, per annum totals, 1894–1899²⁵

	Blanco → Blanco	Pardo → Pardo	Moreno → Moreno	Blanco→ Pardo/ Pardo→ Blanco	Blanco→ Moreno/ Moreno→ Blanco	Pardo→ Moreno/ Moreno→ Pardo	Total Sales
1894	147	1	2	4/12	0/10	0	176
1895	163	1	0	5/8	6/4	0	187
1896	53	0	0	1/2	2/2	0	60
1897	161	1	4	7/8	6/7	0/1	195
1898	156	1	1	3/4	0	0	165
1899	130	0	0	0/7	2/3	0/1	143

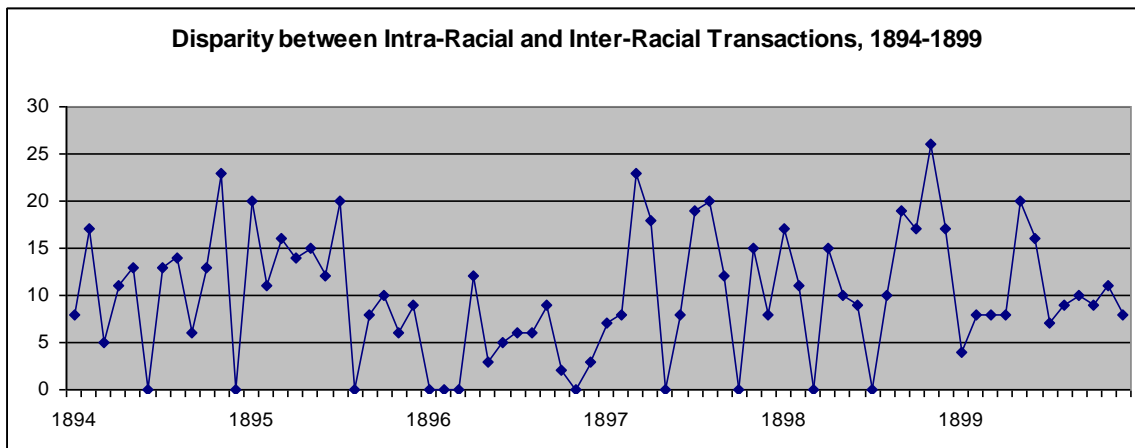
Table 3. Inter-racial Sales per annum²⁶

	White→Colored	Colored→White	% interracial transactions toward colored
1894	4	22	18
1895	10	13	77
1896	3	4	75
1897	13	15	86
1898	3	4	75
1899	2	10	20

Graph 3.



Graph 4.



During the war, transactions undertaken in favor of and undertaken by Afro-descendants are quite similar, differing only between 1 and 3 transactions (see *Table 3*). Yet, for 1894 and 1899, the years directly before and after the war, respectively, many more sales were made by Afro-descendants to whites than vice-versa. This evidence points to a relative parity between the epochs of Spanish and United States imperial rule, as reflected in the similar levels of property purchases among Afro-descendants in Cienfuegos.

The parity between the proportions of inter-racial property transactions in favor and undertaken by Afro-descendants before and after the war suggests that the overarching *structures* of racial order in immediate pre- and post war Cienfuegos were not substantially different. This similarity was reflected in parallel patterns of *who was buying* properties. People of African descent continued to engage in business relations with whites, exhibiting similar patterns of activity in 1894 and 1899: they sold more than they bought.

When Afro-descendants did buy real estate, it was most often small and inexpensive, especially after the war. For example, on July 2, 1897, *morena* Desideria Hernández purchased an urban *finca* from José Gómez y Romero, a Spanish property owner. This may have been Desideria's first property, because the notary lists her occupation as "su casa" (her home) indicating that she had no prior formal employment and did not own any land.²⁷ Born in the city of Cienfuegos, Desideria was thirty four years old, and unmarried. José had purchased this plot as part of a larger property in 1894,²⁸ right before the war from Antonio Pedrós y Vall. Desideria paid 100 pesos for this small plot on the southeastern margins of the city.²⁹ The owners of the property in the immediate vicinity of Desideria's new plot were Don Alfredo Cano and the Sres Garriga and Company.

Like Desideria, many other Afro-descendants entered the notarial records for the first time in 1897, as they took advantage of the tumult from war to secure urban properties. Similar to the results obtained from the number of inter-racial property transactions, 1897 again seems to be a peak year for the agency of Afro-descendants in Cienfuegos as viewed through property sales, with the average property values obtained through inter-racial property transactions by Afro-descendants surpassing the value of similar properties obtained by whites during the same year (see *Table 4*).

Although 1897 shows the most favorable ratio for property purchases by Afro-descendants in comparison to those sold by them, the more general pattern points to a declining value of property both bought and sold by Afro-descendants. Small properties with low values, like the one purchased by Desideria were becoming far more common than higher value purchases.

Table 4. Property Values per year, 1895–1899³⁰

	Average Property Values sold by Afro-descendants	Average Property Values purchased by Afro-descendants	Most expensive property sold by Afro-descendants	Least Expensive property sold by and Afro-descendants	Most expensive property purchased by Afro-descendants	Least expensive property purchased by Afro-descendants
1895	861	358	4000	50	1000	40
1896	260/732 ³¹	168	10,650	30	300	80
1897	296	306	800	60	1500	50
1898	288	217	600	25	400	50

The range of property values also points to a pattern of increasing marginalization of people of African descent from the market in real estate. Although the difference between the least expensive properties purchased and sold by Afro-descendants is minimal in all four years, the most expensive properties show great contrast. In all years except 1897, the maximum value is higher for selling transactions by Afro-descendants than it is for purchasing transactions, indicating a greater outward flow of capital from the hands of Afro-descendants.

The transaction of *parda* Urbana Jiménez, a thirty-five year old property owner, is a notable exception to the declining values of property acquired by people of African descent in Cienfuegos.³² On July 9, 1897, Urbana purchased two urban *fincas* from a Spanish property owner named Dionisio Núñez y Haro.³³ He had acquired these properties through two transactions, one from his brother, Ramón Núñez y Haro in November of 1879, and the other from *morena* María de Jesús Crespo, in December of 1879. Dionisio sold the remaining parts of this larger urban plot to two other people of African descent: *morena* Ynés López and *parda* Manuel de Jesús Correa.

The same day, Urbana sold a portion of her newly acquired land to a Spanish property owner named José Antonio Gutiérrez y Valdez on very favorable terms.³⁴ Exceedingly specific on the price and terms of sale, Urbana demanded 222 pesos and 65 centavos “oro de cuño español” for the property, and added one important clause: if at any point during the next year she or any of her inheritors wanted to re-take possession of this *finca*, they could for the same price José paid.

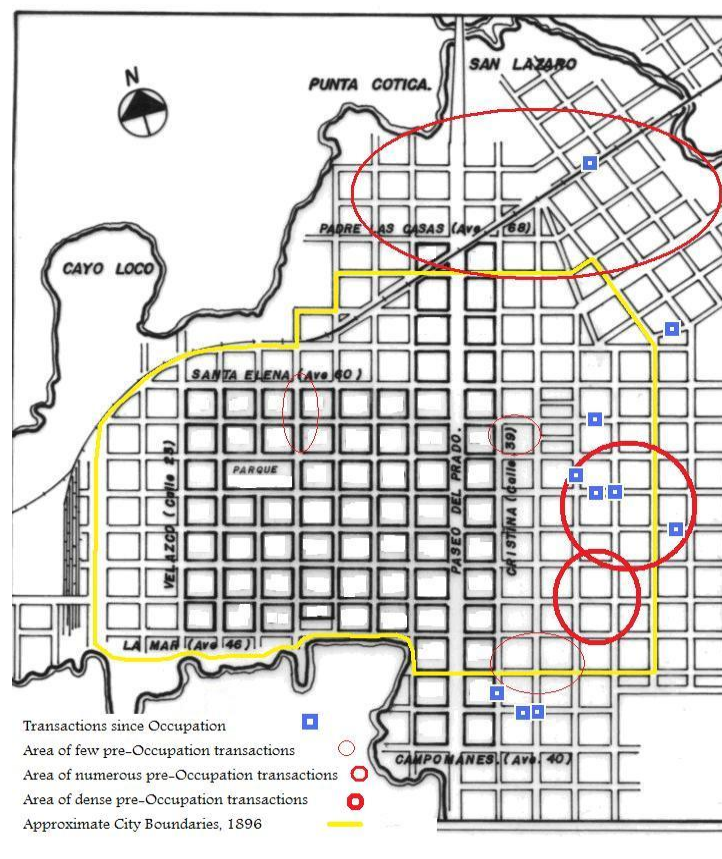
Unlike many other men and women of African descent, such as Desideria Hernández, who entered the notarial records in 1897, Urbana Jiménez was an established property owner. She brought larger properties with higher values than most other people of African descent, the above transaction she undertook in 1879 being the most expensive property purchased by any man or women of African

descent for the entire period under study. The more general pattern points to declining values of property owned by people of African descent.

Urban Geographies of Race: Shifting Neighborhoods and Marginalization

With the analysis of the properties sold in Cienfuegos as well as the availability of historical maps tracking the development and expansion of the historic city center, a picture of the spatial distribution of racial groups within the city emerges. In this section, I begin to reconstruct the racial geography of the city of Cienfuegos, and how this changed between 1894 and 1899.³⁵

Map 2. Spatial Display of Property Transactions by Afro-descendants, 1895–1899³⁶



On November 14, 1894, *parda* Aurelia Flores de Cañizares sold a part of her urban estate to Rafael Machado Quiñones, a twenty-seven-year-old day laborer born in the city of Santa Clara. Rafael was married, and most likely purchased this small plot of land as a first home for his family.³⁷ In comparison to Rafael, Aurelia was relatively well off. She owned several other plots of land nearby, and earned her living as a property owner.

Aurelia's husband, *pardo* Bernardo Cañizares y Fuguet, who worked as a brick layer (*albañil*), accompanied her to see the notary. Aurelia had purchased a large tract of land the previous year from Carmen Tillet y Tillet de Piñal, a young married property owner.³⁸ Carmen, like Aurelia, conducted most of the property transactions instead of her husband, as demonstrated by the power of attorney each held for her spouse.

Apparently, Aurelia did not have formal employment until she purchased land from Carmen: her occupational status was first noted as “de casa” indicating that she was a housewife, whereas by 1894 the notary listed her as a professional property owner, just like Carmen. Carmen had apparently vacated this neighborhood, selling distinct portions of her urban estate to Aurelia and a variety of other individuals including Manuel Reyes and *parda* Ignacia Sarrazen.

Aurelia's new property was located in a neighborhood on the eastern side of the city.³⁹ This area transitioned from an elite- to a primarily working-class neighborhood over the course of the 1890s, as wealthy white property owners partitioned their grand estates, selling them off piecemeal to a racially mixed clientele of laboring men and women of Cienfuegos. By 1894, when the notary was marking the spatial parameters of the plot Aurelia wanted to sell, he noted an equal proportion of neighbors with and without racial markers, indicating a racially integrated pattern of residence.

Aurelia was now a property owner in a racially integrated neighborhood in the eastern zone of Cienfuegos. This was one of two zones in which Afro-descendants transacted in property, the other being in the north, just on and outside the official boundaries of the city. Most transactions dealt with properties on the margins of the limits of the city, as recorded in the official city plan of 1895. The section of the city with the most transactions made by Afro-descendants was the eastern margin of the official city limits, forming two adjacent clusters between the streets Gloria (outside the city limits) and Cuartel (three blocks inside the limits), with a secondary cluster between the streets of Dorticós in the south, Argüelles in the North, Cid in the East and Tacón in the West, where Aurelia owned property. In the north of the city, well beyond the official boundaries, another slightly less dense zone of transactions appears (*see Map 2*).

The post-occupation inter-racial property transactions (mostly sales in favor of whites) show that the area of densest inter-racial property transaction in the pre-occupation period registers more sales to whites than does the area well outside the city limits in the north of the city. This may be the initial phase of a longer-term movement of Afro-descendants to even more peripheral zones that were ultimately less desirable for wealthy property owners. The precarious war-time position of both north and southern zones of Cienfuegos, both susceptible to maritime attacks, was raised as a concern to the local government by city residents in January of 1896.⁴⁰ The concentration of property transactions by Afro-descendants in this zone—combined with the near absence of sales to whites during the occupation—suggests

that this peripheral zone became undesirable for white residents of the city, for reasons of safety and perhaps also because of the rising density of Afro-descendant residents.

Epilogue: Continuity and Change circa 1898

Let us return to the story of Bruno Leblanc introduced at the beginning of this paper. We know that he bought a large tract of land in Cienfuegos in 1835, but what happened to him over all of those years? After a long absence from the notarial records, Bruno appears as an eighty-seven-year-old man in 1898, just months after the United States military intervention. This time, he was not buying property, but fighting to make official his prior transaction.

Bruno was forced to seek legal intervention in the property transaction he undertook with Santiago Yzurrieta. He had purchased an urban *finca* from Santiago more than a half century earlier, in a private agreement, which was to be made public subsequently by inscription in the Registry of Property of Cienfuegos. Santiago had failed to comply. So, in December of 1898 and again in January of 1899, Bruno took Santiago to court over this matter. The judge ruled in Bruno's favor, demanding that title to the property be transferred to Bruno officially within nine days of the judgment. When the nine days had elapsed and Santiago still had not complied with the judge's orders, the judge himself transferred the property to Bruno on February 3, 1899. Why did Bruno wait so long to confront Santiago on his breach of contract? Bruno needed official title in order to engage in any further transactions with this property. Indeed, his desire to sell the property most likely motivated his legal battle against Santiago. In February of 1899, just days after the court order made effective his ownership, he sold it to Antonio Alvarado Setién, a Spanish merchant.

Perhaps more than anything else, Bruno's story illustrates the persistence of land ownership in Cienfuegos over the nineteenth century. Not once in over sixty years had Bruno needed to sell this land, evidenced by his own lack of proper legal title. This changed in 1898. During the first several months of the US occupation, a number of men and women of African descent, like Bruno, sold properties that they or their families had owned for many years, even generations.⁴¹ This story indicates a shift in landholding patterns by people of African descent in the early days of the US occupation. Why did these individuals sell their property, if it had been passed down for generations before then? It was no mere coincidence that men and women of African descent were becoming increasingly marginalized in the property market during United States military rule.

A paradox emerges when we contrast the surge in participation of people of African descent in the market in land during the war with the apparent marginalization of this population in the post-war period. This disparity between the war-time and post-war activity of people of color comes into sharp relief if we consider the two divergent discourses of race relations emerging from the final war

of Cuban independence. The Spanish model seems to be characterized by racial integration in property transactions and residence, especially among the lower and working classes. Simultaneously, a rigid racial hierarchy existed, which separated people of honor from people of color, illegitimates, and other marginalized groups.⁴² Property was a significant tool for social mobility because owners could convert their investment into a source of income by collecting rents, running businesses or factories, or growing crops. The “ownership of a solar signified more than simple stability; it also offered the possibility of further upward movement.”⁴³

The Revolutionary model, surging initially from the first war of independence in 1868, but becoming increasingly salient during the final war of independence in 1895, contrasted with the Spanish emphasis on racial hierarchy.⁴⁴ The insurgent army was discursively committed to the ideal of racial integration and equality, and to a certain extent, these values were reflected in the material realities of war: Afro-descended officers commanded white and racially-mixed units, race was not indicated on most official rebel documents, and bullets did not discriminate. The discourse of racial brotherhood sought to rally support for the cause of independence, distinguishing that future from one of continued racial discrimination under Spanish rule. Would this idea have facilitated or encouraged greater business ties among people of different racial groups in Cienfuegos?

If it would have, then other factors seem to have interfered so as to discourage inter-racial business transactions, which experienced a marked decline after the US military intervention. Aside from the material strains on land and resources in the post-war period, the US intervention also added a new set of social pressures, affecting men and women of African descent, in particular, as members of a subordinate social group who owned valuable resources. The proliferation and institutionalization of the system of inter-racial brotherhood articulated by the rebels was thwarted by the US intervention and subsequent occupation. The inauguration of the US occupation in 1899 reinforced the pressure on Cuban racial classification. This made the prospect of national self-determination even more urgent, but it was no longer contingent on independence from Spain only. It required Cubans to demonstrate to the United States that they were capable of self-rule—and this entailed constructing a white Cuban nation.

With the end of Spanish rule in Cuba in 1898, the idea of citizenship became not only an important dimension of what it meant to be Cuban, but also a contested terrain in which the tensions of nation-building amidst the social transformations of recent abolition of slavery, war, and imperial transition manifested themselves. As a way to limit the breadth of citizenship and maintain what the North American occupiers viewed as proper social and political relations, they attempted to impose restrictions on voting (a key indicator of citizenship), and property ownership was one of those restrictions.⁴⁵ The lofty ideals of liberty and equality aspired to by the Cuban revolutionaries came into direct conflict with the narrower visions of appropriate citizenship envisioned by US military leaders, thus creating “a complex,

multi-sided struggle to define the boundaries of freedom, the content of citizenship, and the pattern of access to resources.”⁴⁶

The beginning of the US occupation in Cuba witnessed a powerful backlash against the idea of restricted citizenship, especially by those sectors of the population who had participated actively in the struggle for independence—such as the many Cuban veterans of African descent.⁴⁷ Although official legal discrimination was successfully overturned, practical discrimination against people of color persisted. The specific ways in which racial relations metamorphosed during the US occupation remains to be further explored over a *longue durée*, as North American racial attitudes came into further contact with Cuban people through US bureaucrats and military personnel.

The decreasing volume and value—as well as the marginal geographic distribution—of Afro-descendants’ property transactions in this period would suggest an increasing level of disenfranchisement of this population from the market in urban land after the war. At the same time, the findings suggest little significant change in numerical trends of inter-racial property transactions in the periods directly before and after the war. This consistency implies a persistence of the underlying structures of racial relations governing such transactions in both periods of Spanish colonial and early US rule. Nevertheless, the persistence of parallel power structures does not necessarily negate the perception and experience of change at the local and individual level. Although there appears to be little change between immediate pre- and post-war property transactions in Cienfuegos, individual stories like that of Bruno Leblanc indicate that that people of African descent were becoming increasingly marginalized from the land market and access to central urban residence. It would take time for these individual stories of disenfranchisement to come across in broader numerical trends, like those presented for the period between 1894 and 1899 here. This research, therefore, suggests that a longer term study would allow for a more comprehensive examination of the racial change in three periods: Spanish rule, US military occupation, and finally the Cuban republic. Finally, research over an extended time period would permit a more careful examination of the channels through which US values and visions of race arrived to Cuba, and the ways in which Cubans engaged with them and selectively enacted them in their everyday interactions.

Notes

Research for this article was supported by the Tinker Grant from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Institute for the Study of the Americas (ISA), which funded a research trip to the Provincial Archive of Cienfuegos from May 18 to June 8, 2010, and by the Cuban Heritage Collection Graduate Fellowship funded by The Goizueta Foundation, which facilitated research in the Cuban Heritage Collection of the University of Miami

from August 11 to September 10, 2010. The author wishes to thank Dr. Louis A. Pérez, Jr. for his wisdom and feedback on an earlier version of this paper, and Orlando García Martínez for his guidance, help, advice, and collaboration in Cienfuegos, and for reviewing this essay. Deepest thanks also to the staff at the Provincial Archive of Cienfuegos, especially Dadiana and Ramona, for taking down those huge notarial protocols off the shelves, and to the García family (Anabel and Iliana).

¹ Archivo Histórico Provincial de Cienfuegos, Protocolos Notariales (APC, PN): Demetrio López Aldazábal, 3 February, 1899. The estate was an entire solar of over 1000 varas on Calle Casales between Calle Dorticós and Calle Santa Clara. Leblanc paid 400 pesos plata. This was solar number 425 on the old official city map. Yzurrieta had purchased the solar just four years earlier in 1831 from Angel Vázquez. Leblanc, though labelled as *moreno* by the notary was classified as a *pardo* by the courts.

² Orlando García Martínez, *Esclavitud y colonización en Cienfuegos, 1819–1879* (Cienfuegos: Ediciones Mecena, 2008), 52–53.

³ *Ibid.*, 49–50. The surname, Leblanc, suggests that Bruno obtained his freedom in Cienfuegos, taking the name from his final master. Thank you to Orlando García Martínez for this insight. Scholarship on slave manumission in nineteenth-century Havana has suggested that slave families employed various strategies to free their members, including, first and foremost, buying the freedom of babies and children, and only secondarily that of female adults. Aisnara Perera Díaz, and María de los Ángeles Meriño Fuentes, *Para liberarse de lazos, antes buena familia que buenos brazos: Apuntes sobre la manumisión en Cuba (1800–1881)* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2009), 242–43. Moreover, although Bruno was officially listed as unmarried, recent research suggests that the kinship and social networks of slaves and former slaves were much more complex than reflected by legal status designations. Many forged social networks through ethnicity, fictive kinship ties, and *cabildos*. See María del Carmen Barcia, *Capas populares y modernidad en Cuba, 1878–1930* (Havana: Fundación Fernando Ortiz, 2005).

⁴ Florestan Fernandes and Roger Bastide, eds., *Relações Raciais Entre Negros e Brancos em São Paulo* (São Paulo: Anhembi, 1955); Florestan Fernandes, *The Negro in Brazilian Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969); Roger Bastide and Pierre Van Den Berghe. “Stereotypes, Norms and Interracial Behavior in São Paulo, Brazil,” *American Sociological Review* 22: 6 (1957): 689–94; Thales de Azevedo, *As Elites de Côr: Um Estudo de Ascensão-Social & Classes Sociais e Grupos de Prestígio* (Salvador: Empresa Gráfica da Bahia/EDUFBA, 1996); Charles Wagley, ed., *Race and Class in Rural Brazil* (Paris: UNESCO, 1952); Marvin Harris, *Patterns of Race Relations in the Americas* (New York: Walker and Company, 1964); Harry Hoetink, *The Two Variants in Caribbean Race Relations: A Contribution to the Sociology of Segmented Societies*, translated from the Dutch by Eva M. Hooykaas (London: the Institute of Race Relations by Oxford University Press, 1967); Herbert S. Klein, “Anglicanism, Catholicism and the Negro Slave,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 8:3 (1966): 295–327; Magnus Mörner, “The History of Race Relations in Latin

America: Some Comments on the State of Research,” *Latin American Research Review* 1:3 (1966): 17–44. In 1950s and 1960s historians and social scientists posited that the historical contexts shaped contemporary racial relations, through the specific experiences of slavery, religion, and the demographic preponderance of people of African and European descent. A particular variety of this thesis posited that Iberian and Anglo models of race relations were substantially different. Given this assertion, we would expect a significant clash in 1898, as the United States occupied Cuba thereby introducing Anglo visions of race into an Ibero-American society. Significant adjustments would expectedly occur in Cuba (and the United States) in terms of the understanding of race, social relations among different racial components, and the social status and role of Afro-descendants in Cuban society.

⁵ Cathy Duke, “The Idea of Race: The Cultural Impact of American Intervention in Cuba, 1898–1912,” in Blanca G. Silvestrini, ed., *Politics, Society and Culture in the Caribbean* (San Juan: University of Puerto Rico Press, 1983).

⁶ Just as Rosa E. Carrasquillo does for the peasants of Caguas, Puerto Rico under American rule, I use property sales records to determine the level of enfranchisement of Afro-descendants in Cienfuegos during the critical period of American intervention. Rosa E. Carrasquillo, *Our Landless Patria: Marginal Citizenship and Race in Caguas, Puerto Rico, 1880–1910* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

⁷ Rebecca J. Scott and Michael Zeuske, “Property in Writing, Property on the Ground: Pigs, Horses, Land and Citizenship in the Aftermath of Slavery, Cuba 1880–1909,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44:4 (2002): 669–99.

⁸ Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (Chicago: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 85.

⁹ John Rutter Brooke (the first military governor of Cuba) was succeeded by Leonard Wood on December 23, 1899. Cuban nationalist historians of the 1930s and 1940s often vilified Wood, while depicting Brooke as more benevolent. See for example, Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, *La lucha cubana por la república, contra la anexión y la Enmienda Platt* (Havana: Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad de La Habana, Colección Histórica Cubana Americana, 1952), 152; Ramiro Guerra y Sánchez, José M. Pérez Cabrera, Juan J. Remos and Emeterio S. Santovenia, *Historia de la nación cubana, tomo VII: Cambio de soberanía desde 1868 hasta 1902* (Havana: Editorial Historia de la nación cubana, S.A., 1952), 4. Although the purpose of this article is to examine the local impact of 1898 for Afro-descendants in Cienfuegos, I have selected the start date of 1894 to capture the “Spanish” system in the year before the eruption of the final independence war of 1895. This allows comparison between the styles of race relations of both Spanish and American empires, but it also allows for a comparison of war time race relations, which were arguably neither Spanish nor American.

¹⁰ The exact sequence and dates of activity of each notary are ambiguous because some volumes are missing from the APC, and the notaries often recorded their works in the protocols of other colleagues. For these reasons, the dates of activity for the notaries listed above are approximate. For more on the activity of notaries in the late nineteenth century, see Zeuske and García, “Estado, notarios y esclavos”; Luis J. Bustamante, *Diccionario bibliográfico cienfueguero* (Cienfuegos, 1931); Pablo L. Rousseau and Pablo Díaz de Villegas, *Memoria descriptiva, histórica y biográfica y las fiestas del primer centenario de la fundación de esta ciudad* (Havana: Establecimiento Tipográfico <El Siglo XX>, 1920), 476–78; Enrique Edo y Llop, *Memoria histórica de la villa de Cienfuegos y su jurisdicción* (Cienfuegos: Imprenta El Telégrafo, 1943); APC Fondo de Protocolos Notariales, Índice de Protocolos Notariales.

¹¹ Verdaguer, who was appointed Escribano Público de Gobierno y Cabildo de la Villa de Cienfuegos in 1863, and subsequently began his notarial career, is cited as one of the first colonists of Cienfuegos, whose son, Manuel Villalón y Verdaguer was selected by Military Governor Leonard Wood to “resolve the grave political question created in Cienfuegos with respect to the legality of the Partido Republicano.” Rousseau and Villegas, *Memoria descriptiva*, 478.

¹² Severo Gómez Núñez, *La guerra hispano-americana: El bloqueo y la defensa de las costas con grabados y planos* (Madrid: Imprenta del Cuerpo de Artillería: 1899), 40. Digital Copy courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

¹³ Philip S. Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism, 1895–1902*, 2 volumes (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972); David Healy, *The United States in Cuba, 1898–1902: Generals, Politicians and the Search for Policy* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1963); James H. Hitchman, *Leonard Wood and Cuban Independence, 1898–1902* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971); Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba Between Empires, 1878–1902* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

¹⁴ Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation and Revolution, 1868–1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886–1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Alejandro De la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Rebecca J. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba After Slavery* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); Rebecca J. Scott *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860–1899* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986). There are also several accounts of the interaction of African Americans and black Cubans, for example: Lisa Brock and Digna Castañeda Fuertes, *Between Race and Empire: African Americans and Cubans before the Cuban Revolution* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), and most recently, Frank Andre Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010),

and Melina Pappademos, *Black Political Activism and the Cuban Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

¹⁵ Nérida Agosto Cintrón, *Religión y cambio social en Puerto Rico (1898–1940)* (Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1996); María del Pilar Argüelles, *Morality and Power: The U.S. Colonial Experience in Puerto Rico from 1898 to 1948* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1996); Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Pedro A. Cabán, *Constructing a Colonial People: Puerto Rico and the United States, 1898–1932* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999); Carrasquillo, *Our Landless Patria*; Carmen Centeno Añeses, *Modernidad y resistencia: Literatura obrera en Puerto Rico (1898–1910)* (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2005); Eileen J. S. Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870–1920* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Gervasio Luis García, “I am the Other: Puerto Rico in the Eyes of North Americans, 1898,” *Journal of American History* 87:1 (2000): 39–64; José-Manuel Navarro, *Creating Tropical Yankees: Social Science Textbooks and U.S. Ideological Control in Puerto Rico, 1898–1908* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Ramón E. Soto-Crespo, *Mainland Passage: The Cultural Anomaly of Puerto Rico* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

¹⁶ Orlando García Martínez traces the shifting composition of the liberating army in Cienfuegos, and Michael Zeuske explores political clientelism in their contributions to the volume. See Orlando F. García Martínez, “La Brigada de Cienfuegos: un análisis social de su formación,” in Heredia Fernando Martínez, Rebecca J. Scott, and Orlando García Martínez, *Espacios, Silencios y Los Sentidos De La Libertad: Cuba Entre 1878 y 1912* (Havana: Ediciones Unión Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba, 2001); Michael Zeuske, “‘Los negros hicimos la independencia’: aspectos de la movilización afrocubana en un hinterland cubano. Cienfuegos entre colonia y República” in Martínez, et. al., *Espacios*, 163–229, especially 186, 216.

¹⁷ Rebecca J. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom*; Rebecca J. Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba*; Rebecca J. Scott, Michael Zeuske, “‘Le droit d’avoir des droits’: Les revendications des ex-esclaves à Cuba (1872–1909),” *Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 59:3 (2004): 519, 521–45; Rebecca J. Scott and Michael Zeuske, “Property in Writing,” 669–99; Rebecca Scott’s work on reconstructing Afro-Cuban life histories in central Cuba are also largely based on the premise of post-emancipatory periodization of Afro-Cuban history. See, for example Rebecca J. Scott, “Small-Scale Dynamics of Large-Scale Processes,” *The American Historical Review* 105:2 (2000): 472–79.

¹⁸ This is part of a larger project, which more fully problematizes the assumptions that Spanish race relations were exclusively racially integrated, and race relations in the United States were only segregated. Indeed, I recognize that some racial segregation existed in certain aspects of Cuban society under Spanish rule, and for this reason, property transactions can form only a part of a broader examination of society aimed at uncovering the variation and nuances in the cultural codes of racial permissibility.

Moreover, I recognize differences between the United States North and South, as well as the idiosyncrasies of sub-regions, such as Louisiana and Florida, which had distinctive cultural histories. Nevertheless, my project operates under the assumption that legalized and codified segregation –Jim Crow –existed in the United States, whereas the abolition of slavery in Cuba in 1886 eliminated all official and explicit forms of racial discrimination, despite the persistence of practical exclusion.

¹⁹ I examined notarial records four different notaries from the years 1889 until 1906. The records examined here make up the period from 1894 until 1899. PAC, Fondo de Protocolos Notariales, 1894–1899.

²⁰ APC: PN, José Joaquín Verdaguer, 11 January, 1894.

²¹ This 584-square-meter *finca* was located on Cristina Street between Argüelles and Santa Clara Streets.

²² One example is the story of *morena* Matilde O’Bourke, who was forced to sell some of her properties after they were damaged in insurgent raids in 1896. APC, PN: José Joaquín Verdaguer, 1 April, 1896. See Bonnie A. Lucero, “Transcending Race and Nation: Social Networks and Economic Mobility among Cubans of Color, circa 1898,” *Florida Atlantic Comparative Studies Journal* (forthcoming).

²³ The policy of *reconcentración*, implemented in 1896–1897, sought to limit rebel troop movements. The policy demanded the forced resettlement of rural populations to the urban centers, which in the jurisdiction of Cienfuegos, included Cienfuegos (city), Santa Isabel de las Lajas, Camarones, Abreus, Cruces, among others. With the abandonment of rural zones, crops were left unattended, creating food shortages, and disease epidemics ravished resettled populations due to poor sanitary conditions, inadequate housing, and overcrowding.

²⁴ The way in which the war was waged in the jurisdiction of Cienfuegos, especially the fortification of the city by Spanish troops, meant that the the city underwent less physical devastation than other parts of the island, especially rural zones.

²⁵ APC, Fondo de Protocolos Notariales, 1894–1899.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ APC, PN: José Joaquín Verdaguer, 2 July, 1897.

²⁸ The entire property was over 700 square meters.

²⁹ The plot of land was 143 square meters, and located on Cisneros Street between Tacón and Cuartel Streets.

³⁰ Data on property value for 1894 is not included here because it was not listed on the indices of Antonio de León, as it was on those of Jose Joaquín Verdaguer.

³¹ First number includes an outlier property value of 10,650 pesos by Matilde O’Burke, an African born freed-woman and substantial property owner in area. The second value excludes this number, because it is over ten times higher than any other recorded value for that year for Afro-descendants. See Lucero, “Transcending Race and Nation.”

³² The two transactions of highest value among all inter-racial sales during this period were conducted by women of African descent. Indeed, women of color seem to have been prominent in the market in land in Cienfuegos, an observation that warrants further study.

³³ APC, PN: José Joaquín Verdaguer, 9 July 1897. One was 215 square meters on San Fernando Street at Cuartel Street, valued at 700 pesos. The other, worth 800 pesos, was 366 square meters located on San Fernando Street at Cid Street.

³⁴ APC, PN: José Joaquín Verdaguer, 9 July 1897.

³⁵ The idea of racial geography, employed by Hal Langfur in his study of the racial relations of eastern Brazilian frontier, potentially illuminates the ways in which racial differences were encoded in physical space. See Hal Langfur, *The Forbidden Lands: Colonial Identity, Frontier Violence, and the Persistence of Brazil’s Eastern Indians, 1750–1830* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

³⁶ Base map courtesy of Lcdo. Arquitecto Aníbal Barrero Barcia. Data shown on map gathered from notarized property transactions, APC, Fondo de Protocolos Notariales, 1894–1899; Approximate boundaries of the city of Cienfuegos taken from Brito Lilia Martín, *El desarrollo urbano de Cienfuegos en el siglo XIX* (Cienfuegos: Ediciones Mecenas, 2006), 158; Data gathered from APC, Fondo Protocolos Notariales, 1894–1899. Mil gracias a Orlando García Martínez por apoyar esta idea y por dar consejos en cómo proceder.

³⁷ The plot of land was barely over 100 square meters in area.

³⁸ APC, PN: José Joaquín Verdaguer, 4 November, 1893.

³⁹ Her property was on Calle Cid between Dorticós and Santa Clara Streets.

⁴⁰ Rousseau and Villegas, *Memoria Descriptiva*.

⁴¹ Another example is the *parda* María Herculeana Corina Cunill, who on January 16, 1899 sold an urban estate that she had inherited from her grandmother, *morena* Barbara Cunill. First, she purchased the sub-divisions of the land from her co-inheritors, *morena* Matilde, *morena* María Benita, and *parda* María Casimira de los Dolores for 800 pesos. The same day, María Herculeana sold her grandmother’s entire estate to a merchant, Jacinto Font y Silva for 880 pesos. APC: PN, Demetrio López Aldazábal, 3 January, 1899.

⁴² Ann Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, Sexuality, and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

⁴³ Karen Graubart, "The Creolization of the New World: Local Forms of Identity in Urban Colonial Peru, 1560–1640," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 89:3 (2009): 486. According to Graubart, Spanish willingness to grant property to upwardly mobile *castas* produced "a vibrant and relatively open market in real estate." R. Douglass Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660–1720* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

⁴⁴ See Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*.

⁴⁵ For a detailed account of the debate over suffrage during the American occupations, see Alejandro de la Fuente and Matthew Casey, "Race and the Suffrage Controversy in Cuba, 1898–1901," in Alfred W. McCoy, and Francisco A. Scarano, Eds., *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 220–29.

⁴⁶ Scott and Zeuske, "Property in Writing," 671.

⁴⁷ Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War*; Alejandro de La Fuente, "Race, National Discourse, and Politics in Cuba: An Overview," *Latin American Perspectives* 25:3 (1998): 47.