

*By the same author*

CUBA

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

SUEZ

# CUBA

The Pursuit of Freedom

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HUGH THOMAS



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## CHAPTER XII

*The Slave Merchants*

'Ebony', or 'sacks of coal', or simply 'bales' (*bultos*), as slaves were now described by those who sold them, partly in jest, partly in order to defeat the moralistic English, were still wholly bought directly by planters from merchants (*negreros*), who specialized in the trade. Sometimes, as in Liverpool or Nantes in the past, the slave voyage from Havana would be a joint stock enterprise, with numerous shareholders, some shares worth as little as \$100.<sup>1</sup> On the African side of the Atlantic, most of the dealings were through factors residing permanently there and professionally occupied with the problems of dealing with African kings. Journeys were now usually direct trips to and from Africa, though sometimes North America came into the route. Often the ships were built in North America and often the insurance for the voyage was raised in New York. Occasionally ships were fitted out at, and returned to, Cádiz. Most merchants of Havana had Spanish connections: indeed, the biggest of them had almost always in the nineteenth century started life in Spain, being usually regarded and regarding themselves as members of the Spanish section of the Havana community: *negrero* was even a slang word for a peninsular Spaniard in the 1870s.<sup>2</sup>

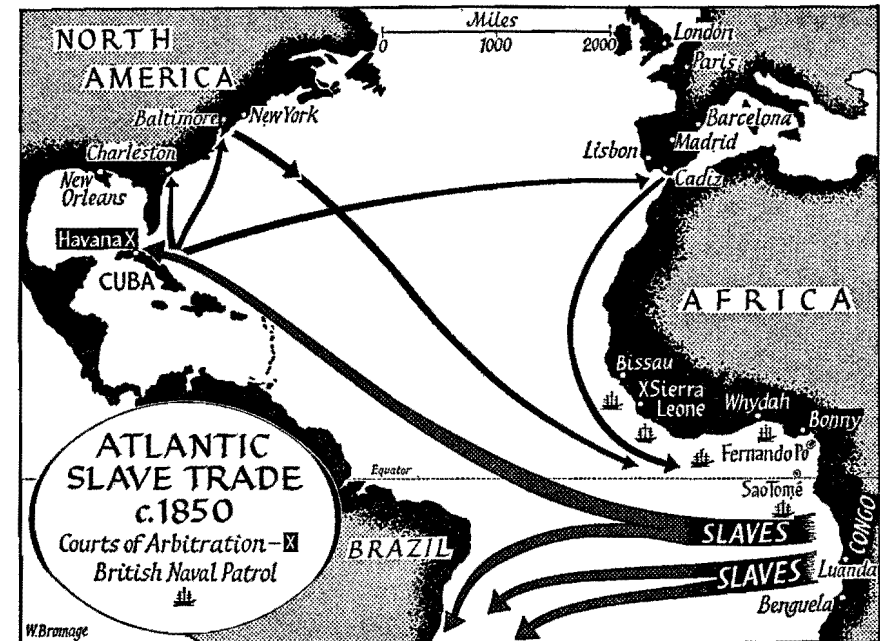
About twenty important Havana merchants had now almost completely displaced foreigners in the traffic in slaves. The biggest slave merchant in the 1830s was probably Joaquín Gómez, a native of Cádiz, co-founder of the first bank in Havana, an anti-clerical and freemason whose masonic name was 'Aristides the Just' and who 'arrived at Havana – about the age of thirteen or fourteen years old, almost naked'; he was the first importer of horizontal sugar mills with iron rollers from Fawcett and Preston of England in 1830 and bought several productive *cafetales* and sugar mills himself.<sup>3</sup> After him came Manuel Cardozo, a Portuguese, and Francisco Marty y Torrens and Manuel Pastor, both Spaniards of great riches, the former a retired bandit, both later associated with Antonio Parejo and the Spanish queen mother in slave traffic in the 1840s and 1850s on the very largest scale, in fast steamers (Pastor later became a count, his heirs became bankers in Madrid and

<sup>1</sup> In 1821, P.P. (1822), *Accounts and Papers*, XXII, 540–1.

<sup>2</sup> See Gallenga, 87.

<sup>3</sup> Moreno Fragnals, 107; see also Philaethes, *Letters from the Havana*, 62.

another generation established a munificent foundation from the remaining millions). There were also Pedro Forcade, of French origin and his partner Antonio Font, both of whom soon appear, like nearly all their predecessors, in lists of sugar planters (Forcade founded *Porvenir*, near Colón, Font *Caridad*, near Cienfuegos). Forcade apparently had both English capital and some English partners.<sup>4</sup> Darthez and Brothers



of London had a Havana representative, with exclusive concern with slaving. Cunha Reis, slavers of New York, had a Havana man. Pedro Martínez de Cádiz was also represented in Havana, sometimes by himself. Another firm established on both sides of the Atlantic was Pedro Blanco and Carballo, of whom Blanco, a native of Málaga, at first a captain of slave ships, lived near the Gallinas lagoon with a large harem and many luxuries,<sup>5</sup> and later retired in 1839 to Barcelona with over \$M4, where he became a major figure on the Stock Exchange.<sup>6</sup> Others active were Julián Zulueta, also with a London connection in the person of his cousin Pedro, though by 1840 this skilful Basque entrepreneur had become a planter and local grandee; and José Baró, a man

<sup>4</sup> Turnbull, 312.

<sup>5</sup> Theodore Canot, *Revelations of a Slave Trader or Twenty Years Adventures of Captain Canot* (1954), 115; cf. *Parliamentary Papers*, XXIX, 349, where he is captain of the *Barbarita*, and *ibid.*, 358, where he stayed at Gallinas; *ibid.* (1828), XXVI, *Correspondence with British Commissioners*, 128, shows him as captain of the *Hermosa Dolorita*.

<sup>6</sup> He figures in Texidó's novel in the style of Eugene Sue, *Barcelona y sus misterios* and in Lino Nová's Calvo's fictionalised biography, *Pedro Blanco, el negrero* (Buenos Aires, 1941)

of much the same origin and position as Zulueta who in addition to his mills and his slave ships controlled the supply, manufacture and repair of moulds for use in sugar manufacture.<sup>7</sup> Ships could still be built in Liverpool for Havana merchant houses. Portuguese traders were still very large importers of slaves into Brazil, and also often sold to Havana: in 1837 the English Consul, David Turnbull, calculated that out of seventy-one slave ships operating on Cuban coasts, forty were Portuguese, nineteen Spanish, eleven U.S. and one Swedish;<sup>8</sup> in 1820-1, eighteen had been Spanish, five French, two Portuguese and one U.S. – if flags were to be believed.<sup>9</sup>

However, exact nationalities should not be considered too closely. Because of the international interference by the English, ships sailed under several flags. We hear, for instance, that the ship *Fanny* cleared out of Santiago de Cuba in 1827 under Dutch colours; on her arrival at Calabar she raised a French flag; she sailed back to the Americas with 238 slaves under that flag but she would have hoisted a new Dutch flag had the pursuing English frigate turned out to be French.<sup>10</sup> One instruction from Blanco and Carballo of Cádiz to their captain sailing for Africa ran thus:

From the moment that you sail and lose sight of the Morro, you must use no other papers but Portuguese, unless you should be obliged to put into any of the ports of the island [of Cuba], in which case you will make use of Spanish papers. Your route to the coast of Africa must be that which you think the safest; you will touch in going at the Gallinas; there you will see Don Pablo Alvarez; you will hear from him if he will give you the cargo for the merchandise which you will carry, which cargo must be from 200 [slaves] upwards; and the said Pablo ought also to provide provisions for them . . . Should you at last not be able to arrange the business you will set sail without losing a moment and continue your voyage towards the south, where you will settle the matter according to circumstances, taking care to visit the points of Loanda, Ambriz and all other trading places throughout the Congo.<sup>11</sup>

This instruction also makes clear that now as ever the slaves brought over in the mid-nineteenth century derived from all parts of Africa, and that rather more may have come from the Congo than is sometimes imagined. Few of the Cuban slaves came from the old Gold Coast, the preferred slaving ground of the previous century; the river Bonny was

<sup>7</sup> Moreno Fraginals, 123.

<sup>8</sup> Turnbull, 456.

<sup>9</sup> *P.P.* (1822), XXII, 540-1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* (1827), 225.

<sup>11</sup> Turnbull, 425-6.

the slave centre in the 1820s, Gallinas or Dahomey in the 1830s. The Guinea centre had shifted north towards the Río Pongo, the Gallinas lagoon and the river Sulima – all in the Senegal-Gambia region.<sup>12</sup> A list of merchandise in the slave ship *L'Oiseau*, a French vessel leaving Guadeloupe for Africa in 1825, shows 220 muskets as the largest single item out of a total of \$8,600 worth of goods.<sup>13</sup>

The most important slave dealers on the other side of the Atlantic in Africa (some also dealt in 'legitimate trade' such as palm oil) were Antoine Léger, a French-born nationalized Portuguese, active in the Cape Verde Islands in the 1820s,<sup>14</sup> 'Dos Amigos' of Lagos, Caefano Nozzolino at the Cape Verde Islands, Pablo Frexas at Brass on the Niger Delta,<sup>15</sup> Louis Seminaire at Gallinas, Pedro Blanco when he was at Gallinas, but above all the scarcely credible figure of the Portuguese mulatto, Francisco Félix Da Souza, active from the 1820s to the late 1840s.<sup>16</sup> Da Souza, after starting life apparently in Cuba,<sup>17</sup> was for a time commander of the Portuguese fort at Whydah. After working for some time as a slaver on his own account, he gained a monopoly of slave exports from Ghezo, king of Dahomey, the monster of West Africa whose income from his export tax on slaves amounted in 1849 alone to £300,000 (\$1,300,000). His slaves were guarded by a powerful force of Amazons, wearing war caps made in Manchester. With Da Souza's financial help, Ghezo built up a military suzerainty over the old Slave Coast between 1818 and 1858.<sup>18</sup> Da Souza's funeral rites at Whydah in 1849 lasted six months, during which time King Ghezo in honour of his old friend enthusiastically had a boy and a girl beheaded and three men burned alive. (But Da Souza died much in debt.) The forty Portuguese ships for instance which arrived in Havana in 1837 no doubt carried Da Souza's slaves – probably in all over 12,000 slaves that year.<sup>19</sup> Most of Da Souza's exports, of course, went to Brazil. Scarcely less important in the slave trade to Brazil was Diego Martínez of Lagos, originally a protégé of Da Souza's who flourished in the late 1840s and in reality succeeded Da Souza, despite the survival of the latter's sons in the coast till 1858-60.<sup>20</sup> Both these men lived in a style of unbridled luxury, their hospitality to all save the English being legendary along the coast.

<sup>12</sup> Dow, *Slaves, Ships and Slaving*, 15. See also the maps and diagrams derived from Koelle's enquiry into the tribal origins of Sierra Leone Africans in *Journal of African History*, V (1964), No. 2, 185-208.

<sup>13</sup> *P.P.* (1826), 225. See Appendix, VI, for full list.

<sup>14</sup> *Papers on the Slave Trade* (1826), XXIX, 309.

<sup>15</sup> K. Onwuka Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885* (1956), 52.

<sup>16</sup> *Cf. Accounts and Papers* (1826-7), XXVI, 147.

<sup>17</sup> Dow, 252.

<sup>18</sup> See Newbury, *The Western Slave Coast and its Rulers*, 37.

<sup>19</sup> Turnbull, 154, i.e. at 300 slaves per ship (Consul Tolmé's reckoning).

<sup>20</sup> See David Moses, 'Diego Martínez in the Bight of Benin', *Journal of African History*, VI (1965), 79-90.

The European or mulatto factors on the coast of Africa were, of course, only the last stations in an immense organization. Europeans had never been permitted by African rulers to go far beyond the coast and, since they were interested in commerce (even if commerce in men), not conquest, this had suited them. Perhaps many slave traders of Liverpool or Cádiz genuinely knew nothing of the complicated arrangements of which they were the final, but by no means the only benefactors: thus in the region of the Niger delta a large trading organization was run by a branch of the Ibos, the Aros, whose influence was based on the Aro Chukwu Oracle, everywhere respected and feared in East Nigeria. The Aros exploited these feelings in order to dominate the economic life of the region and they became the sole middlemen of the hinterland trade, by establishing colonies along the trade routes. Other tribes came to believe that this monopoly was divinely appointed and in addition accepted Aro judicial and political arrangements. The consequence was that the Aros sold most of the slaves at Bonny, which in the 1820s was the most prominent slave port of West Africa; and that the slaves were captured by means of oracular devices. For instance, the oracle levied fines of slaves on certain communities and groups; these groups believed that the oracle would eat them; whereas in fact the Aros sold them to Da Souza or Diego Martínez and other factors on the coast.<sup>21</sup> It might also be added that, bloody though the journey in the Middle Passage certainly was, it was shorter as a rule and perhaps often less intolerable than the journeys from the interior of Africa to the coast, often on foot, often by river, and organized by Africans.<sup>22</sup> Another prominent slave trading race were the tiny tribe of Efiks of old Calabar, who also enslaved those of their own people who were guilty of adultery or theft and whose descendants in Cuba founded the most persistent of the Cuban sacred cults, the Abakuá.<sup>23</sup>

Many professional slave merchants in the nineteenth century were semi-gangsters like Mungo John (alias John Ormond), the half-caste ex-Liverpool slave-trader of the Río Pongo,<sup>24</sup> Pedro Blanco himself, or Theodore Canot, a half-Italian, half-French sailor who described how his first view of the slave ships in Havana harbour dazzled him: 'These dashing slavers, with their arrowy hulls and raking masts, got complete possession of my fancy'.<sup>25</sup> Some captains combined slaving with piracy.

<sup>21</sup> Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta*, 156.

<sup>22</sup> See Summary in Elkins, *Slavery*, 99.

<sup>23</sup> See below, 521. For the Efiks, see C. Daryll Forde, ed., *Efik Traders of Old Calabar* (1956), in which is included Antera Duke's diary for 1785-8, one of the most extraordinary documents preserved from pre-colonial Africa.

<sup>24</sup> Father and son, John Ormond dominated the Río Pongo for two generations; see C. Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (1962), 66, 185.

<sup>25</sup> Canot, *Captain Canot*, 50.

Baltimore or New York-made clippers were usually too fast to be easily caught by the British naval vessels, heavily loaded as they were with food and armaments.<sup>26</sup> With these new clippers it was possible to cross the Atlantic several times a year. Joseph Gurney, visiting Cuba in 1841, was told that nine tenths of the vessels employed in the Cuban slave trade were built in North America.<sup>27</sup> The trade increasingly relied indeed on U.S. shipbuilders and U.S. capital, and there was no prosecution at any time under the U.S.'s own anti-slave trade laws. It was this continuing U.S. trade that really prevented English action from being effective, though U.S. ships sailed under several flags, constantly changing to suit circumstances (even some French men fitting out ships in Baltimore).<sup>28</sup> The Brazilian slave merchants, though condemned by the English Consul as 'twenty to thirty men, principally adventurers of foreign extraction of the basest class - the worst pariahs of the human race' - were far the largest capitalists in the country. Much the same comment could have been made in respect of Havana except that the North American connection was stronger.

Few instances are recorded of English ships engaging in the trade in the mid-century though in 1826 the master of an English palm oil ship the *Matta* was nevertheless found guilty of selling four female Negroes to a Spanish captain in the old Calabar river.<sup>29</sup> Occasionally, someone under English protection might also do some selling.<sup>30</sup> English half-castes such as the Ormonds, Fabers and Skeltons, were active, however, on the West African coast as was Mrs Lightburn, half-African, half-North American.<sup>31</sup> Because of the number of U.S. ships anyway in Brazilian waters, sometimes with 'double papers, double captains and a double flag', the Royal Navy had a far more delicate task in stopping them.<sup>32</sup> Slaves were even taken on board Spanish mail vessels, according to one English commander.<sup>33</sup> But most English officers assumed that about half the slave trade to Cuba was, during the 1850s at least, in U.S. hands, an adjunct of the still grandiose slave trade to Texas and the U.S. south (perhaps 300,000 slaves were brought into the U.S. south between 1808 and 1860).<sup>34</sup> A number of them came from Cuba, even though the

<sup>26</sup> C. Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade* (1949), 34. These were usually 300 tons, averaging 100 feet long, with a crew of 40.

<sup>27</sup> J. J. Gurney, *A Winter in the West Indies* (1840), 213. J. J. Gurney (1788-1847) was a philanthropist and the brother of Elizabeth Fry.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. the case of the *Guadeloupe* (P.P. (1826), XXI, 551).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, *Accounts and Papers* (1828), XXVI, 91.

<sup>30</sup> Fyfe, *Sierra Leone*, 225.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>32</sup> Turnbull, 459. The navy's role is considered in Chapter XVI.

<sup>33</sup> P.P. (1852-3), XXXIX, 8.

<sup>34</sup> W. E. B. du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870*, vol. 1 (1896), 178; Soulsby 169. For figures, see *ibid.*, 110-12; also cf. Mathieson, 138.

figure may not have been as high as the 15,000 a year estimated by the Dutch Consul-General in Havana, Mr Lobé.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the continuance of the slave trade in Cuba, the situation was nevertheless slowly changing; thus by 1840 it was already impossible to insure slave ships in Havana since the two main insurance companies (*Compañía de Seguros Marítimos* and *Especulación*), which had begun business almost exclusively with slavers, found that the risks were too great, despite premiums varying from 25% to 40%. But U.S. insurance continued on these ships, at only 2½% (it was no doubt mainly for that reason that the Havana firms went out of business), and Brazilian ships at a higher rate, though less than Cuban.<sup>36</sup>

There were of course still insurrections on slave ships, as in the eighteenth century and before. The best known was that of the slave cargo belonging to two planters of Puerto Príncipe, José Ruiz and Pedro Mantes, which was being carried along the Cuban coast on the Havana vessel *Amistad* in very bad weather. The Spanish mulatto cook told the slaves (pointing to some barrels of beef and then to an empty barrel) that on arrival at Puerto Príncipe they would be chopped up and made into salt meat. One master spirit among the slaves (all bozals from different tribes near Sierra Leone) named Cingues, therefore, led a revolt, broke the slaves' irons and, after throwing captain and crew overboard, directed Ruiz and Mantes (who had once himself been a sea captain) to sail to Africa, always towards the rising sun. But Ruiz and Mantes secured that they sailed out of course at night so that, after two months, with water and food short, they landed in the U.S. near New York. There the Negroes were accused of piracy and murder, while the Spaniards demanded the return of their property. The question was complicated by the fact that there were three little girls and one small boy (*mulecón*) among the slaves, against whom a plaint of piracy could not legally be preferred. Eventually the slaves were acquitted and thirty-five (out of an original fifty-three, the rest having died) sent to Sierra Leone by friends of the anti-slavery cause.<sup>37</sup>

Such accounts of the slave ships as exist suggest that profits remained high and that still, if one ship out of three or four came home, the owners would be in pocket. Thus the *Firme*, captured at Havana with 484 slaves in 1829, had been financed as follows:<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Turnbull, 149.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 463. Private underwriters still guaranteed Havana slavers at between 33% and 36% (Madden, 33). As the ships were often U.S. owned and U.S. built it is natural that they should have been underwritten there.

<sup>37</sup> Madden, 228-41; see also Fyfe, *Sierra Leone*, 222-3. Richard Robert Madden (1798-1886), magistrate appointed to supervise abolition of slavery in Jamaica 1833-41; superintendent of Liberated Africans and judge arbitrator in Mixed Court, Havana, 1836-40; afterwards Colonial Secretary of Western Australia.

<sup>38</sup> *Parl. Report* (1829), Class A, 115.

EXPENSES	COSTS	SLAVES	TOTAL
Outward cargo for slave purchase (½ in coin, ½ in spirits, gunpowder, calicoes, handkerchiefs)	\$28,000	484 slaves sold at Havana @ \$300 <sup>39</sup> a head	\$145,200
16 able seamen at \$40 a month			
20 ordinary seamen at \$35 a month			
Vessel 10 months absent, and wages if capture had been avoided would have been	\$13,400		
Wear and tear of voyage	\$10,600		
	Deduct expenses		\$52,000
		Net profit on voyage	\$93,200

There is no evidence to suggest that mortality *en passage* had lessened in the nineteenth century. Seventy-two slaves out of 258 died on the *Segunda María* (1825); 73 on the *Orestes* out of 285 (1826); 47 out of 300 on the *Campeador* (1826); 271 out of 562 on the *Midas* (1829); 680 out of 983 on the *Fama de Cádiz* (1829); 126 out of 348 on the *Cristina* (1829); 39 out of 144 on the *Santiago* (1830); 216 out of 422 on the *Umbelina* (1831).<sup>40</sup> All these were on boats captured by the English and afterwards condemned. There were now no clear regulations for carrying slaves, as there had been in England during the legal period. The vessels were built, in Baltimore or elsewhere, to be as fast as possible and were driven, especially when chased, with the hatches closed down. If anything went wrong and the crew had to abandon ship, they would do so without providing for the slaves, and in most nineteenth-century memoirs of this business there is some such remark as 'I shall never forget the dreadful shriek of the panic-stricken blacks' in respect of some atrocious behaviour or other.<sup>41</sup> No doubt the sick as well as the dead were thrown overboard.<sup>42</sup> There are several instances of slaveships sinking,<sup>43</sup> while the macabre voyage of the *Rodeur* is perhaps symbolic of the whole trade in the nineteenth century. This was a French ship which sailed from the river Bonny to Guadeloupe in 1819: the captain, 'very good tempered, he drinks a lot of brandy', told a young planter's son his views on slave treatment: 'Flog them as well as feed them . . . of course not maim them . . . for then they would not work; but if you do not

<sup>39</sup> Lieut. Jackson 'just returned from the coast' told *The Times* (29 January 1849) that slaves cost a doubloon (£3 8s) only in Africa. Sir Thomas Buxton spoke of slaves costing £4 (\$17) in 1838 (*The African Slave Trade* (1839), 57, fn.)

<sup>40</sup> Madden, qu. 48-9.

<sup>41</sup> Dow, 215, qu. Drake's memoir.

<sup>42</sup> M. M. Ballou, *Due South; or, Cuba past and present* (1885), 297.

<sup>43</sup> See list in Ortiz, *Negros Esclavos*, 151.

make them feel to the marrow, you might as well throw them into the sea.' The Negroes' howls at nights kept the boy awake. 'One day, one of the blacks whom they were forcing into the hold suddenly knocked down a sailor and attempted to leap overboard. He was caught, however, by the leg by another of the crew and the sailor, rising up in a passion, hamstringed him with a cutlass. The captain, seeing this, knocked the butcher flat upon the deck with a handspike. "I will teach you to keep your temper," he said with an oath, "he was the best slave of the lot!" I ran to the main chains and looked over; for they had dropped the black into the sea when they saw that he was useless. He continued to swim even after he had sunk under water, for I saw the red track extending shorewards, but by and by it stopped, widened, faded and I saw it no more.'

Later, there was a successful attempt by some Negroes to throw themselves overboard and, 'from the waves came what seemed . . . a song of triumph' in which they were joined by their comrades on the deck. The captain then made an example of six slaves, shooting three and hanging three. After that, the Negroes were kept in the hold. Ophthalmia broke out and spread. Soon 'all the slaves and some of the crew are blind. The captain, the surgeon and the mate are blind. There is hardly enough men left out of our twenty-two, to work the ship'. Then a few days later, the boy noted 'All the crew are now blind but one man. The rest work under his orders like unconscious machines; the captain standing by with a thick rope . . . yet had hopes of recovering his sight . . . A guard was continually placed with drawn swords at the storeroom to prevent the men getting at the spirit casks . . .'

Though it is hard to believe, the *Rodeur* was later nearly run down by another ship, the *San León* from Cádiz, bound for Havana, whose crew turned out to be entirely infected by ophthalmia. At this discovery, the crew of the *Rodeur* broke into macabre laughter, and the two ships drifted apart. Eventually some of the crew recovered. The captain lost an eye, but the other recovered. After being reminded that the cargo was fully insured, the captain threw the thirty-nine wholly blind slaves overboard and put in successfully to Guadeloupe.<sup>44</sup> Upon curious similar voyages was the Cuban economy for the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century essentially based; and it would seem that, with the activities of abolitionists, conditions got worse rather than better.

In the first period of illegal trade (1820-35), before the Royal Navy were entitled to check on the 'equipment' of the slave vessel, slavers bound to Cuba would usually land slaves somewhere on 'the back of the island'. The ship would then travel round empty to Havana and announce her arrival to the merchants by raising a red flag. The British

<sup>44</sup> Diary of the *Rodeur*, qu. Dow, xxvii-xxxv.

commissioner or Consul would then report the ship's arrival to the captain-general, who would gravely cause her to be inspected and then announce with satisfaction and injured innocence that there was no proof that the ship had been engaged in slaving. The merchants would meantime dispose of their slaves through factors. In 1836 the red flag was banned, but regulations were relaxed so much that slavers sometimes sailed straight into Havana itself after dark.<sup>45</sup>

The size of the financial interest involved in slaves suggests why the efforts of the English were defeated by the organization of planters, hand-in-glove with traders and officials. The Cuban coast line was long, the possibilities of fraud limitless. Illegal and legal slave trading (that is, internal traffic within the western hemisphere) were difficult to disentangle. But an immense catalogue of facts was collected by British consuls and commissioners proving illegal trading. It was want of will on the Spaniards' part, not want of adequate information, that prevented them from effectively extinguishing the trade. The traders were helped by officials and even by U.S. Consul Trist - himself a failed planter - who in the 1830s enabled U.S. shipping papers to be quite easily available.<sup>46</sup>

Cotton was booming in the U.S. south, the conditions which had prevailed in 1808 and enabled Jefferson to agree to the abolition of the trade no longer prevailed and a U.S. official who connived at the slave trade had nothing to fear.<sup>47</sup> The Cuban slave trade was very busy in these years, Governor Maclean of Cape Coast estimating that three out of five slaves leaving the Gulf of Benin were bound for Cuba about 1834-5.<sup>48</sup>

The British Consul, Turnbull, who made courageous efforts to bring an end to the slave trade by public exposure, wrote in respect of 1838-9:

As if to throw ridicule on the grave denials of all knowledge of the slave trade which are forced from successive captains-general by the unwearied denunciations of the British authorities, two extensive depots for the reception and sale of newly imported Africans have lately been erected at the further end of the Paseo, just under the windows of his Excellency's residence, the one capable of containing 1,000 and the other 1,500, slaves; and I may add, that these were

<sup>45</sup> Cf. accounts in *P.P.* (1826), XXX, 37. An interesting account of the landing of a slave ship is given by Ballou (*Due South*, 285ff.): how 'with a look of treacherous tranquillity the dark, low hull of a brigantine' would suddenly appear . . . 'the rakish craft was of Baltimore build, and about 200 tons and narrowly escaped a French cruiser. The slaves were apparently Ashantis, the cargo reaching 350 of whom between 30 and 40 had died'.

<sup>46</sup> See below, 199.

<sup>47</sup> See report of British Consul at Cape Verde Island, 31 December 1838 (Class B, 1839, F.S., 110, qu. Buxton, 40).

<sup>48</sup> Buxton, 47.

constantly full during the greater part of the time that I remained in Havana. As the barracoon or depot serves the purpose of a market place as well as a prison these two have, doubtless for the sake of readier access and to save the expense of advertising in the journals, been placed at the point of greatest attraction, where the Paseo ends, where the grounds of the Captain-General begin, and where the new railroad passes into the interior, from the carriages of which the passengers are horrified at the unearthly shouts of the thoughtless inmates.<sup>49</sup>

These barracoons, kept by a certain Riera, were often thought to be the real showpieces of Havana, and were shown with pride to foreign visitors. They had taken the place of older barracoons which, lining what is now the Prado, had originally been built as barracks for the Spanish navy in 1781.<sup>50</sup>

The actual illegality of the trade in the nineteenth century caused it to assume some of the outward (as well as, in English eyes, the formal) characteristics of piracy. Thus one slave captain might be robbed of his slaves by another and recoup himself by pillaging a third.<sup>51</sup> Armed vessels might leave Havana and simply attack Portuguese slavers or even ordinary traders or, in one instance in 1825, a British brigantine escorting two prizes. A whole fleet of fast pirates was established at Galveston, Texas, in the 1820s.<sup>52</sup>

It is hard to imagine the manner in which, whatever the intolerable practices which occurred in Africa itself, the labour force of Cuba was dragged out of the dark continent into America, half tortured and in the general belief that numbers only mattered, there to be branded with iron.<sup>53</sup> The instances recorded, mostly deriving, of course, from accounts of English captures, leave no doubt at all that the Spanish slave trade in the nineteenth century, under whatever flag, was handled with at least as great brutality as at any previous time. The decisive factors in enabling it to survive in the nineteenth century were however African conditions themselves. The economy of that continent had been organized for so long for the slave trade that it was everywhere the staple item of trade; yet the English, for a hundred years the biggest shippers, had now changed their policy, and turned policeman. Slaves could therefore be bought for very little in an Africa whose economy was half shattered by English abolition – half the price payable in the 1780s; but they could be sold, due to the insatiable demands of Cuban

and Brazilian planters, at a price several times that which obtained in the eighteenth century. The collapse in Africa and the conversion of what had hitherto been from the European point of view a respectable trade to semi-gangsterism was the most remarkable consequence of abolition.<sup>54</sup> But the worm was turning; and even Francisco Arango, who had done so much to initiate the trade in the 1790s, died as an old man in 1840 – with the title of Marqués de la Gracitudo – writing a tract against the trade and encouraging his countrymen to procreate mulattoes in order to ‘whiten’ (*blanquear*) the island.

<sup>54</sup> See for instance Ward, *A History of Ghana*, 160. ‘A heavy blow was struck at the economic system of the country. In 1807 the British Government abolished the slave trade . . . There existed a vast organisation of wholesale dealers, brokers, depots for the collection of slaves. The slave trade . . . was a trade in which the small man could share. The purchasing power of the people depended on it. Petty chiefs could sell into slavery people who lost their cases in their courts and could not pay . . . not only European, but African fortunes were founded on the slave trade’.

<sup>49</sup> Turnbull, 60.

<sup>50</sup> Ortiz, *Negros Esclavos*, 166.

<sup>51</sup> See Gurney, *A Winter in the West Indies* (1840).

<sup>52</sup> Mathieson, 25-6.

<sup>53</sup> See Ortiz, *Negros Esclavos*, 164-5, for a description.