"Cuba," wrote John Quincy Adams as early as 1823, "almost in sight of our shores, from a multitude of considerations has become an object of transcendent importance to the political and commercial interests of our Union." Like Thomas Jefferson and others, Adams had his eye on Cuba as a source of commercial and strategic power. But not until the Spanish-American War of 1898 did the United States decisively wrest the biggest island in the Caribbean from a rival European power, and establish over it a virtual protectorate. The taking of Cuba was of course part of a larger turn-of-the-century United States acquisition of protectorates (e.g., Panama, Nicaragua, Haiti) and outright properties (e.g., Puerto Rico) for the purpose of gaining strategic control of the Caribbean. In the case of Cuba itself, however, commercial interests were also a major factor, and grew ever more important under the Platt Amendment, a rider on the Cuban Constitution giving America the right to intervene on the island. Most historians agree that from 1900 to 1934, the United States exercised this right diplomatically or militarily, but in a consistent manner, to stabilize Cuban politics in order to protect American lives and property. However true, this analysis is incomplete and misleading. To draw a line of causality from politics to economics, to assert that a stable government is the guarantor of commercial activity not only inside a country, but between it and other countries, is to ignore the more important causality running from economics to politics. United States diplomats established in Cuba what they thought were two workable systems. Commercially, they fostered a dependent relationship based on

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an exporting monoculture economy that integrated Cuba into the world market but made it particularly subject to variations in the price and demand of sugar. Politically, they encouraged an independent, democratic republic designed to function much as its American model did, representing its citizens and maintaining peace, order and prosperity.

American foreign policy makers were short-sighted and naive in their assumption, however sincere, that a democratic government was compatible with an economy based on fragile dependency. Americans determined the economic system, which formed certain social classes, who, frustrated by their inability to achieve reform, resorted to violence against the government as the only way out. Through intervention, the United States managed to keep the lid on this explosive brew, but a stable political system simply proved unable to survive, until, in the 1930s, Franklin Roosevelt found that dictatorial regimes dealt more effectively with discontent. Historian Walter LaFeber calls this model of imperialism "neodependency," describing how American economic relations with Caribbean nations resulted in "inevitable revolutions," but he only deals with Cuba in the decade leading up to the Castro revolution in 1959.\(^2\) The invitation is thus open to expand his model to the first era of the Cuban Republic. Dividing the first third of our century into three periods, from 1900 to 1919, 1920 to 1928, and 1929 to 1934, this study of Cuban-American relations, in keeping with its assumptions of causality, will, for each period, first explore the socioeconomic situation of Cuba, and then offer a narrative of Cuban politics and American intervention as evidence of the consequences of the mismanagement of Cuban affairs by Americans from the very beginning.

In the first two decades of Cuba’s formal independence, the United States established a pattern of foreign domination based on a monoculture economy. Both American investors and Cuban merchants assumed, at the end of the war, that Cuba’s prosperity depended on the development of its exports. Before the war, President McKinley had warned Spain that the fighting on the island “injuriously affects the normal functions of business, and tends to

delay the conditions of prosperity to which this country is entitled.” While Secretary of State Richard Olney estimated American investments in Cuba before the war at $95 million, by the passing of the Platt Amendment in 1902, they had grown to $100 million, and to $205 million in 1911. American companies quickly poured much-needed capital into the most promising export resources, especially sugar and tobacco, but also into other activities and infrastructure such as railroads, mining, manufacturing, public utilities, banking, shipping, and securities. “A new generation of carpetbaggers,” as historian Louis Pérez calls American and European investors, immigrated to Cuba, bought land, set up efficient export structures, and looked for cheap labor. In 1905, by which time thirteen thousand North Americans had purchased land, 60% of rural property was owned by the United States, 15% by Spain, and 25% by Cubans. Among many others, the Cuban-American Sugar Company, as early as 1899, bought 77,000 acres; the United Fruit Company acquired 200,000 acres by 1901; and a company from New York purchased 180,000 acres to build railroads, resorts, and mills. After the occupation, the Spanish American Light and Power Company of New York was providing gas to the island, and two American corporations produced electricity. Europeans also were present: by 1911, British capital added up to $60 million; French, to $12 million; German, to $4.5 million. “The charge that the Caribbean policy of the United States was primarily one of ‘financial imperialism’ is not sustained by the facts,” correctly states historian Julius Pratt, insisting instead on strategic interests in the Caribbean as a whole. But in Cuba specifically, foreign financial interests were undoubtedly important.3

From 1898 on, America set the rules of trade and saw reciprocity as the key. By negotiating a commercial treaty, it could not only import raw materials, but open up Cuba as

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a market for finished American goods. During the occupation, American advocates of reciprocity seemed genuinely convinced of its beneficial effects on the Cuban economy. “[Reciprocity] means everything to Cuba,” said occupation Governor Leonard Wood in 1900, while calling for a 50% reduction on Cuban agricultural products, “for if she can obtain favorable duties on her tobacco, and especially on her sugar, her development will be immediate.” One year later, American President Theodore Roosevelt, in a characteristically candid and paternalistic manner, mirrored the feeling:

I urge the adoption of reciprocity with Cuba not only because it is eminently for our own interests to control the Cuban market and by every means to foster our supremacy in the lands and waters south of us, but also because we, of the giant republic of the north, should make all our sister nations of the American Continent feel that whenever they will permit it we desire to show ourselves disinterestedly and effectively their friend.4

Interestingly, reciprocity had many Cuban allies and American opponents. In October 1901, believing they would be the main exporters, twenty thousand Cubans petitioned Governor Wood in favor of a treaty. Meanwhile, in the United States, the American Beet Sugar Association, along with sugar cane planters from Louisiana, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico, opposed the supposedly humanitarian arguments of Wood and Roosevelt, claiming Cuba would offer too much competition.5

Nevertheless, after a lengthy debate in the Senate, Congress passed the Reciprocity Treaty in 1903, partly as compensation for the Platt Amendment, and partly “to have U.S. investors do well while doing good.” The treaty gave Cuban goods a 20% tariff preference in American ports, but also offered American products a 25% to 40% reduction on duties, “transform[ing] Cuba,” according to historian Lester Langley, “into a marketplace for American goods.”6 Although some complained about foreign ownership of their “nation of beggars,” many Cubans welcomed the flooding of the island by American soft drinks, candy

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5Fitzgibbon, Cuba, 208.

bars, automobiles, and a new commercial elite. Cuba’s economy became inextricably tied to American markets, as United States per capita sugar consumption climbed from 62.2 pounds a year in 1900 to 119.2 pounds in 1928. In 1900, Cuba furnished 17.6% of America’s sugar, and 76.4% in 1922. Although Cuba now had to accept the world price on sugar, business was booming, as World War I paralyzed European beet sugar production and inflated United States demand for alcohol and army supplies. Therefore, as the price of sugar rose slowly but steadily from 2.58 cents a pound in 1900 to 3.41 cents in 1916, sugar exports as a percent of total exports also grew from 47.9 in 1902 to 92.2 in 1920, and Cuban balance of trade transformed its 1899 deficit of $21.7 million into a surplus of $216.4 million in 1919.7

However, a picture of the Cuban economy is incomplete without an analysis of class distortion caused by American hegemony. As a whole, the economy--dangerously tied to one export product--grew steadily, but the underlying transformations in the class structure, directly caused by America’s push for a monoculture economy, provide the missing link to most historians’ analysis of why the political regime became unworkable. Louis Pérez explains this as a new type of colonial relationship disguised as self-government. “The first permanent casualty of the war,” he adds, “was the Creole bourgeoisie.” The war had not only killed many laborers and their livestock, but had destroyed land, machinery, and equipment. The number of sugar mills alone had crumbled from 1,100 to 207. To revive agriculture, large amounts of capital were needed, and customs houses, the main source of government revenue, were controlled by the United States, separating the state from the planters. Americans were the only ones able to raise enough capital to erect mills, and obviously were interested in operations large enough to export. Thus land, as described above, was bought in large quantities, and little of it was left for medium-sized plantations.

* Fitzgibbon, Cuba, 210-14; Walter LaFeber, Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America (New York & London: The University of Georgia Press, 1989), 38; Langley, Twentieth Century, 39

Also, while the Cuban bourgeoisie withered, many Spaniards remained on the island as merchants, professionals, educators, publishers, or employees of the Church.8

As is typical of single-crop economies, the poor became poorer. Peasants or small farmers, heavily indebted and unable to compete with American and Spanish sugar mills, were selling their fincas (small farms) at a rate of 3,700 annually between 1898 and 1900. Increasing numbers of peasants found that in their alternative to farming—working in factories—they faced stiff competition from unskilled immigrants coming from Spain or China, and later from Haiti and Jamaica, often seasonal workers favored by employers. As the pool of unemployed labor grew in the 1910s, wages dropped, giving rise to a labor movement resentful of Americans and the Platt Amendment. Cuban women—who could not vote, according to the Constitution—were increasingly replaced by men in domestic employment, and suffered even lower wages and higher unemployment and illiteracy rates. The arrival of blacks from elsewhere in the Caribbean, reaching a high of 34,000 in 1919, added to the desperate working class and fostered discrimination.9

Polarization in class structures translated into an indigenous political elite isolated from the masses, alienated from American diplomats and landowners, and dependent on corruption and public spoils for its survival. Allan Millet comments that, as American army officers left Cuba in 1902, they observed, “the social and political insecurity of Cuba’s type of economic growth far outweighed the stabilizing effect brought about by a simple increase of the nation’s wealth.” Cuban politicians were mostly veterans of the Spanish-American War who gained the confidence of American occupation forces. They were mostly from white, well-off families, but found themselves often disconnected from commercial interests. Having little chance for acquiring wealth outside the government, the political class adopted public office, patronage appointments, and civil service as ends in themselves, and elections and violence as the means. The government’s role was mainly limited to distributing appointments to municipal, provincial, and federal office, particularly in the army. The public payroll grew from 20,000 in 1903 to 42,000 in 1924, offering a veritable valve for the

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8Louis A. Pérez, Jr., Reform and Revolution, 192-94, 201.
system. Corruption became rampant, as an estimated 25% of customs revenues in the 1910s disappeared from the treasury. Amnesties and the notorious lottery system also distributed power among the elite. Even the opposition party to the Conservatives, the Liberals, made up of enlisted men of more modest origins, perpetuated the hegemony of the bureaucratic class. As long as Cuban politicians’ only obligation toward America was to protect life and property, while exports increased the overall wealth of the island, the system survived in relative stability.

The pattern of American intervention in Cuban affairs was inadvertently presaged by the paternalistic American governor of Cuba, Leonard Wood, from 1900 to 1902. While Wood is rightly admired as a firm but fair administrator of genuinely healthy public works programs, his being called “one of the greatest colonial administrators in history,” betrays the fact that he was not supposed to treat Cuba as a colony. Since the Teller Amendment of 1898 provided for Cuba’s independence, the saga leading to the adoption of the Platt Amendment was indicative of America’s ambivalent role not only in Cuba but in the Caribbean as a whole. The governor before Wood, John R. Brooke, only performed the limited function of disarming the Cuban civilians, or, in the words of Secretary of War Elihu Root, “a lot of men most likely to make trouble in Cuba.” On one hand, Leonard Wood was a respectable choice for governor: he reformed countless areas of Cuban life; he released 520 prisoners and pardoned others; in the judicial sector, he eliminated corruption and fear by introducing Anglo-Saxon procedures such as habeas corpus; he reclaimed land from the Spanish-controlled Catholic Church; one of his appointees, Major Walter Reed, bravely eradicated most cases of yellow fever, malaria, tuberculosis, and smallpox by reforming sanitation; Wood also set up charities and a public school system, and called for the construction of roads, bridges, railroads and sewers. His social measures, on the other hand,

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9 Louis A. Pérez, Jr., Reform and Revolution, 194, 201-11.
11 Elihu Root, cited by, Louis A. Pérez, Jr., Army, 8; see also 6-7.
were as well-intentioned, but less successful: he established a rural guard for patrolling the countryside, but the lack of a standing army made golpes (coups d'état) easier; he abolished the lottery, but it was reintroduced after his departure; he abolished consumer taxes, but less revenue impoverished the government; finally, he tried to institute local self-government through municipal elections, but elected officials proved inexperienced. In the eyes of many Cubans, Wood left the island none too early.  

The Platt Amendment, however, being a long-term determinant of Cuban-American relations, was handled personally by the highest American diplomats. The terms of the amendment, initially part of an Army Appropriations Act, subsequently attached to the Cuban Constitution, were drafted in a letter from Elihu Root to Leonard Wood in February 1901. Root suggested five provisions to the Constitution: 1) that the United States approve of Cuba's external affairs, 2) that Cuba keep healthy finances and acquire no public debt, 3) that the United States retain the right of intervention "for the preservation of Cuban independence and the maintenance of a stable government, adequately protecting life, property, and individual liberty," 4) that acts of the military be "maintained and protected," and 5) that the United States acquire naval stations on the island. When Senator Orville Platt wrote his amendment, it contained the same provisions, practically word for word, and added provisions concerning sanitation, the Isle of Pines, and the signing of a formal treaty. While the United States Congress passed the amendment by a relatively narrow vote, Cubans were deeply divided over the issue. At first, widespread disapproval within the Cuban constitutional convention produced twenty-four votes against and only two in favor. The convention then sent a committee to Washington to lodge a formal protest in April 1901, where the delegates were personally greeted by Root. The Secretary of War warned them

\[12^\text{Fitzgibbon, Cuba, 33-54, 59-62.}\\
\[13^\text{Letter of Elihu Root, Secretary of War, to Major General Leonard Wood, military governor of Cuba, February 09, 1901,} \text{ cited by, Fitzgibbon, Cuba, 271-73.}\\
\[14^\text{Extract from 'An Act Making appropriation for the support of the Army for the fiscal year ending June thirtieth, nineteen hundred and two,' (the 'Platt Amendment'),} \text{ cited by, Fitzgibbon, Cuba, 272-73.}\\
\[15^\text{Showing the divisions in America, the Senate approved the treaty 43 to 20, with 25 abstentions; the House, 159 to 134, cited by, Fitzgibbon, Cuba, 79; for a description of anti-imperialism in the United States, also see, John Milton Cooper, Jr., "Progressives and American Foreign Policy: A Reconsideration," \text{Mid-America} 51 (1969): 260-77.}\\
that Cuban acceptance of the amendment was a prerequisite to the withdrawal of his country’s armed forces. He also hinted—without Congressional authority—that he would make commercial concessions and continued by stating that the United States would only interfere, according to one delegate, in case of “anarchy.” Since President McKinley had already signed the bill in March, enough delegates were convinced, and the amendment passed by the narrowest of margins, fifteen to fourteen. While historian Russell Fitzgibbon later concluded that “the Republic of Cuba was born at last and the United States had redeemed their pledge to the world,” the feeling of being an unofficial protectorate of America frustrated and humiliated many Cubans. One delegate exclaimed after the passage of the Platt Amendment, “Cuba is dead; we are enslaved forever,” and seventeen years later, a member of the Cuban House of Representatives still felt that “Cuba is no more independent than Long Island.” Ironically, that same political caste was opposed to annexation when it was proposed a few times by United States Senators—perhaps it had grown too used to the spoils system.  

After the withdrawal of the United States in 1902, American leaders assumed they had established a stable government in Cuba and they would not have recourse to the Platt Amendment, but further decisions rested principally on the shoulders of a great proponent of interference, President Theodore Roosevelt. Prompted by other Caribbean events, Roosevelt in 1904 declared the Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, stating his intention to exercise “an international police power” over nations who were not “civilized.” Cuba was then offered as an example of a successful independent nation. However, the political system of Conservative Cuban President Tomás Estrada Palma broke down in 1906. As rival gangs of old generals fought over public spoils and fraudulent elections, and as Rural Guard violence against Liberals increased, the Corollary solidified Roosevelt’s basis for intervention. Walter LaFeber sees an ironic twist in the Rough Rider’s interpretation: the Monroe Doctrine,
originally written to protect South American revolutions, was now used to put down a Cuban revolt.\footnote{17}

The need for a second American occupation, from 1906 to 1909, signaled a basic incompatibility between Cuba’s economic and political systems, but the United States reacted with only nominal political corrections. The decision to land troops—Roosevelt’s, entirely—was prompted by threats to American property coming from the agitation of the 1905 presidential elections. Estrada Palma, representing the Moderate (later Conservative) party, had been a collaborator and a conciliator of Cuban-American relations, but now faced accusations of fraud from the Liberal opposition during the preliminaries. As in 1901, the accusation was well-founded, according to Russell Fitzgibbon, who described an election with “no issues, only personalities,” permeated by “rioting, theft, arson, and even murder.” The Liberals thus refused to vote, and began terrorizing Estrada Palma’s government, which had no standing army to protect it. Roosevelt and American diplomats were surprised at this sudden violence, and the President sent troops but refused to use them. When American \textit{chargé d’affaires}, Jacob Sleeper and Commander Colwell, on 13 September 1906, decided to land a battalion ashore, they received a sharp reprimand from their Commander-in-Chief: “You had no business to direct the landing of those troops. . . . The forces are to be used only to protect American life and property.” Indeed, Roosevelt waited until Consul General Frank Steinhart cabled him—apparently in Estrada Palma’s behalf—that rebels threatened to burn and pillage foreign property. In a letter he sent to the Cubans, however, Roosevelt spoke not of protecting property but of “anarchy,” and he sent Secretary of War William Taft to Cuba along with 2,000 troops. Estrada Palma resigned against Roosevelt’s advice, and Taft established a provisional government with himself as temporary governor.\footnote{18}

Historians are divided over the nature of Governor Charles Magoon’s three-year occupation of the island. Some see the former real estate tycoon’s tenure as a corrup:

extension of the spoils system by a man who “spoke no Spanish and ran Cuba as if it were Chicago,” transforming a $13 million surplus into a $12 million debt. Others speak of a less-admired Leonard Wood, who further eradicated yellow fever and filth, established more equitable election laws, and ended up with a near $3 million surplus! The evidence indicates that, while the country was effectively centralized around American institutions, like the Bureau of Insular Affairs and the Army of Occupation, which controlled customs houses, prevented a resurgence of revolt by instituting a permanent army, and conducted relatively fair elections in 1908, Magoon sold public works contracts to American companies, looked the other way when spoils were distributed, and used pardons liberally. Although American diplomats were generally proud of Liberal leader José Miguel Gómez’s honest victory in 1908, backed by a now-solid army, they downplayed the 1906-1909 intervention they had not wanted in the first place in order to get Taft elected in his own country.

The next American intervention, in 1912, should have made clear the fact that Cuba’s instability was not going to go away, but this time “dollar diplomacy” was the panacea. Irene Wright, writing in 1912, called for the creation of a “colonial department” as a step toward recognizing that “the ‘crisis’ which seems to exist, eternal and omnipresent, in Cuba is not... political at all, but economic.” Half-admitting this, Taft and Secretary of State Philander Knox now intended to stay out of the Caribbean militarily, using only commercial means to conduct diplomacy. They were quickly tested, however, as riots erupted in Cuba when the Independent Colored party defied a law forbidding race-based political parties. When Knox sent five hundred troops and two battleships to Guantánamo Bay to protect sugar mills and American lives, he justified his actions to Gómez by declaring, “this is not intervention.” The election of 1912, however, brought Mario García Menocal and the Conservatives to power,

21Pratt, Colonial Experiment, 154; Langley, Twentieth Century, 43. The author writes, “the election of 1908, conducted under the new rules, were probably the fairest in Cuban history”; for statistics on the elections, also see, Schroeder, Statistics, 519; Pérez, Army, 26; Fitzgibbon, Cuba, 145.
along with a pro-American attitude. By then, the reins of American diplomacy were in the hands of President Woodrow Wilson and Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, who advocated a hands-off policy they termed the "New Freedom."21

However, the very next election showed Wilson that even he, the supporter of self-determination, could not keep his hands off Cuba. True to his republican principles, Wilson above all wished to protect whatever government was in place on the island. During the 1916 Cuban presidential contest, three Conservative presidents of electoral boards were killed, and 800,000 votes were cast, while the census of 1919 would show a potential of only 477,786 voters. Wilson backed Menocal, but by February 1917, the Liberals had decided on revolution, and were strengthened by the Central Electoral Board's and Supreme Court's pronouncement of Liberal candidate Alfredo Zayas as the winner. Because Cuba declared war on Germany one day after the United States, Wilson could send 2,600 troops to "train" in Cuba, and Menocal remained president.22 By the end of World War I, the United States had established a fairly consistent pattern of intervention, but it was to face a changing Cuban population.

It was in the 1920s when Cuba first felt the pernicious possibilities of a monoculture economy. Historian Ramon Ruiz uses the term "bitter sweet" to describe the roller coaster of prosperity and pauperism attached to the dominance of sugar on the insular economy. At the end of World War I, controls on sugar were suddenly abandoned, and a wild speculation produced what came to be called the "dance of the millions" in 1920, referring to how much was won or lost. The price per pound of sugar soared from 10 cents on 02 March, to 13 cents on 01 April, 18 cents on 18 April, and finally, to a high of 22.5 cents on 19 May. The descent was as sudden, and proved disastrous: after May, for each following month, the price


fell respectively to 19, 17, 15 and 09 cents, reaching 3.75 cents on 13 December 1920. The rest of the decade witnessed a slow decline in the price, to an average of 1.826 cents per pound in 1929. While the chaotic year 1920 saw many sugar properties pass from Cuban to American ownership, the boom period came after 1923, when Cuba enjoyed a good harvest and a $50 million loan from J. P. Morgan & Company, and imports from the United States totaled $193 million while exports to them reached $359 million. The decade saw Cuba’s highest production of sugar, reaching over five million tons in 1925, nearly 22% of world production. As production grew, however, so did American control. American investments in Cuba reached the staggering figure of $1.36 billion in 1924, a far cry from the fifty millions of the war period, even less than Olney’s $95 million estimate. “By 1925,” concludes Ramon Ruiz, “the requirements of cheap sugar had imposed on the formerly sleepy island an agro-industrial wage economy of huge mill-complexes (centrales), renter planters (colonos), and seasonal labor.” Ruiz adds that more Cubans were driven to work in the cane fields, while harvest time, la zafra, was shortened by technological improvements from four to two months.

For various reasons, the class structure that emerged in the twenties moved Cubans to resent American hegemony over the island. The number of planters and peasants losing their land to foreign companies increased, and though they sometimes found employment in these caompanies, it was for decreasing wages. While the general population resented this loss of income, a new, nationalistic middle class was emerging. It was formed by a union of the old Cuban sugar elite--displaced by American owners after 1920 and funneled into professional roles--with a new generation of young professionals, business owners, and teachers who matured in the 1920s. Many of them were sons of immigrants who now identified themselves as Cubans and had not lived through the war. This entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, a product of the boom of the 1920s, but feeling their existence was precarious, demanded protectionist policies for Cuban industries, an end to political misconduct, and the
establishment of a merit system. Associating their woes with the existence of the Platt Amendment, the new nationalists posed a direct challenge to American and the Cuban political elite.\textsuperscript{25}

During the early 1920s, writes the former diplomat and later historian Dana Munro, the United States was “confronted not by a choice between a good and a bad course of action, but by a choice among courses of action all of which [were] bad.” This is an accurate statement to the extent that American policy-makers genuinely endeavored to let the Cuban government decide its future, as long as it remained stable and friendly to United States interests. “Retrenchment” was the key word after the war, says Lester Langley, but once again, economic imperatives produced largely political solutions. When, in the middle of 1920, speculative drives forced the Banco Internacional de Cuba and many other banks to suspend payments, President Menocal felt obliged to decree a moratorium on all debt payments, leaving Havana importers with no cash to pay for goods.\textsuperscript{26} The Cuban elections could not have come at a worse time or been more unruly. Alfredo Zayas defected from the Liberal party to ally himself with the Conservatives and clinch the presidential election, where, once again, Gómez and the Liberals boycotted voting and claimed fraud. Facing an illegitimate government racked by a $12 to $24 million price tag on bank closings, newly-appointed Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes refused to change policy by calling for a new election. He decided to adapt to the fact that his predecessors had dispatched General Enoch Crowder, as personal representative of the president, to restore Cuba’s finances to normality and regulate the election process. According to most historians, Crowder’s presence became almost a \textit{de facto} occupation. Staying in Cuba two years, he exercised such great influence upon the policies of Zayas, historian Dana Munro recounts, “Zayas found himself depicted in a Cuban newspaper cartoon, pen in hand, asking: ‘Which name shall I sign, Crowder or Zayas?’.” Indeed, Crowder’s recommendations on political reforms, reductions in government expenditures, revisions in the banking structure, termination of the

\textsuperscript{24} Schroeder, \textit{Statistics}, 445; Ruiz, \textit{Making}, 42-44.

\textsuperscript{25} Pérez, \textit{Reform and Rebellion}, 231-34; Langley, \textit{Twentieth Century}, 122.
national lottery, and corruption in public works contracts often became Zayas policies. Crowder also made possible the J. P. Morgan loan, and "approved" of Zayas's much-admired "honest cabinet." Certainly many of these reforms were beneficial to the island, and Cubans responded with mixed feelings of hurt pride and gratitude. However, because the price of sugar had been stabilized and a crisis narrowly averted by the time of Crowder's departure, the island's fundamental economic dependency had not been addressed.27

The Tarafa controversy of 1923 showed Cubans just how directly foreign investors controlled the island's destiny. Most of the railroads in Cuba were owned either by English interests, or by one of two American companies--the Cuba Company in the eastern and central provinces, and Consolidated Railways of Cuba in the north. The latter's president, Colonel José Tarafa, introduced to the Cuban Congress a bill intending to consolidate railway transportation of sugar, but his initiative was opposed by the American sugar interests who shipped their product from their own ports and did not see the use of transporting it across the island on rails. Historians Nearing and Freeman have claimed that "organized bribery" assured the passage of the Tarafa bill. They also concluded harshly in 1925, "this method of control avoids the costs of colonization while it leaves a free field to the American interests. The ownership of Cuba lies almost completely in the hand of the National City Bank."28

However, most United States diplomats did not see a relation between their country's economic power and the fact, displayed again in 1924, that not a single presidential term in Cuba could go smoothly. The election of Gerardo Machado y Morales seemed for a moment to signal a new type of rule over Cuba. Machado presented himself as the representative of the anti-Platt middle class union of the old elite and new professionals, while, at the same time, he maintaining friendly relations with the United States. Such a cooperativista approach reassured both Cubans and American businessmen for a while, allowing Machado to implement public works projects and constitutional changes, such as woman suffrage and

26 Dana G. Munro, The United States and the Caribbean Republics, 1921-1933 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), ix; Langley, Twentieth Century, 98; Fitzgibbon, Cuba, 166.
extended one-term limits, with less graft than his predecessors. However, his conservative policies toward the United States, and the breaking of his promise not to run in 1928, gave birth to a growing nationalistic opposition. Representatives of commerce, industry, and finance, along with physicians, architects, professors, artists, feminist organizations, Afro-Cuban associations, and Catholic groups, formed political pressure groups aimed at the abrogation of the Platt Amendment, which now took on a emotionally-charged symbolism.\textsuperscript{29} By 1929, admits Julius Pratt, America’s attitude toward Cuba had degenerated into “disillusionment and skepticism,” reinforced by the fact that strategic arguments no longer applied after World War I and economic dependency was laid bare.\textsuperscript{30} The world-wide economic crisis of the Great Depression would not help.

“In the end,” claims Louis Pérez, “sugar shaped the national character.” This was never truer than after the 1929 stock market crash and its aftershocks spurred a revolutionary movement in Cuba. The price of sugar fell from an average of 2.46 cents per pound in 1928, to 1.50 cents in 1930, and 0.93 cents two years later. As elsewhere during the Depression, dropping prices did not correspond to increased sales, as Cuba’s sugar production plunged from over five million tons in 1929, to less than two million tons in 1933, and its balance of trade remained positive but dropped from $56.7 million to less than $5 million. The United States in 1933 furnished only 53.5% of Cuba’s imports, down from 67.3% a decade earlier, and bought only 67.7% of its exports, down from 87%. Cuba tried to restrict production, and the Cuban Sugar Institute fixed a price at 2.29 3/4 cents per pound, but found the price would not hold against international market pressures. Wages were devastated: from 1929 to 1932, the daily pay of cane cutters fell from $1.60 to $0.50, that of sugar mill operatives, $2.00 to $0.80. In the tobacco industry, field workers now received $0.80 per day, down


\textsuperscript{30}Pratt, \textit{Colonial Experiment}, 313.
from $1.50, while elsewhere in the economy stevedores’ salaries dropped from $3.00 to $2.50, and painters’ from $3.00 to $1.50.31

The Depression left many Cubans reeling from the shock, but also angry, and willing to agree with Russell Fitzgibbon’s assertion in 1935, “it would seem that Cuba’s best solution lies in ridding herself to a greater degree of her fatal dependence on sugar.” Class antagonisms had clearly been exacerbated, and the victims of the Depression were all too willing to blame the Platt Amendment. For example, labor organizations like that of the sugar workers, the first national union in Cuba, were springing up in reaction to hardships, and many strikes paralyzed the island from 1929 to 1932, often repressed by violence. But the energy and idealism of the movement came mainly from youth movements, often associated with intellectuals and professors. Imbued by a revival of war hero José Martí’s faith in Cuba, they called for broad revision of Cuba’s economy, including moderate land reform, nationalization of key natural resources, labor legislation, elimination of corruption and cynicism in politics, and of course, abrogation of the Platt Amendment. These “extrainstitutional opponents,” as Pérez calls them, were “urban professionals frustrated politically by the monopoly of power exercised by the Libertador ruling elite.” The new opposition was too alienated from the system of patronage and fixed elections, and after 1929, could not be incorporated into it.32

Discontent with the machadista regime grew so strong in the early 1930s as to drive the president from power in 1933, creating a temporary state of chaos within the country, to which the United States reacted with characteristic disbelief. Many events provoked Cuban anger. In 1929, reacting to professors’ complaints that “they could not teach with soldiers in the classrooms,” Machado had the University of Havana closed, as well as many high schools and teachers colleges. The students and their leaders protested, and some formed the ABC Movement, named so because its terrorist factions were lettered A, B, C, and so on. As strikes and terrorist acts on both sides multiplied, Machado ignored pleas from his own staff

31 Pérez, Reform and Rebellion, ix; Schroeder, Statistics, 413, 261, 190; Fitzgibbon, Cuba, 219-76.
for agrarian reform, and announced he would rule until 1935. President Hoover was
disconcerted but Secretary of State Henry Stimson refused to intervene, to the chagrin of
some members of Congress: “It is characteristic of the American dollar diplomacy at its
worst,” railed Representative Fish, “anything to protect property investments, regardless of
human rights and the liberties of the Cuban people.”

The election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt as president brought a more ambivalent
United States policy in Cuba. On the day of his inauguration, 04 March 1933, he proclaimed
his “good neighbor” policy:

the neighbor who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects
the rights of others—the neighbor who respects his obligations and respects the
sanctity of his agreements in and with a world of neighbors.

However, events in Cuba made Secretary of State Cordell Hull and American investors
nervous, so Hull sent Sumner Welles to the island in May as ambassador extraordinary and
plenipotentiary, with specific instructions to mediate between Machado and his adversaries
in order to avoid military intervention. Events quickly proved out of Welles’s control. In
August, a general strike and increasing murders by police convinced Welles to pressure
Machado to resign. “A public orgy greeted the news of his [Machado’s] flight from Cuba,”
recounts Ramón Ruiz. “In their thirst for revenge, crazed mobs jammed the streets of
Havana, looting, stealing, and killing porristas (Machado’s thugs) . . . Some were literally
hacked to pieces.” He was replaced by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, who lasted only twenty-
four days, when he was driven from power by a revolutionary junta backed by the students,
called the “Pentarchy,” for its shared power by five rulers. Of the five, a National University
physician, Ramón Grau San Martín, was eventually named president. He espoused most of
the revolutionary ideals, and quickly instituted reforms. In September he declared a unilateral
annulment of the Platt Amendment and passed an eight-hour day law; in October he

32 Fitzgibbon, Cuba, 236; Pérez, Reform and Rebellion, 253-55; particularly telling was the fact that
labor unrest was most prominent in foreign-owned industries, such as utilities, transportation, and sugar, Pérez,
Army, 60; Ruiz, Making, 79-80; Pérez, Army, 62-64.
33 Ruiz, Making, 78; Pratt, Colonial Experiment, 327-28; Langley, Twentieth Century, 124.
34 Franklin D. Roosevelt, cited by, Edwin Lieuwen, U. S. Policy in Latin America: A Short History
prohibited cheap labor from Haiti and Jamaica; and in November, he abolished machadista parties, lowered utility rates, and decreed that half of employees in industry and commerce had to be Cuban. He also suspended payments to the Chase National Bank and seized two sugar mills from the Cuban-American Sugar Company. Welles, obviously viewing Grau as a foe of American interests, was nonetheless limited by his president’s pledge of non-intervention, and by the bad publicity that might mar the upcoming December Pan-American conference. He shrewdly decided to stay aloof and withhold recognition, gambling that it would discredit the Grau presidency in the eyes of the world and the Cuban political elite. While Welles told Hull that Grau was not “adequate,” and “our own commercial and export interests cannot be revived under this government,” he further warned Grau by stationing between thirty and forty ships around the island.35

The coup that brought down Grau, engineered by Fulgencio Batista and approved by the United States, was to usher in a period of relative peace, but also a deeper interlacing of Cuban and American interests. Welles’s non-recognition of Grau permitted Batista and his group of non-commissioned army officers to grow in size and prestige, and force the resignation of the president on 15 January 1934. Carlos Mendieta, one of the military officials from the new middle class, became the first president to be “made and unmade” by Batista, until Batista installed himself as dictator in 1940. Diplomatic recognition by the United States followed a few days later.36 Hull and Welles also negotiated treaties supposedly freeing Cuba from American influence, but actually highlighting the salience of the single-crop relationship: the Platt Amendment was officially abrogated in a treaty four months after Grau’s departure, but the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act, passed in June and, according to Lester Langley, “virtually forced upon the republic,” lowered once more American duties for Cuban sugar and decreased taxes on American goods entering Cuba. The New Dealers had accepted that dictatorships were an efficient—if morally repulsive—way to maintain order in the commercial ties that bound not only Cuba, but the whole of Central

36Langley, Twentieth Century, 129; Pratt, Colonial Experiment, 329.
America, to United States imperatives. Adolf Berle, Jr., a genuine New Deal liberal and expert on Latin America, described the resulting stability in Cuba as “great luxury for a relatively small group in Havana and a small rise above the starvation level for the masses.”

An overall analysis of the causes of chronic political instability in Cuba from 1900 to 1934 would be incomplete without exploring other possible explanations. It is unfair to lay out economic evidence without asking if Cubans and Americans might have acted out of other, maybe purer motives. One explanation, advanced by early historians of Cuba, described political instability not simply as chronic, but as endemic or inherent in a Latin-blooded people. “The Cuban government was left free to develop into the type of corrupt dictatorship that was seemingly indigenous to the soil,” wrote Julius Pratt in 1950, leading him to conclude that “American intervention had unquestionably strengthened the financial positions of most of the governments concerned [in Latin America]. It had made no appreciable change in political attitudes or habits.” By using the racial—maybe even racist—panacea, Platt’s logic disconnects politics from economics. Increases in production and exports are good, he assumes, and so are stable politics; if the two do not correlate, race must be the missing link. Russell Fitzgibbon also suggested, in 1935, the inevitable Latin “temperament” as central: “the terms of the Platt Amendment merely enhanced and intensified a sense of psychological inferiority which probably would have existed in any case.” Of course, historians who adopted such dangerous and simplistic rationalizations received their cue from diplomats like Elihu Root who posited a basic difference between Anglo-Saxons and Latins: “Where we accumulate, they spend ... they have less of the inventive faculty which strives continually to increase the productive power of men.” Senator Orville Platt dismissed annexation because “the people of Cuba, by reason of race and characteristics, cannot easily be assimilated by us.”


more illegitimate is that, supposing they were true, they would apply only minimally to Cuba's case. Before the Spanish-American war, Cuba was mostly white, and the immigrants transforming its racial landscape were either white Spaniards or black Haitians and Jamaicans, the latter being far from "Latin." All that is left is a common language, Spanish, which would brand human beings as hot-blooded and anarchistic.

In addition, to insist on the importance of American strategic interests in Cuba is also misleading—if less pernicious. Admittedly the war against Spain was waged primarily to secure the Caribbean against European imperialism. Early American rhetoric toward Cuba, for example from Orville Platt or Theodore Roosevelt, consistently emphasized "peace" and "prosperity" as equal considerations, where the presence of American forces at Guantánamo Bay were a constant reminder. Nevertheless, not only were commercial interests larger in Cuba than anywhere else in Latin America, but strategic considerations were on the wane, especially after World War I. Therefore to base intervention on strategic considerations grew increasingly absurd.

Economic arguments, however, also have their limitations. One cannot simply assume that it would have been obviously the better—and more realistic—answer to let Cuba determine its future completely free of American influence. First, in 1902, when the Platt Amendment was added to the Cuban Constitution, few could have predicted the phenomenal rise in sugar exports, the increasingly interrelated national markets, and especially the destabilizing effects of World War I and the Great Depression. Second, even in the United States, the rise of industry and agro-business necessitated the existence of large corporations with high-capital capabilities, and the establishment of nationwide transportation facilities.

Yet a socio-economic perspective goes farthest in explaining how and why Cuba stagnated politically. American assumptions about their own right of investment, and right of intervention to protect that investment, ignored the devastating social effects on Cuba. They destroyed the traditional peasant and planter classes, exacerbated the poverty of farm

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workers, and produced a restless urban working class, a nationalistic middle class excluded from the political circles, and a political elite that could only find salvation in the spoils system of the bureaucracy or the army. From the beginning of the occupation to the abrogation of the Platt Amendment and beyond, America tied Cuba's future to that of an unpredictable world price on sugar, thus assuring an unstable, divided political culture based on class polarization, not ethnic behavior. Simply put, this classic Third World policy persistently failed Cuba and, in the long run, backfired on the United States itself. Diplomats did not realize that economic dependence would create desperate social classes and, eventually, the revolutionary situation of 1959. Had it been left to its own devices, the Cuban economy might have seen a similar, albeit slower, concentration of its capital directed to the world market by its own people. But at least, it would have been Cuba's capital, Cuba's failure or success, and in the long run, it might have avoided countless problems for its northern neighbor.
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