"OUR NEW CITIZENS, THE BLACKS"

The Politics of Freedom, 1810–1890

In March 1888, as the last slave system in the Americas was collapsing amid the mass flight of Brazilian slaves, a newspaper in Rio de Janeiro province published a satirical poem about a planter's efforts to hire newly freed libertos to work on his plantation.

> I went looking for blacks in the city
> Who might want to rent themselves out.
> I spoke to them humbly:
> "Blacks," I said, "do you want to work?"
> They looked at me askance,
> And one of them, ugly and crippled,
> Said to me, gasping and panting,
> "There are no more blacks, no:
> All of us today are citizens.
> Let the whites go work in the fields."[1]

While this is a vision of post-emancipation bargaining as seen from the perspective of the former slave owners, it nevertheless does express black hopes concerning the changes to be brought by emancipation.

The writer leaves no doubt of the damage done to these former slaves by slavery: the liberto's crippled condition, his shortness of breath. The author also stresses his own efforts at correct behavior and "humility," but then undercuts those assertions by noting, first, that he was looking for workers willing "to rent themselves out," an expression drawn directly from slavery, and, second, that he addressed them as *negros*, a term synonymous in colonial and nineteenth-century Brazil with "slaves." The planter was still operating under the assumptions and mindset of slavery—which meant that his efforts to hire workers to replace his former slaves were bound to fail. The people he was addressing had moved on to

FIGURE 3.1. "I went looking for blacks in the city . . ." Bahia, ca. 1900. Credit: Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

a new set of assumptions. "There are no more blacks, no"—that is, there are no more slaves. "All of us today are citizens." Did he mean all of us blacks are citizens? Or, an even more intriguing possibility, did he mean all of us Brazilians, planters and former slaves alike, are citizens, and therefore equal?

Across Afro-Latin America, the independence and nation-building struggles that ended slavery brought the Caste Regime to an end as well. At the same time that slaves were using the openings created by the independence wars to pursue freedom and emancipation, free blacks and mulattoes were capitalizing on wartime conditions to strike down the colonial racial laws. Indeed, partly because of the erosion of those laws during the final decades of colonial rule, and partly because of their relatively advantaged legal status, free blacks and mulattoes were able to push considerably further than the slaves. During the 1810s and 1820s, they achieved both the complete abolition of the caste laws and the enactment of laws and constitutions that, for the first time ever in the region's history, offered people of African ancestry full and equal citizenship in their respective nations. The

result was two centuries of struggle over the terms of that citizenship and over whether, and how, promises of equality would be honored in practice.

Independence

If rebel and Spanish commanders were initially uncertain whether slaves should serve in their armies, they had no such doubts concerning free people of color. Spain had actively recruited such troops into the colonial militia. And particularly in Colombia and Venezuela, and perhaps in Argentina and Mexico as well, independence was likely to be won or lost according to which side free black troops decided to support. After spending the previous 200 years living under the dictates of the Caste Regime, they would back whichever side made the clearest commitment to striking down those laws and declaring full racial equality.

The first such declaration was issued in Mexico, where in September 1810 rebel leader Miguel Hidalgo proclaimed the abolition of caste distinctions: "Indians, mulattos or other castes . . . all will be known as Americans." Following Hidalgo's defeat and execution early in 1811, José María Morelos, himself a person of mixed African-Indian ancestry, assumed command of the rebellion. He confirmed the revolution's commitment to racial equality, which, along with land reform and the abolition of slavery, became one of the cornerstones of the rebels' social program. Consistently preaching these reforms, Morelos recruited and trained a disciplined army of regulars drawn from the free black peasantry of the Costa Grande, the Pacific coastal region west of Acapulco. Between 1812 and 1814 these troops fought the Spanish to a standstill. Then in 1815 a reinforced Spanish army succeeded in pushing the rebels back to their coastal redoubts, in the process capturing Morelos and putting him to death.[2]

Morelos's army, greatly reduced, continued a sporadic guerrilla war under the command of Vicente Guerrero, another rebel commander of mixed African-Indian ancestry. Such a war had no prospect of victory, but Spanish troops proved equally unable to root out and destroy the rebels. Finally, in 1821 the Mexican-born commander of the Spanish forces, proposing to lead his majority-Mexican troops in a surprise bid for independence from Spain, offered a compromise settlement to Guerrero: neither the abolition of slavery nor the land reform proposed by Morelos would be enacted, but the Caste Regime would indeed come to an end: "All inhabitants of New Spain, without any distinction among Europeans, Africans, and Indians, [will be] citizens . . . with access to all positions according to their merits and virtues."[3] Guerrero agreed, and the caste laws were repealed as part of the price of independence and peace.

Revolutionaries in Argentina also took an early stand against the caste system. Free black militia units had played a crucial role in defeating attempted British invasions of Buenos Aires in 1806 and 1807. Seeking to enroll those units in the

newly formed rebel army, in 1811 the revolutionary junta in Buenos Aires declared black and Indian soldiers and officers to be equal in all respects to their white counterparts, and they repudiated the Caste Regime more generally: "The present government . . . must especially direct its efforts against those prejudices that . . . condemned until now a part of our population as numerous as it is capable of any great enterprise." Two years later, in 1813, the rebel government reminded authorities in the inland province of Córdoba of the need to seek out and promote talented officers and administrators, "even though their extraction and genealogical descent may not be the most accredited." All their efforts on behalf of the revolution would be in vain, rebel officials warned, "if the People do not experience the good effects of the promises made by this Government" to end discrimination and prejudice.[4]

Long-standing resentments and grievances among free blacks and mulattoes in the coastal cities of Colombia and Venezuela, and their high levels of participation in the colonial militias, made the question of racial equality absolutely central to independence struggles in those regions. In Cartagena, mulatto militiamen led by Afro-Cuban artisan Pedro Romero forced local authorities to declare the region's freedom from Spain in 1811. Romero and his followers demanded "equal rights for all the [racial] classes of citizens," and the constitution of the following year explicitly guaranteed those rights. But racial tensions persisted within the independence forces, leading to bloody fighting between white and mulatto militia units in 1815. Fatally weakened by these internal conflicts, the destroyed and depopulated city fell to the Spanish four months later and remained under Spanish occupation until 1820.[5]

Although Venezuelan elites had vehemently opposed Spain's relaxation of the caste laws during the late 1700s, as they now prepared to strike for freedom against Spain it was quite clear that they had no hope of victory without support from the pardos. In their Constitution of 1811 the revolutionaries therefore abolished all legal restrictions on free browns and blacks and even outlawed the use of the term "pardo."[6] But such measures could not overcome the antagonisms between Afro-Venezuelans and the white elites. The caste laws had divided colonial society into racial groups separated by anger, fear, envy, and resentments that, under the turbulent conditions of war, now came boiling to the surface. Furthermore, as the pardos had fought back in the 1790s and early 1800s against the white elites' racism and intolerance, they had found their principal source of support in the new laws and decrees emanating from Spain and enforced locally by the royal appellate court established in Caracas in 1787.[7] When given the choice between throwing in their lot with the Creoles or opting for continued Spanish rule and perhaps a chance to avenge themselves against their tormentors, many pardos chose the latter. Shortly after the announcement of the new constitution, free blacks and pardos in the city of Valencia rose in rebellion against the Creoles. Be-

tween 1812 and 1815 Afro-Venezuelan cavalrymen from the southern plains formed the bulk of the royalist forces under José Tomás Boves that defeated the rebel armies, retook Caracas, and drove Simón Bolívar and his supporters into exile. Boves cemented his black troops' loyalty with cries of "death to the whites" and declarations that "the whites' property belongs to the pardos." As a result, reported a Spanish official in the colony, it was "proverb[ial] . . . that the pardos were faithful [to Spain] and the white creoles revolutionary."[8]

During the second half of the 1810s, pardo support for the royalist cause began to weaken. Responding both to the French invasion of 1807 and the independence rebellions in the New World, in 1812 the Spanish Cortes produced Spain's first written constitution. That constitution granted citizenship to American-born whites, Indians, and mestizos but explicitly denied it to Americans "who on either side [maternal or paternal] derive their origin from Africa," and it left in place the caste laws governing blacks and mulattoes.[9] Boves's death in 1814, and the arrival from Spain of a massive expeditionary force the following year, led to the breakup of Boves's army and the demotion and displacement of many of his pardo commanders. Amid growing fears that the pardo troops might constitute themselves as an independent force, Spanish officers disbanded the Afro-Venezuelan units and reassigned their members to the newly arrived Spanish regiments. The pardo forces responded by deserting en masse and returning to their homes in the plains, where they fought on as independent marauders and bandits only loosely tied, if at all, to the royalist cause.[10]

Meanwhile the rebels continued their active courting of pardo support. They had retaliated against Boves's calls for race war against the whites with declarations of a "war to the death" against all Spaniards, soldiers and civilians alike, who failed to join the rebel cause. The policy specifically exempted the royalist pardos, however: "Spaniards and Canarians, depend upon it, you will die, even if you are simply neutral. . . . Americans, you will be spared, even when you are culpable."[11] The rebels continually reiterated the revolution's commitment to racial equality and promoted free blacks and pardos to positions of command in the rebel forces.[12]

Changes in the caste laws were equally dramatic in Brazil, where the Constitution of 1824 declared the legal equality of all freeborn Brazilian citizens. (Libertos freed from slavery possessed full civil and legal rights but were barred from serving as electors or holding public office.) Unlike the countries of Spanish America, Brazil had avoided a prolonged war for independence and widespread mobilization of its slave and free black populations. Nevertheless, Afro-Brazilians had made abundantly clear their resentment of the caste laws: "Equal opportunity for all without regard to race or color was their primary aspiration." For free blacks and mulattoes, "the fight for independence was first of all a battle against whites and their privileges."[13]

That battle had begun in Bahia in the Tailors' Revolt of 1798, in which mulatto soldiers and artisans had gathered to plot an uprising based on the principles of the French and Haitian Revolutions. Their immediate grievances were the differential treatment of black and white soldiers in the city's garrison, and the absence of Afro-Brazilian officers in high levels of command. "Every soldier is a citizen," proclaimed placards posted around the city, "particularly the brown and black men who are abused and abandoned. All are equal. There is no difference." The conspirators broadened their program beyond just military questions to include full independence, the declaration of a republic based on electoral democracy, the abolition of slavery, and full equality between blacks and whites.[14]

The revolt was repressed by Bahian police before it had even begun. But free black desires for racial equality continued to simmer beneath the surface of colonial political life, to explode once again in the republican uprising of 1817 in Pernambuco. Initially led by white planters and merchants angered at royal controls over local commerce, the rebellion soon unleashed the pent-up aspirations of Recife's free blacks and mulattoes. A Portuguese observer caught in the city during the revolt recalled how "the half-castes, mulattoes, and blacks went about in such an insolent manner that they kept saying we were all equal." Under pressure from the free black population and its leading agitator, mulatto tailor José de Ó Barbosa, the briefly installed revolutionary government condemned the caste laws and declared itself in favor of racial equality. "Never can we believe," it proclaimed, "that, by virtue of being darker or lighter, men lose their original condition of equality." Following the defeat of the rebels, the Portuguese commander devoted particular attention to restoring order among the free black population, ordering "the public and bloody whipping," noted another Portuguese observer, "of free mulattoes, fathers of families, blacks, a few whites, etc."[15]

Brazilian elites were perfectly aware of free blacks' desire for racial equality. They were aware as well of the need for free black support, not in the independence wars that never materialized but in the "state of domestic war," as a royal advisor put it in 1818, that existed between masters and their slaves.[16] As more Africans were imported into Brazil during the 1820s than in any other decade in Brazilian history, the Haitian experience weighed increasingly on the minds of slave owners and government officials. Nineteenth-century jurist Perdigão Malheiro described slavery as "a volcano . . . a bomb ready to explode with the first spark," and slave rebellion was most likely, he noted, during periods when the free population was divided by internal disputes and conflict.[17] Keeping control over Brazil's slave population required that the free population maintain a united front against them. Such unity could only be achieved if Afro-Brazilians were granted full legal equality.

Thus by 1825 formal caste restrictions came to an end in Spanish America and Brazil in much the same way that slavery had, through free blacks and mulattoes

exploiting moments of political crisis and instability to win major concessions from newly established national governments. But while those governments claimed to have embraced the principle of racial equality, in practice it proved difficult to throw over racial attitudes, assumptions, ideas, and behavior that, after three centuries of Spanish and Portuguese rule, had become deeply inscribed in the life of the region. In the same year that Brazilian elites approved their new constitution, the Ministry of Justice handed down a decree mandating punishments for "black capoeiristas" convicted of disorderly conduct. Responding to objections that the new law lumped together free blacks and slaves (as had often been done in colonial decrees) and excluded whites from its provisions entirely, the Ministry quickly amended the ruling to distinguish between slaves and free blacks and to include whites as well. The following year, however, the Ministry issued new public order statutes that set two different curfew hours, one for whites and the other for free blacks and slaves, and instructed local police chiefs to repress any gathering that threatened public order, "especially gatherings of blacks, slave or free."[18]

Throughout Spanish America and Brazil, racial assumptions inherited from the colonial period remained very much in force. Members of the white elites and middle class sought to maintain the privileges of whiteness by openly flouting government efforts to enforce racial equality and integration. Despite repeated decrees by the Brazilian government mandating the end of segregation in Catholic brotherhoods, racial separation continued.[19] Elite social clubs and civic organizations remained almost exclusively white or fought to become so, as in the case of the Sociedad de Amigos del País in Caracas, which in 1834 proposed to bar pardos from membership and even argued for a restoration of the caste laws.[20]

In all the new republics, education was theoretically open to blacks and mulattoes, a promise that was at least partially realized.[21] But racial barriers continued to restrict black access to learning. In Argentina the University of Córdoba admitted only a handful of pardos during the 1820s and 1830s, and then it closed its doors to them in 1844; not a single student of color was admitted to the University of Buenos Aires. Elementary schools in Córdoba were opened to pardos in 1829, but only two such students per year were permitted to enter the city high school. Buenos Aires and Montevideo maintained segregation in the public schools by creating separate institutions for white children and children of color.[22]

For two centuries free blacks and mulattoes had suffered the economic, social, and psychological consequences of second- and third-class citizenship. Now that that experience was over, they were insistent that it be *completely* over. "Equality under the law is not enough in view of the [black and mulatto] people's current mood," observed Simón Bolívar in 1825. "They want absolute equality on both public and social levels": equality in practice as well as in principle.[23]

Bolívar went on to express the fear that, as part of that drive for equality, "they will demand that the darker skinned elements should rule. This will ultimately lead to the extermination of the privileged class" and "pardocracy": rule by the pardos. Such fears of black vengefulness and lust for power were widely held among white elites.[24] Yet vengeance was not what most Afro-Latin Americans were seeking. Bolívar had it right the first time: free blacks and mulattoes were demanding the full rights of citizenship. And in return for the promise of those rights, they willingly accepted the obligations of citizenship, serving in provincial and national armed forces and taking part in the contentious party politics of the early republican years. In so doing they played a central role in shaping the new republics and in defining the contours of national politics.

Black Liberalism

In every country of Afro-Latin America, those politics were organized around struggles between "conservatives" and "liberals," two labels that by the 1840s and 1850s had started to solidify into national party structures. Both parties drew from the full spectrum of Latin American society, from wealthy landowners to poverty-stricken peasants; and party allegiance was often determined more by personal ties of kinship and friendship (to which party did one's family, friends, and patrons belong?) than by questions of ideology or program. But especially in Spanish America, there was a clear tendency for traditional elites—powerful landowners and merchants who had monopolized wealth and privilege under colonialism and proposed to continue doing so under independence—to cluster in the Conservative Party, which in turn stood for the preservation of as much of the colonial heritage (Catholicism, social and racial hierarchy, large landed estates) as possible.

Liberal Parties also drew support from elite landowners and merchants. But their principal appeal was to social groups that had been excluded from positions of power and privilege during the colonial period and who were now seeking to make their way upward in the new, post-independence world. Liberalism thus spoke to economic elites from outlying provinces far removed from centers of power in the former colonial capitals. It spoke as well to middle- and lower-class groups, and especially to middle- and lower-class nonwhites, who had suffered social and political exclusion on the basis of both their class status and their racial status. The explicitly egalitarian rhetoric of liberalism—which invoked the concepts of civic equality, political democracy, and the rights of citizenship—touched a powerful chord with these longtime victims of colonial absolutism and social hierarchy. Liberalism offered the promise of overturning both evils and ushering in the "absolute equality, on both public and social levels," that free

blacks and mulattoes had fought for in the independence wars and continued to fight for over the course of the 1800s.[25]

Time and again Afro-Latin Americans explained and justified their struggle in terms of rights and citizenship. In Colombia, immediately after the 1811 declaration of independence in Cartagena, free black men and women in that city began to accord themselves the title of "citizen" as they recorded their names in parish birth, marriage, and death registries. In language deriving in equal part from the colonial-period rhetoric of slave rights and the post-independence rhetoric of liberalism, a group of libertos writing to the governor of Cauca in 1852 described themselves as "inhabitants of the San Julián hacienda to which once we belonged as slaves, before you [now] in the exercise of our rights as citizens." Petitioning the government in 1878, Afro-Colombian river boatmen demanded that "we . . . be treated like citizens of a republic and not like the slaves of a sultan." Afro-Panamanian Liberals denounced the "slow and imperfect" integration of blacks and mulattoes into national life following emancipation and called for a "broadening of citizenship" to include nonwhites in full political participation.[26]

The struggle for that broadened citizenship was carried out in part through party and electoral politics.[27] In much of Afro-Latin America, however, it also took place through armed confrontation and civil war, with the result that, in country after country, free blacks and mulattoes formed the backbone of liberal rebellions, guerrilla movements, and armies. In many cases it was difficult for observers to determine whether an uprising was a racially motivated "black" rebellion or the product of a broader liberal coalition. Given the anxieties and insecurities of the day, such a distinction was fundamentally important to white elites. Rebellions or other movements perceived as being too "black" in character ignited fears of "caste war" (the local term for race war), another Haiti, and the possible "extermination of the privileged class." Thus initial elite support for the 1817 republican rebellion in Pernambuco, Brazil, soon cooled in the face of massive free black and mulatto support for the uprising. This was also the case seven years later in anti-monarchical rebellions in Pernambuco, Bahia, and other northeastern Brazilian states. In 1828, as Simón Bolívar prepared to suspend Colombia's liberal Constitution of 1822 and impose a centralist dictatorship, pardo Admiral José Padilla led the black population of Cartagena in a federalist (anti-centralist) rebellion. Padilla's overtly racial appeals, and the open hostility of his followers to local whites, had the "effect of rallying all the people of property and influence around the person of General Bolívar" and alienating all white support for the uprising, which was soon defeated. This sequence of events repeated itself in Panama in 1830, when mulatto General José Domingo Espinar led black artisans and urban laborers in a liberal, federalist uprising against the government in

Bogotá. Local elites soon turned on Espinar, and he was defeated by an army raised by local hacendados.[28]

In 1829 Lima was briefly rocked by rumors of a conspiracy led by black artisan Juan de Dios Algorta, the goals of which, according to a local newspaper, were to "overthrow the government [of conservative President Agustín Gamarra] and assassinate the whites."[29] Nothing came of that plot, but in Mexico that year free black and mulatto militia units from the Veracruz and Acapulco coasts marched on Mexico City to install former independence leader Vicente Guerrero, a man of mixed African-Indian ancestry, and a radical liberal and federalist, in the presidency. Guerrero and his supporters nourished bitter memories of the Spanish caste laws, Spanish tax collectors, Spanish domination (largely enabled by the caste laws) of wholesale and retail commerce, and the brutal Spanish repression of the Morelos insurgency of the early 1810s. Once in power, Guerrero signed decrees expelling all Spaniards from Mexico, abolishing slavery, and barring imports of manufactured goods that competed with those produced by local artisans. Frightened and appalled by the overtly populist tone of his administration, conservatives called for "death to the *negro* Guerrero," overthrew him after less than a year in power, and executed him by firing squad.[30]

Similar tensions festered in Brazil, where Portuguese merchants and artisans had made free use of colonial caste laws against their black and mulatto competitors and had celebrated their racial superiority by scornful references to Afro-Brazilians as *cabras* (goats; a pejorative term for mulattoes) and *macacos* (monkeys). In turn, blacks and mulattoes mocked the immigrants' racial pretensions by ridiculing them as *caiados*, "whitewashed ones." Following independence in 1822, urban mobs attacked Portuguese shops and stores and demanded their expulsion from the country. Crowds in Recife and Salvador jeered:

> The sailors and the "whitewashed,"
> All of them to hell,
> For only blacks and browns
> In this our land shall dwell.

In the national capital of Rio de Janeiro, mobs called for the deportation of Portuguese immigrants and the replacement of Portuguese-born Emperor Pedro I with his Brazilian-born son Pedro II, "a cabra like us." The young Pedro was in fact white, not a cabra, but the city's poor were trying to claim him as one of their own and to distinguish his Brazilian nationality from the "whitewashed" origins of his father. As in Mexico, their agitation had its effect: partly in response to popular pressure, partly in order to attend to dynastic politics in Lisbon, Pedro I abdicated in 1831 and returned to Portugal, leaving the Brazilian throne to his five-year-old son.[31]

The temporary weakness of the monarchy following Pedro's abdication opened the door to a second wave (after the 1810s and 1820s) of anticentralist rebellions. These uprisings—the War of the Cabanos in Pernambuco (1832–35), the Cabanagem revolt in Pará (1835–40), the Balaiada in Maranhão (1835–40), and the Sabinada in Bahia (1837–38)—all followed a similar trajectory. Angered by commercial, fiscal, political, or other forms of intervention in their affairs by the central government, local elites launched insurrections aimed either at full secession or at winning higher levels of local autonomy from the government in Rio de Janeiro. Amid the turmoil unleashed by these rebellions, the free black, slave, and Indian populations joined in with their own sets of demands. In the face of these popular uprisings, local elites soon lost their taste for rebellion and defected to the government side, passing leadership of the revolts to members of the middle and lower classes.

Thus provincial authorities in Maranhão contemptuously dismissed the Balaiada rebels as "people of the lowest class of society" and their leaders as men "without political influence, of plebian background, and colored" or, on another occasion, as men "without fortune, without honor, and colored." The rebels entirely agreed with this characterization. Indeed, it was precisely their lack of "honor," fortune, and political influence that had moved them to rebel and to speak on behalf of their plebeian followers. "The Citizens are the Whites and the Rich," proclaimed a rebel manifesto, "and all the people of Color, whom they habitually despise, suffer the heavy yoke of absolutism and slavery." The rebels accused the government of having continued the discriminatory practices of the Caste Regime in hopes of maintaining racial hierarchy and division. The elites "want to take the blood of three men, one White, one Mulatto, and one Indian, put it in one glass, and then show us their blood divided from each other. Brazilians, look well on this division and disunion; just because they have lighter skin they want to rob us of the rights that we all have under divine and human Law."[32]

In their racial and class composition and political orientation, these Brazilian rebellions were strikingly similar to liberal rebellions of the same period in Spanish America, in which majority-nonwhite peasants and slaves confronted majority-white elites to demand racial equality and the full rights of citizenship. Only one of the Brazilian rebellions, however, expressed its goals and aims explicitly in the language of liberalism. This was the Sabinada revolt in Bahia, so named for its principal leader, mulatto physician Francisco Sabino. Of the rebellions of this period, it was the only urban-based one; and in Salvador, as in other northeastern cities, "the most radical elements, those who imagined a republican Brazil, or at least a federalist [decentralized] Brazil, were pardos from poor or middling families."[33] It was those pardos who transformed what was initially a barracks rebellion of disgruntled military officers—many of whom, along with

virtually all of the garrison's enlisted men, were Afro-Brazilian—into a full-blown secessionist movement.

Withdrawal from the nation-state was justified, the rebels argued, by the government's failure to extend the full rights of citizenship to blacks and mulattoes or to promote talented Afro-Brazilians in either the civilian or military administrations.[34] The government is "warring against us because they are whites, and in Bahia there must be no blacks and mulattos, especially in office, unless they are very rich and change their liberal opinions." Such language immediately alienated white support for the rebellion and led most white inhabitants to flee the city, leaving it "entirely colored," according to the British consul. "Infuriated black and mulatto mobs" attacked Portuguese immigrants and other foreigners and set fire to the homes of wealthy whites. Government troops repressed the rebellion with brutal ferocity, hunting rebel soldiers down one by one and shooting prisoners in cold blood. Over 1,000 rebels were killed in the final assault on the city; government casualties totaled 40.[35]

The provincial rebellions had been stimulated in part by a wave of liberal Parliamentary reforms in the early 1830s that reduced federal authority and weakened the power of the monarchy. Having seen the destabilizing consequences of such decentralization, the Brazilian Parliament embarked on a conservative Regresso ("return") that reversed the reforms of the 1830s by reasserting imperial control over the armed forces, the police, the courts, and the provincial governments. This strengthening of the central government in turn strengthened the ability of provincial elites to maintain social order and hierarchy in their localities. Liberals and Conservatives continued to flail away at each other, but through a re-centralized political and electoral system thoroughly controlled and dominated by landowning elites rather than through civil wars and armed uprisings. Politics remained intensely competitive, and even occasionally violent. But the competition was no longer based on class or ideology—indeed, in programmatic terms, the two parties were virtually indistinguishable. Rather, parties represented competing clienteles of the great landowners. Neither was significantly more conservative or liberal, more oligarchical or "popular" in orientation, than the other. Both drew broadly from across the class and racial spectrum, and neither identified with any specific racial or class configuration.[36]

This had been precisely the goal of the Regresso: to produce a political system in which neither race nor class formed a basis on which to mobilize political constituencies. Landowning elites in Spanish America would have loved to have been able to achieve this. But while Brazil had retained the instruments of central authority intact through the independence and post-independence periods, in Spanish America those institutions had been shattered and destroyed by decades of warfare, and the mobilization of tens of thousands of men to take part in that warfare. In Spanish America, armed struggle remained a principal currency of

politics. This was a currency that free blacks and mulattoes possessed in ample measure; and first in the independence wars and then in the civil wars following independence, they invested that currency in the leaders and movements whom they saw as most likely to advance their political interests. Most of those leaders and movements were liberal in character.

More than any other Spanish American country, Venezuela had lived through the 1820s and 1830s in fear of race war between blacks and whites. Violence by slaves and free blacks had broken out repeatedly during those years, often under the independence-war banner of "death to the whites." Following the establishment of the Liberal Party in 1840, these rebels expressed themselves in the language of radical liberalism, demanding "free land and free men" (land reform and abolition), open and honest elections, and an end to landowner and government abuses of peasants and farmworkers.[37] These demands reached a climax in the conflagration of the Federal War (1858–63), in which armies of black and mulatto peasants and ex-slaves eventually triumphed against government forces, bringing the Liberals to power. Conservatives denounced the victors in openly racial (and racist) terms: "It is three quarters of Venezuela that conspires against the few good that there are in this unfortunate land. It is the blacks against the whites: the vicious and the idle against the honest and industrious—the ignorant against the learned." Conservative President José Antonio Páez, driven into exile at the end of the war, described it as "a revolution . . . among the colored population; a class which until then had been the most peaceful and submissive, but since perverted to such a degree as to require all the energies and resources of the white race to save itself from utter ruin and degradation."[38]

In Peru, liberal *montoneros* (mounted armed bands) and guerrillas harassing conservative hacendados outside Lima were drawn heavily from runaway slaves and free blacks.[39] Afro-Peruvians provided support for Ramón Castilla's successful 1853 uprising against conservative President Echenique (during which Castilla declared the final abolition of slavery) and for populist Nicolás Piérola's 1894 uprising and subsequent presidency. Piérola began his revolt, in fact, in the sugar-plantation zone of the Chincha Valley, with backing from the region's black guerrillas and montoneros.[40]

In Mexico, as we have seen, mulatto militia units from the Veracruz and Acapulco coasts installed liberal populist Vicente Guerrero in power in 1829. Following Guerrero's death in 1831, those units transferred their allegiance to his ideological successor, populist Liberal Juan Alvarez, whom they helped propel to national power in 1855. Alvarez's presidency initiated the process of Liberal reform that culminated in the writing of the Constitution of 1857, and the Liberal hegemony in Mexico that lasted from the late 1860s until the Revolution of 1910.[41]

In Ecuador, Liberal President José Urbina, after decreeing abolition in 1851, formed an elite Afro-Ecuadorian presidential guard, the Tauras, that was a main-

stay of his regime until the Conservatives took power in 1860. After 35 years of Conservative rule, the Liberals returned to power in 1895 through an uprising led by caudillo Eloy Alfaro. Alfaro drew his political and military support from the provinces along the Pacific coast, including the majority-black province of Esmeraldas. After Alfaro's death in civil violence in Quito in 1912, black troops loyal to him retreated to Esmeraldas and continued guerrilla resistance against the government until 1916.[42]

Liberal ties to the black population, and black identification with the Liberal Party, were strongest of all in Colombia. In the Cauca Valley, free blacks and slaves formed the bulk of Liberal forces in the civil war of 1839–42. After a Liberal administration was elected to power in 1849, it abolished slavery in part as repayment for black support. A rebellion of Conservative landowners protesting emancipation confirmed Afro-Colombians' belief that, if ever returned to power, the Conservatives would reinstitute slavery. Conservatives further fanned such fears by denouncing Liberals in barely coded racial terms, as "bands of barbarians . . . preach[ing] insubordination to authority, communal property, impiety in religion, and party hatred to the ignorant masses" and proclaiming that the only way to handle the "democratic trash" was with a whip—a clear reference to slavery.[43]

Afro-Colombians responded by angrily reaffirming their commitment to the party. As Conservative-Liberal tensions heightened during the 1870s, hacendado Alfonso Arboleda wrote to his father that "in the last session of the local Democratic Club, mainly attended by blacks, they were saying that the aim of the Conservatives is to make a new revolution in order to re-enslave all the blacks. The Conservatives are believed to be saying 'Slavery or the gallows for all Blacks.'" Reported the young Arboleda, "I heard a Black saying ' . . . we'll put the noose to their [the Conservatives'] necks, apply the lash . . . and then leave them to hang.'"[44] When civil war broke out in 1876, Afro-Colombian Liberal militias sacked the city of Cali and rampaged through the Cauca region, repeating the bloody deeds of the independence wars. By the end of the war, reported a German visitor in 1880, the valley was in ruins, the majority of landowners bankrupt: "They lack the capital to rebuild what has been destroyed, and most of them, after fighting for many years against the destructive fanaticism of the blacks, have given up and have no wish to start all over again." The blame for this situation he laid squarely at the door of "the Liberal party, or what in the Cauca is the same thing, the black population."[45]

Needless to say, not all Liberals were at ease with this kind of racial politics. In the Cauca and elsewhere in Colombia, the party split in the 1870s into opposing groups of radical Liberals closely tied to the black population, and centrist Independents allied to the Conservatives.[46] The French consul in Panama noted the presence there of not one but two Liberal parties: a white faction composed of

well-to-do local merchants, and a "black Liberal party" comprising urban arti-
sans and laborers. Late in the century the latter succeeded in winning electoral
control of Colón, one of the two principal cities of the isthmus, creating a black
municipal administration and bureaucracy that U.S. officials found more than a
little disconcerting to deal with when they began construction of the Panama
Canal in 1904. For U.S. administrators, black officials were barely tolerable at the
municipal level; when mulatto Liberal Carlos Mendoza succeeded to the Pana-
manian presidency in 1910, U.S. authorities refused to countenance a "Negro"
chief executive in the new republic and forced him to resign.[47]

Not all free black mobilization during this period was liberal in character.
Throughout the plantation zones, conservative landowners recruited black peas-
ants and farm workers into their patron-client networks, drawing on them for
military and electoral support. In Peru, conservative politicians cultivated rela-
tions with the black artisan guilds of Lima, lending them money, serving as god-
parents to members' children, bailing them out of jail, and calling for protection-
ist tariffs on imports that competed against their products. In return, the guilds
were expected to turn out their membership at election time and, their liberal op-
ponents charged, use violence and intimidation to prevent other voters from
coming to the polls.[48]

The best-known case of a conservative politician successfully courting black
support was that of Argentine caudillo Juan Manuel de Rosas. Rosas's success
with the black population owed more to his systematic murdering and repression
of the liberal opposition than to any concessions or benefits that he offered Afro-
Argentines. Not only did he reopen the slave trade between 1831 and 1838, but also
his demands on the black population to fight the civil, foreign, and Indian wars in
which his government was constantly embroiled badly disrupted black family
and community life. Following the dictator's fall in 1852, the black press (which,
significantly, only came into existence after his departure) strenuously de-
nounced "that barbarous and savage tyranny of twenty years" that had kept Afro-
Argentines "in a state of barbarism, or absolute ignorance . . . shut up in the [mil-
itary] encampments and made the principal and unwitting instrument of his
power and domination."[49]

Wherever in Spanish America competitive two-party systems were allowed to
function, most politically active blacks and mulattoes identified with liberalism,
with major consequences for the region's political history. Black support con-
tributed materially to liberalism's eventual triumph throughout Spanish Amer-
ica; in return, liberalism brought to power almost all of the black and mulatto
presidents who held office in Spanish America during the 1800s: Bernardino Ri-
vadavia in Argentina (1825–27), Vicente Guerrero in Mexico (1829), Vicente Roca
(1845–49) in Ecuador, Joaquín Crespo (1884–86, 1892–97) in Venezuela, and Ulises
Heureaux (1882–99) in the Dominican Republic.[50] But when liberalism did come

to power, it was in a form that few black liberals would have foreseen or approved. As the cases of Colombia and Panama suggest, in most of the region liberalism as a political movement had two currents that coexisted with each other in a tense, deeply ambivalent relationship. One current was conservative and elite-dominated; the other was "popular," stood for radical political and social reform, and provided the bulk of the military and electoral manpower that supported liberal parties and governments. But when those parties and governments took power in the second half of the 1800s, it was in the form not of "popular liberalism" but of liberalism dominated by landowner and elite interests. And those governments promptly proceeded to enact social and economic policies that undercut the position of the very peasants and workers who had brought them to power.[51]

Despite this outcome, the black liberals' struggles were by no means in vain. They created a tradition of anti-oligarchical political mobilization that later helped create the most important political movement in twentieth-century Latin America: labor-based populism.[52] And in the shorter term, the challenge to elite interests posed by popular liberalism kept Spanish American landowners in a position of vulnerability and weakness through much of the first 50 years of independence. This in turn opened real possibilities for newly free libertos and free black peasants to redefine conditions of life and work in the plantation zones of Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico, and elsewhere.

Citizens, Workers, Peasants

Let us return to the Brazilian planter and libertos whom we met at the beginning of this chapter. As you recall, the former had gone

> looking for blacks in the city
> Who might want to rent themselves out.
> I spoke to them humbly:
> "Blacks," I said, "do you want to work?"

To which the libertos responded:

> There are no more blacks, no:
> All of us today are citizens.
> Let the whites go work in the fields.

This was a fictitious, semi-humorous poem, almost certainly not written by a slave. Yet its portrayal of post-emancipation labor relations is borne out by abundant evidence that, once emancipation had been enacted, former slaves sought to put as much distance as possible between themselves and their former status as unfree workers, and that their efforts to do so had major consequences for plantation agriculture throughout Afro-Latin America. So strong was this determina-

tion that it persisted years, decades, and even a century or more, after slavery had ended. Visiting Peru in 1880, Frenchman Charles Wiener found Afro-Peruvians still tormented by "that evil memory, that nightmare, of slavery, slavery that has not existed for a quarter of a century, but the memory of which does not seem to be able to disappear. . . . They say so frequently that they are free that one senses in them a barely repressed anger against a past from which they have been redeemed, but that nothing can erase."[53] In Brazil, black civic organizations (many of them named after May 13, the day on which slavery was finally abolished) celebrated Abolition Day with clockwork regularity all through the 1900s. Anthropologists doing fieldwork among rural Afro-Latin American populations in the 1970s and 1980s found that their informants still retained powerful feelings concerning slavery and a burning determination to avoid conditions of work that were at all reminiscent of servitude.[54]

The first step in escaping plantation slavery was, logically enough, to leave the plantation. While most former slaves remained in the countryside, others opted to leave rural life behind and head for nearby towns and cities. (This is why, when the planter in the poem needed farm laborers, he "went looking for blacks in the city.") Slaves had always seen urban employment as preferable to working on a plantation, and many now seized the opportunity of freedom to seek such employment.

Or to *not* seek such employment. Once at liberty in the cities, libertos joined with free blacks, poor whites, Indians, and mestizos in the construction of a "plebeian culture" that was in many ways the reversal of slavery. Where slavery had forced workers to labor under harsh and often brutal discipline, "plebeian culture" rejected the notion of workplace discipline and insisted on workers' right to refuse work whenever and wherever they wished.[55] Where slavery had severely restricted worker leisure, "plebeian culture" valued parties, festivities, and collective celebrations. And where slavery had limited workers to minimal food and clothing, of poor quality and grudgingly given, "plebeian culture" valued free, unlimited consumption of food, liquor, and stylish clothing.[56]

Not surprisingly, such values, goals, and pursuits generated immediate tension and conflict between urban elites, authorities, and middle classes, on the one hand, and plebeians on the other. Throughout Afro-Latin America, that tension assumed a harsh racial edge. "How long," a letter to the Lima newspaper *El Comercio* in 1855, the year after emancipation, demanded to know, "will we suffer the impudence, the insults, the outrages of our new citizens, the blacks? . . . Are the police sleeping, or just closing their eyes to these gatherings of drunkards, that serve only to insult and threaten white citizens?" The Conservative Colombian newspaper *Ariete* in 1850 drew an even sharper racial line, contrasting "the black, the rogue, the vagrant, the stupid, and the criminal" with "the white, the honorable, the hard worker, the talented, and the virtuous" and concluding that "never

will the color black be equal to the color white." When French merchants and businessmen in Panama City petitioned their consul in 1859 for increased police protection, they described crime in the city as "the war of blacks against whites, the war of those who have nothing and wish to live without working against those who possess something and live honorably from their labor."[57]

Towns and cities enacted vagrancy and "public order" statutes, including tightened restrictions on black street dances and other public festivities, but weak and understaffed police forces found these ordinances difficult to enforce. Some municipalities, recognizing the impossibility of maintaining order through official force alone, sought to enlist plebeian institutions in their efforts. Authorities in Peru turned to the artisan guilds to "discipline . . . and control Lima's unruly and frightening dark-skinned plebes." In Buenos Aires, the African national societies were required by law to inform the police of any criminal activity among their members. The societies, however, simply shrugged off police supervision, turning in only a single accused criminal between 1820 and 1870, and functioning for the most part completely free of police interference.[58]

In the end, it was less official controls and repression than the imperious necessity of physical survival that reimposed labor discipline on the libertos. Consumption could not be sustained without income, and income could not be earned without work. In the towns and cities this work was primarily wage employment: women working as domestic servants, laundresses, cooks, and street vendors; men working as day laborers, servants, or in jobs in light industry.[59] Especially in the war-torn conditions affecting much of Spanish America at mid-century, none of these occupations made possible the material abundance that was the antithesis of slavery. Even artisans, historically the most prosperous and successful segment of the free black work force, found themselves struggling. Many black artisans and businessmen and women lost property and savings in the turmoil of the independence and civil wars; all surely found it difficult to operate under unsettled political and economic conditions. Artisans also faced devastating competition from British imports from which they had been largely protected during the colonial period. Their precarious economic position during the early and mid-1800s, and their efforts to defend themselves against the forces undermining that position, were yet another reason for Afro-Spanish Americans' high level of participation in the politics of the period.[60]

While war and political turmoil undercut the economic position of urban wage-laborers, they had different and in some ways more positive consequences for black peasants and libertos who remained in the countryside. Here, too, the first priority for libertos was to redefine their living and working conditions in such a way as to negate and obliterate the experience of slavery. Here, too, libertos sought new forms of work, leisure, family life, and consumption. But in pursuing those goals, libertos and peasants in the countryside had access to a resource that

was largely absent in the cities and that gave them far greater leverage in their bargaining with former masters and current employers. That resource was land.

Access to land, in the form of garden plots, had been a central and recurring point of contention between masters and slaves before emancipation. The first priority of the newly freed was to acquire smallholdings on which to support themselves and their families.[61] And in a number of ways, the turmoil and disorder of the post-independence years favored their quest. Facing the destruction of much of their physical and financial capital during the independence wars, the loss of many of their slaves, and the threat of further losses in the continuing civil wars, many landowners in Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, and other countries cut back on cultivation, leaving part or all of their land to go fallow. Free blacks and newly freed libertos promptly moved in to squat on such lands. Landowners and their administrators sought to negotiate rental arrangements with the squatters, but in a situation of abundant land and scarce labor, as a local official in Colombia's Cauca Valley reported in the 1850s, libertos were opting to settle on estates "that offer them the greatest advantages, so that . . . today one can say that [the libertos] set the price for land rentals. . . . Even when it is certain that there exist marked tendencies for some landowners to aggressively confront the libertos, imposing high rents . . . they have been forced to accept the counter-proposals made by their former slaves."[62]

Further weakening the bargaining position of landowners was the availability of vast tracts of unoccupied state lands. These *tierras baldías* had formerly belonged to the Crown and following independence passed into the possession of the newly independent republics. During the second half of the 1800s, as national economies recovered and plantation agriculture began to expand, these public lands would be taken over by landowners looking to increase their holdings. But during the first half of the century, planters possessed neither the capital nor the incentive—nor, for that matter, the labor—to acquire and develop such lands. Thus the tierras baldías lay free, open, and largely unpoliced.[63]

These public lands drew peasants and libertos like a magnet. In the Barlovento region of Venezuela, libertos and free blacks carved out small farms on state lands, growing cacao, bananas, manioc, corn, and other crops for their own consumption and for sale in nearby towns.[64] In Colombia, black peasant and liberto families moved on to public lands to which, not content with squatting, many of them petitioned the government for formal title.[65] Very few of these petitions were granted, but in the absence of any concerted effort to remove them from the land, black smallholdings proliferated, taking different forms in different parts of the country. In the sugar-growing Cauca Valley, peasant families settled in hamlets and small villages, where they practiced subsistence agriculture and grew small surpluses of crops for sale in urban markets. In a region dominated during the colonial period by plantation and hacienda agriculture, these autonomous

communities of black peasants "formed a new social class that stood outside [plantation] society."[66]

In the Pacific rainforests, insects and other pests made it more difficult to cultivate subsistence crops and to store food for sale or future consumption. The forest offered other resources, however, including abundant fish and game, other forest products, and gold from the region's rivers. Libertos and free blacks living in the rain forest therefore fanned out more thinly, settling in small family encampments along the riverbanks. These extended families, or *troncos* (trunks), claimed landholdings that were held in common by all members and on which all members had rights to farm, hunt, gather forest products, and pan for gold.[67]

Family structures determined not just the ownership of land but the organization of work as well. Colombian liberto families refused to send women and children to the plantations to work for wages. Only men undertook wage labor, and then only for limited periods of time. And it was access to land and to family labor that made such resistance to wage employment possible, noted a visitor to the Chocó region in the late 1800s: "Every black has his placer or little mine, where he works several days a week (when he urgently needs to) with his family[. H]e prefers to earn little but to be free and work on his own account; rarely does he endure a permanent job." The importance of family labor in these communally owned mines emerges clearly in the Colombian census of 1867, in which almost half the region's miners were female.[68]

Family labor was retained for use on family land. And while field labor continued to be harsh and demanding, it took place at a more human pace than under slavery, as it was supervised by parents and other family members. Peasant families were able to slow their work rhythms in part because the product of their labor was no longer being expropriated by masters and in part because their highly diversified subsistence agriculture required less labor than the monoculture of the plantations. In the 1970s, visiting Afro-Colombian peasants who still cultivated their smallholdings using traditional methods, anthropologists Nina de Friedemann and Jaime Arocha found them growing bananas, cacao, coffee, medicinal herbs, and other crops "in what appeared to be the most complete disorder. Nevertheless, the system functioned very well." Coffee and banana trees provided shade and shelter for lower plants, and their fallen leaves formed mulch that kept weeds down and provided nutrients. Crop diversity also reduced the incidence of diseases and insect pests that plagued neighboring haciendas practicing sugar (and, by the 1960s and 1970s, soybean) monoculture, and spread labor and harvesting demands more evenly through the year rather than concentrating them in a single season.[69]

Lower labor demands meant greater leisure time, which could be spent at rest or in the many ritual activities that organized the cultural and spiritual life of the black villages. The synthesis of African and European religion that had taken

place under slavery was now complete, producing forms of folk Catholicism that, while following the Catholic religious calendar and acknowledging the authority of the church, were powerfully African in content—so much so that tension and conflict continued between priests and parishioners over the proper forms for religious observance. Drumming, dancing, and music played on African instruments were necessary parts of such observance for black worshippers, and over time the church grudgingly accepted these aspects of black religiosity.[70]

What the church could not accept was the African practice of "bringing down" the saints through ritual trance and possession. To be sure, this practice bypassed the authority of the priests by giving lay people direct access to the gods and saints. Even worse, it gave profound spiritual authority to women, since it was mainly they who served as conduits or channels for the holy spirits. Rejecting the practice of spirit possession as devil worship, the church tried actively but unsuccessfully to stamp it out. Instead, peasants held their *velorios* (acts of devotion) in private homes, where parishioners gathered to worship the Virgin, St. John, St. Anthony, and other popular saints.[71]

Women had primary responsibility as well for another all too frequent ritual observance in the black villages: the funerals of babies and newborns. Under freedom, both black birth rates and the size of black families seem to have increased during the first half of the 1800s. But infant mortality remained extremely high, and burials of *angelitos* (little angels) were a common occurrence of village life. In the black communities of the Chota Valley in Ecuador, for example, it was local custom for mothers to rest for 44 days after giving birth, during which they ate a specially nourishing diet, did no work, and did not leave the house. A party was then held to celebrate the mother's "recovery" from the birth, at which the child was often baptized. Yet despite such precautions to protect the mother's and infant's health, many children died during their first year of life, both in the Chota region and elsewhere. Child funerals were so common in the Esmeraldas rainforest of Ecuador that to this day *rezanderas* (prayer women) hold an annual service on December 24 in which the dead Baby Jesus is sung into heaven, in memory of all the other angelitos who have joined him there.[72]

The funerals of the angelitos were exemplary of the changes wrought by freedom. Unlike on the colonial plantations, where the deaths of slave infants seem to have gone largely unmarked, libertos and peasants were now at liberty to leave work in collective remembrance of a deceased child and to celebrate the angelito's entry into paradise with festive eating and drinking. They were at liberty as well to construct the networks of family, friends, and villagers within which the death of a child was not just an isolated event but an occasion for the communal expression of joy and sorrow.

In the plantation zones of mainland Spanish America, libertos and black peasants had succeeded in transforming the structures of their daily lives by making at

least partially real the threat of the destruction of the plantation economy. While stopping well short of complete revolution, the combination of abolition, the continuing economic and political disruptions of the civil wars, and the anti-oligarchical content of radical liberalism, all came together to produce a dramatic realignment of the balance of power among landowners, slaves, libertos, and peasants. That realignment made it possible for Afro-Spanish Americans to bargain with former masters, current employers, and state officials from a stronger position than had ever been the case before or has ever been the case since. As a result, between 1820 and 1870 they were able to redefine conditions of life and work in the plantation zones and to construct the lives that they had been denied under slavery.[73]

Black Middle Classes

While war and civil violence battered the societies and economies of mainland Spanish America, peace and stability created conditions for the continued expansion of plantation economies in Brazil, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. Based on the oppression of between 2 and 3 million slaves,[74] those economies paradoxically generated significant opportunities for free black upward mobility and the growth of black middle classes.

Fueled by ever-increasing sugar exports, Cuba may well have been the fastest-growing economy in Latin America during this period. By 1850 it had the second-highest level of exports per capita in the region, exceeded only by Uruguay; Puerto Rico had the third highest. Cuban and Puerto Rican sugar competed directly with sugar production in Brazil. As a result, after substantial increases in the early 1800s, Brazilian sugar exports only doubled in value between 1820 and 1870, a relatively slow rate of growth. Brazil's coffee exports exploded during the same period, however, rising in value from 7 million pounds sterling in the 1820s to 50 million in the 1850s and 113 million in the 1870s. This was sufficient to produce "modest but steady" growth in the national economy as a whole, and considerably more than that in the coffee-growing southeast (Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, and São Paulo).[75]

In all three countries, the great bulk of export earnings went to landowning and merchant elites and, through taxes, the national (or in Cuba and Puerto Rico, the colonial) government. That wealth tended to concentrate and be spent in urban areas, especially port cities and provincial and national capitals. As export-based wealth increased, so did the demand for goods and services provided by free black artisans and shopkeepers. Of the free black and pardo males canvassed in the 1834 census of Rio de Janeiro, almost 40 percent were registered as artisans. In Salvador, artisans sustained the Afro-Catholic religious brotherhoods and in

1832 created what was destined to become the city's longest-lasting workers' mutual aid society, the Sociedade Protetora dos Desválidos.[76]

In Cuba, Spanish officials in 1843 described a substantial segment of the free black population that lived "comfortably and, as they say, wears a clean shirt every day. . . . Most of them know how to read and write and carry out the skilled trades, and there are many who are owners of considerable amounts of capital."[77] An 1828 manifesto by Havana's black militia officers conveys these upwardly mobile Afro-Cubans' collective sense of themselves. Describing themselves as "Spanish Mulattoes and Blacks of Havana," the officers drew a clear line between themselves and the city's Africans and claimed a place in the "Spanish" sphere of colonial society. They then specified the achievements on which that claim was based:

> Mulattoes and blacks, we are the ones who practice the mechanical arts to the highest degree of perfection, to the admiration and wonder of professors from other enlightened nations. We own property—houses that we live in with our families, workshops, and buildings to rent out to those who need them. We have farms and slaves in the same proportions as those other members of the people of Havana who possess such property. [78]

These militiamen, and other successful black artisans and businesspeople, measured themselves by the standards of white society and demanded recognition and acceptance by that society. But Cuban elites and Spanish officials refused to grant such acceptance. While caste laws restricting black upward mobility were being struck down in Brazil and mainland Spanish America, they remained very much in effect in the Spanish colonies of Cuba and Puerto Rico. Cuban elites in particular followed the disastrous lead of their Venezuelan (and Haitian) counterparts during the late colonial period by insisting on the continued enforcement of white racial privilege. As a result, "boundaries between whites and free people of color became much more rigid" during the 1820s and 1830s, as Afro-Cubans encountered "new discriminatory barriers . . . [and] a color prejudice more virulent than they had known before."[79]

Heightening prejudice and the continued enforcement of the caste laws drove small groups of free black conspirators to join with the slave population in plotting rebellions aimed at overturning slavery and the Caste Regime. Free blacks helped plan and carry out major slave uprisings in 1812, 1825, and 1835. They also sought out international allies, including British abolitionists operating on the island during the 1830s and early 1840s, and anti-slavery forces in Haiti.[80]

As the rhythm of slave insurrection accelerated in the 1830s,[81] Spanish officials became increasingly concerned that free blacks could serve as a potential link between the colonial state's internal and external enemies. In an effort to prevent their making contact with those enemies, officials imposed new restrictions on

free blacks. In 1837 the prohibition against the entry of Haitians into Cuba was extended to free black foreigners from any country, as well as to black sailors, who were required either to remain on their ships while in port or be arrested and held in jail until their ships left. In 1839, following the arrest of several black militia officers and enlisted men for participation in an antigovernment conspiracy, the Crown ordered "the most active vigilance over the colored militia" and the disbanding of any units that "strayed from the path of loyalty." In 1841 the Spanish governor abolished the only all-black town council in the island, that of Santiago del Prado, "a town council of people of color, unique in its kind and the scandal of this island." In 1842, to limit their contact with the slave population, free blacks were barred from carrying swords or firearms and from working as overseers or bookkeepers on plantations.[82]

But still the slave rebellions continued, reaching a climax in the spring and fall of 1843. That March, 1,000 slaves escaped from plantations and railroad construction camps in the Cárdenas region of Matanzas. Marching through the countryside "in military order, clad in their holiday clothes, colors flying, and holding leathern shields," they were attacked and dispersed by Spanish troops, with heavy loss of life. Many slaves committed suicide by hanging themselves in the woods to avoid capture; others escaped to local cimarrón encampments. A second wave of uprisings then broke out on several Matanzas plantations in November. Again they were put down.[83]

Convinced that these rebellions were the product of an islandwide free black conspiracy, in early 1844 the colonial government unleashed a massive campaign of terror and repression against Africans and Afro-Cubans. All black militia units were disbanded, free blacks were forbidden to enter plantations without written authorization, and plantation owners were granted expanded powers of punishment over their slaves. At least 2,000 free people of color and 800 slaves were arrested and interrogated, most of them under torture. (This bloody chapter of Cuban history is known as La Escalera, after the ladderlike device to which victims were strapped before being tortured.) Untold hundreds died in custody; 600 free blacks and 550 slaves were sentenced to prison terms, 430 free blacks to banishment from the island, and 38 free blacks and mulattoes and 39 slaves to death. More than 700 Afro-Cubans fled the island in fear for their lives.[84]

Some historians have argued that there was no conspiracy among either the free black or slave populations at this time and that the government's actions were the product of unfounded hysteria.[85] More recent research suggests the presence of multiple, overlapping groups of plotters among both the free black population and the slaves, though the precise nature of the contacts among those groups remains unclear.[86] Beyond question is the savage brutality of the Spanish response and its effectiveness in repressing further slave and free black resistance. Large-scale slave rebellions in the island simply ceased after 1844. A Spanish visitor to the

island in the late 1840s found that even prosperous free blacks had been reduced to a state of submission quite close, in some ways, to that of the slaves: "Always the black, whether slave or free, is obligated to respect the white, to whom the law grants a superiority which has as its object conserving the moral force required to keep in submission those of the black race."[87]

That "moral force" was difficult to maintain in the face of the free blacks' continuing economic advance. Despite the decimation of the Afro-Cuban elite in 1844 and the confiscation of property suffered by many well-to-do people of color, the black middle and upper-middle class soon rebuilt itself. The Spanish visitor who commented on free blacks' state of submission was struck by the disparity between their lowly social status and their undeniable economic achievement. "They can own property and even slaves, and many earn their livelihood in this way." The governor of Havana noted in 1854 the continuing "ambitious pretensions" of the free blacks and "the propensity of this race to excel the white" in economic and professional achievement. The result, he noted, was widespread "displeasure" and "discontent" among the whites, resulting in continued demands that, in the words of two such individuals, the government reinforce "the power that the white race has over the black one" and prevent "the awakening in an inferior and degraded class of the idea of equality." Spanish governors continued to invoke "the indispensable subordination and respect with which the colored class must regard the white" and the imperative need to prevent any "slackening of the links of obedience and respect which the colored race should entertain for the white and on which the tranquility of this territory largely depends." In 1864 the Spanish administration even began to enforce long-disregarded legislation outlawing cross-racial marriage.[88]

Upwardly mobile Afro-Brazilians also had their complaints and grievances during this period, which found expression in the republican uprisings of the 1820s and 1830s and in demands in the "mulatto press" of Rio de Janeiro for increased black representation at the highest levels of government.[89] The government might easily have responded to these outbursts with renewed controls and restrictions on the free black population, as in Cuba. Instead, after putting down the provincial rebellions and reestablishing central authority, the monarchy reconfirmed its commitment to racial equality and, in 1850, took the first step toward the eventual abolition of slavery by finally outlawing the African slave trade.

This commitment to racial egalitarianism, combined with continuing economic growth and the ending of the slave trade, created significant opportunities for black economic advancement. Planters started filling their labor demands by buying urban slaves and transporting them to the countryside, resulting in improved bargaining and labor market conditions for urban free blacks. In the countryside, growing urban demand for foodstuffs created opportunities for free

black smallholders to produce corn, beans, manioc, livestock, and other crops for sale in nearby towns and cities.

Nor were opportunities limited to manual occupations. Though no racial statistics are available on university enrollment, nineteenth-century intellectual Sílvio Romero estimated that "hundreds" of mulattoes had graduated from the newly established law and medical schools by the mid-1800s. "Mulatto doctors, lawyers, and professors were numerous," agrees historian João Reis.[90] Black entry was even more rapid into professions not requiring a university degree, such as teaching, journalism, and the arts. By the 1870s and 1880s, the majority of elementary school teachers in Salvador and its environs were black. Black and mulatto writers were common, including the country's very best: Antônio Gonçalves Dias, Tobias and Lima Barreto, João da Cruz e Sousa, and the greatest Brazilian author of all time, Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, founder and first president of the Brazilian Academy of Letters.[91]

Especially striking to foreign visitors was the ability of nonwhites to take part in national politics. "One finds colored men in all branches of administration, in the holy offices, in the army, and there are many of excellent family," reported French traveler Maurice Rugendas in 1835. "If a man has freedom, money, and merit, no matter how black may be his skin, no place in society is refused him," concurred an American observer in 1857.[92] Two of the most prominent Conservative politicians of the 1800s—Francisco de Sales Torres Homem, Viscount of Inhomerim; and João Maurício Wanderley, Baron of Cotegipe—were men of color, and Afro-Brazilians were to be found in the national Parliament, in state legislatures, and in high appointed positions as well. In Brazil, enthused French physician and naturalist Louis Couty, who lived in the country from 1878 to 1884, "race prejudice does not exist. . . . Free blacks and mulattoes mix completely with the white race. . . . Not just at table, in the theater, in the salons, in all public places; also in the army, in the government, in the schools, in the legislative assemblies, one finds all colors mixed together on a basis of equality and the most complete familiarity."[93]

More than any other Latin American country, Brazil had succeeded in defusing the racial tensions of the post-independence years and in laying the foundation for its future "racial democracy." What had made this achievement possible? Certainly one reason was the extension of legal and civic equality to free blacks and mulattoes. But this had also been done in Spanish America yet had not, in itself, been sufficient to bring peace to the region. Indispensable to the achievement of racial and political peace was the government's ability to repress the republican uprisings of the 1830s and with them the "popular" wing of Brazilian liberalism. Those rebellions failed in large part precisely because of their "blackness." In a society obsessed with the dangers of "Haitianization," the majority-black composition of those radical movements was a key factor in alienating white support and

weakening the republicans in their confrontations with the central state. Thus while anti-oligarchical "popular liberalism" continued to roil national politics in much of Spanish America, by the 1840s its Brazilian counterpart had been largely repressed and discredited. In the absence of that radical wing, Brazilian liberalism became a party and a movement dominated by landowners and indistinguishable, in ideological and programmatic terms, from conservatism.[94] The resulting removal of class and racial tensions from Brazilian politics made possible not just the functioning of political democracy (by 1870 suffrage in Brazil extended to an estimated 50 percent of the free male population, a relatively high proportion by European standards of the time) but the functioning of racial democracy as well.

Or at least in the eyes of foreign visitors. Brazilians themselves knew better. Even sociologist Gilberto Freyre, the originator and most articulate exponent of the concept of Brazil as a racial democracy, readily conceded the "dissatisfaction" of those "mulattoes who after graduating from the University of Coimbra or the Imperial academies never felt themselves wholly adapted to the society of their day, with its racial prejudices, less marked than in other countries, but not to be ignored."[95] Those prejudices were given vivid expression in a classic Brazilian novel of this period, Aluísio Azevedo's *Mulatto* (1881). The book's central character, Raimundo da Silva, is a young mulatto graduate of Coimbra. Despite his education and accomplishments, he meets racial scorn and rejection from local elites when he returns home and tries to begin a legal career. Perhaps his greatest offense against local society is his romantic pursuit of a beautiful young white woman, daughter of a Portuguese merchant. "Surely, they are carrying this business of blood to great extremes!" he reflects, just before being murdered by a jealous rival in love.[96]

Though the caste laws were gone, their spirit lived on in the barriers of discrimination and prejudice that continued to impede black advancement.[97] In order to overcome those barriers, upwardly mobile blacks and mulattoes depended, even more than their white compatriots, on that archetypal figure of Brazilian life, the powerful patron. All of Brazilian society was organized around ties of patronage and clientelism: "Politicians did not succeed in their careers, writers did not become famous, generals were not promoted, bishops were not appointed, entrepreneurs were not successful without the help of a patron."[98] When even such prominent personages required assistance from powerful protectors, how much greater was the dependence of blacks and mulattoes, whose racial status was a constant source of vulnerability and weakness?

The answer can be found in the novels of Machado de Assis, himself a person of mixed African ancestry. Like his fellow Afro-Brazilian author Tobias Barreto, Machado almost never commented in his novels on racial matters. Rather, his books are wry meditations on the subtleties, ambiguities, rewards, and betrayals of ties between the powerful and the weak. From the highest levels of the Afro-

Brazilian population to the lowest, black advancement depended on these ties, which proved even more effective than military force in maintaining political and racial order in Brazil. By tying talented blacks and mulattoes to white patrons, and simultaneously repressing radical political alternatives, Brazilian elites ensured both the quiescence of the black middle class and the maintenance of a larger structure of class and racial inequality that preserved wealth and power in their hands. This was the true meaning of racial democracy, and of Brazilian political democracy as well.[99]

The complexities and contradictions of those two systems, and of the patron-client ties by which they were maintained, were poignantly embodied in Brazil's Emperor, Pedro II. "A cabra like us," Pedro enjoyed a popularity among slaves and free blacks that grew steadily over the course of his long reign (1840–89). Committed to the eventual abolition of slavery, he was instrumental in bringing the slave trade to an end in 1850 and then in pushing the Free Womb law through Parliament in 1871.[100] It was the emperor's justice to which slaves appealed when they petitioned for their freedom or sought protection from abusive masters. A committed racial democrat, Pedro drew no racial distinctions among his subjects, mingling freely and easily with Afro-Brazilian politicians and intellectuals and even receiving the poverty-stricken Prince Obá II, self-proclaimed monarch of Rio de Janeiro's African population, with the same respect and courtesy that he showed ambassadors from Europe.[101]

Pedro's abolitionist stance, and especially his support for the Free Womb law, provoked growing anti-monarchical sentiment among the coffee planters of the southeast, who joined together in 1871 to create a Republican Party calling for an end to the monarchy. For these diehard slavocrats, the final abolition of slavery in 1888—and Pedro's support for a land reform program to benefit the newly freed libertos—was the last straw. Republican demonstrations and political agitation intensified in 1888 and 1889. In response, libertos, capoeiras, and other Afro-Brazilians under the leadership of mulatto abolitionist and journalist José do Patrocínio formed the Black Guard, a citizen militia with the stated goal of "opposing and resisting any revolutionary movement hostile to the institution that has freed the nation [i.e., the monarchy]." "Our goal is not to pit colored men against whites, but to restore to the former the right that was stolen from them, to take part in public affairs"—almost certainly a reference to the Electoral Reform of 1881, which had been aimed specifically at the liberto population and had drastically reduced national suffrage.[102] The guard's violent assaults on Republican meetings and parades further discredited the monarchy in the eyes of the planters and helped precipitate its overthrow in November 1889. Accompanying the emperor into exile was his close friend and adviser, and archetypal member of the black middle class, engineer and abolitionist André Rebouças. Neither man would ever set foot in Brazil again.[103]

With the fall of the emperor, Afro-Brazilians lost their most powerful patron and their most effective protection against the power of the planters. Even more than the Empire, the Republic established in 1891 would be a political system in which planter interests reigned supreme. Suffrage was limited to literate males, a decentralized federal system allowed landowning elites full control over state and local politics, and the planter-dominated Republican Party ruled with little or no opposition. Under these conditions the hopes and euphoria of 1888, when slaves had rushed to claim their citizenship, soon evaporated. As a Bahia newspaper observed in 1890, in an unintended but deeply ironic counterpoint to the poem quoted at the beginning of this chapter, "in 1888, everyone said: we are all citizens, there are no more slaves. Today, in a low voice that trembles with terror, everyone repeats to himself, or to his interlocutor: 'in Brazil there are no more citizens: we are all slaves!'"[104]

Cuba too was being torn by political struggles between monarchy and republicanism, though in this case the struggles were overlaid by the question of colonialism and the war for independence. As in Brazil at the same time, and mainland Spanish America 60 years earlier, slavery and race had central roles in those conflicts. Spain's refusal to concede racial equality to free blacks created a perfect opportunity for Cuban rebels to recruit black support. At the outbreak of the Ten Years War in 1868, one of the rebel government's first decrees was a declaration of full racial equality and an end to the caste laws. Free Afro-Cubans flocked to join the rebel forces, which soon became majority black; and though white officers predominated at the upper levels of the army, Afro-Cubans were well represented at the middle and lower levels of the officer corps. The general commander of the rebel forces, Antonio Maceo, was Afro-Cuban, as were many of his most trusted subordinates.[105]

During the war years Spain sought, with considerable success, to divide Cubans along racial lines by portraying itself as the defender of white "civilization" and the rebels as black barbarians pursuing the goal of an Africanized, Haitianized Cuba.[106] Once the rebels had been defeated, Spanish policy changed direction, making an open bid for Afro-Cuban support by gradually repealing the caste laws. Spanish officials did not act spontaneously but, rather, under pressure from a well-organized civil rights movement based in the social clubs, mutual aid societies, and civic organizations of the Afro-Cuban middle class. Under the leadership of journalist and political activist Juan Gualberto Gómez, in 1887 these organizations formed an islandwide Directorio Central de las Sociedades de la Raza de Color to coordinate the civil rights struggle. Between 1878 and 1893 Afro-Cuban activists obtained government edicts outlawing restrictions on interracial marriage; segregation in public education and public services; and the keeping of official birth, death, and marriage records in volumes separated by race.[107]

This was late in the game, however, for Spain to be reversing course. By the 1880s and 1890s caste legislation had lasted 70 to 80 years longer in Cuba and Puerto Rico than in the rest of Spanish America and had left a powerful legacy that would not be easily overcome. Race "prejudice had become normative" in Puerto Rico,[108] and to judge by the reactions of white Cubans to the antidiscrimination edicts of the 1880s and 1890s, this was the case in Cuba as well. Private schools simply ignored legislation mandating equality in education. Towns and cities forced to open their parks and squares divided them into separate areas for blacks and whites. And while many hotels, restaurants, and theaters accepted the new laws, others continued to exclude black customers. As a result, most politically active Afro-Cubans remained committed to independence. The Directorio Central served as a conduit for communication between exiled rebel activists in the United States and organizers on the island. When a third independence war erupted in 1895, most of the Directorio's constituent societies closed their doors as their members marched off to join the rebel forces. As in the two earlier wars, those forces were again majority black and mulatto.[109]

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Independence wars against Spain, and then civil wars among competing political forces, created the conditions for black emancipation throughout Spanish America.[110] Under conditions of war, slaves and free blacks were able to overturn colonial-era restrictions on their freedom and produce the first great wave of social and political reform in Latin American history. War also reduced the ability of landowners and governments to control black workers and peasants who were now legally free. Afro-Spanish Americans seized this opportunity by joining with other lower- and middle-class groups to forge an alternative to conservative, oligarchical politics—"popular liberalism," based on radical doctrines of broad-based democracy and social and racial equality. In the countryside, libertos and free black peasants obtained land, redefined working conditions, created families, and constructed a rich cultural and social life.

Afro-Brazilians also fought to create "popular liberalism" and to broaden the terms of their political and economic participation in the life of the nation. But in Brazil a stronger, more consolidated national state was able to defeat the rebellions of the 1830s and 1840s and to repress radical political movements. That state also followed racial policies quite different from those in effect in Spanish America. Everywhere in Spanish America—in the first half of the 1800s on the mainland, and during the second half in Cuba and Puerto Rico—slaves and free blacks made the transition toward freedom more or less in tandem. In Brazil, by contrast, over the course of the 1800s free blacks won legal equality while slaves remained as oppressed as ever, and in larger numbers than ever, by slavery. This was also a period of increased Africanization of the slave population, further dividing

slaves from free blacks. Africanization took place in Cuba as well, and is a contributing reason why those two countries were the last in the Western world to abolish slavery.

Yet even if at different times and by different routes, by the end of the century all the societies of Afro-Latin America had abolished the legal structures of colonial racism: slavery, the slave trade, and the caste laws. Blacks and pardos had won freedom and legal equality with whites. Those advances offered the hope that, in the words of Cuban independence leader José Martí, the 1900s in Afro-Latin America would be "not the century of the struggle of races but of the affirmation of rights."[111] His prediction proved unduly optimistic. Race struggle continued in Afro-Latin America, shaped partly by the historical legacy of the colonial period and partly by the new conditions of twentieth-century modernity. Societies that during the 1800s had accepted and acknowledged, even if uncomfortably, their racially mixed, miscegenated character now sought to remake and transform themselves. It was to be a new age: the age of "whitening."