

Patchwork Freedoms

In nineteenth-century Santiago de Cuba, the island of Cuba's radical cradle, Afro-descendant peasants forged freedom and devised their own formative path to emancipation. Drawing on understudied archives, this pathbreaking work unearths a new history of Black rural geography and popular legalism, and offers a new framework for thinking about nineteenth-century Black freedom. Santiago de Cuba's Afro-descendant peasantries did not rely on liberal-abolitionist ideologies as a primary reference point in their struggle for rights. Instead, they negotiated their freedom and land piecemeal, through colonial legal frameworks that allowed for local custom and manumission. While gradually wearing down the institution of slavery through litigation and self-purchase, they reimagined colonial racial systems before Cuba's intellectuals had their say. Long before residents of Cuba protested for national independence and island-wide emancipation in 1868, it was Santiago's Afro-descendant peasants who, gradually and invisibly, laid the groundwork for emancipation.

Adriana Chira is Assistant Professor of History at Emory University. Her research focuses on practices of litigation among socially marginalized groups – enslaved people, free Africans and Afro-descendants, and peasantries – in the Iberian Atlantic during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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Patchwork Freedoms

Law, Slavery, and Race beyond Cuba's Plantations

ADRIANA CHIRA
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To Paul

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- Archivo del Arzobispado de Santiago de Cuba (the Archive of the Archdiocese of Santiago de Cuba): AASC
 Archivo General de la Administración (Madrid): AGA
 Archivo General de Indias (Seville): AGI
 Fondo Audiencia de Santo Domingo: SD
 Fondo Estado: Estado
 Fondo Indiferente General: IG
 Fondo Papeles de Cuba: Cuba
 Fondo Ultramar: Ultramar
 Archivo Histórico Nacional (Madrid): AHN
 Fondo Estado: Estado
 Fondo Ultramar: Ultramar
 Archivo Histórico Provincial de Santiago de Cuba (Santiago de Cuba): AHPSC
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 Escribanía del Cobre
 Escribanía de Guerra
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 Escribanía de Manuel Caminero
 Escribanía de Nicolás Lasso
 Escribanía de Ramírez Torres
 Escribanía de la Real Hacienda
 Escribanía de San Luís del Caney
 Escribanía de Soler y Requíferos
 Fondo Actas Capitulares: Actas Capitulares

- Fondo Anotaduría de Hipotecas: Hipotecas
 Fondo Audiencia Territorial de Oriente: ATO
 Fondo Contaduría: Contaduría
 Fondo Gobierno Provincial: GP
 Fondo Juzgado de Primera Instancia: JPI
 Fondo Protocolos Notariales: PN
 Archivo Nacional de Cuba (Havana): ANC
 Fondo Asuntos Políticos: AP
 Fondo Audiencia de Santiago de Cuba: ASC
 Fondo Bienes Embargados: BE
 Fondo Comisión Militar: CM
 Fondo Correspondencia de los Capitanes Generales: CCG
 Fondo Gobierno General: GG
 Fondo Gobierno Superior Civil: GSC
 Fondo Intendencia de la Hacienda: Hacienda
 Fondo Miscelánea de Expedientes: ME
 Fondo Real Consulado y Junta de Fomento: RCJF
 Fondo Reales Órdenes y Cédulas: ROC
 Biblioteca Elvira Cape (Santiago de Cuba)
 Biblioteca Nacional de España (Madrid): BNE
 Expediente (Record number): exp.
 Legajo (Bundle): leg.
 Museo Naval (Madrid)
 Colección Guillén
 Real Academia de la Historia (Madrid): RAH
 Colección Juan Bautista Muñoz: Colección Muñoz

JOURNAL ABBREVIATIONS

- American Historical Review*: AHR
Boletín de la Biblioteca Nacional José Martí: BNJM
Colonial Latin American Review: CLAR
Comparative Studies in Society and History: CSSH
Hispanic American Historical Review: HAHR
International Review of Social History: IRSH
Journal of African History: JAH
Journal of Early American History: JEAMH
Law and History Review: LHR
Revista de la Biblioteca Nacional José Martí: RBNJM
William and Mary Quarterly: WMQ

Note on Language and Region

The kinds of terms that we choose to describe experiences of enslavement matter. They inform whom we, as writers and readers, approach as subjects. In this book, I use the term “slavery” to refer to the institution itself as it was described by historical actors in the nineteenth century, turning to the term “enslavement” as frequently as possible in order to remind readers that slave status was a process. In doing so, we always keep in view the violence that process entailed and the participation of enslavers in it, while also suggesting that the subjectivities of the enslaved exceeded slave status itself.

I try to stay as closely as possible to nineteenth-century racial labels whom various actors in Santiago used. The most common terms that individuals turned to in order to describe themselves and others were: *negro* (Black, and often used to refer to people held in slavery and usually applied to others; I have never encountered it as a term used for self-identification), *moreno* (Black, usually associated with a free status in the records from Santiago), *pardo* (Brown), and *de color* (of color). These terms might appear clunky to scholars working in contexts where the color line was more rigidly defined, and where more straightforward terms such as “Black” and “of color” conveyed racial identifications and self-identifications. The Santiago- and Cuba-specific terms, however, help convey differences that people of African descent found to be relevant. The use of these terms was also very contextual, as the narrative in this book shows; individuals shifted color status throughout their lifetimes, as did family members across generations. Part of the goal is to show that the use of racial terms in Santiago was inconsistent and that identifications were made and unmade through practice, rather than

simply mandated from above through a blueprint. On occasion, I use the term “Afro-descendant” to refer to groups that included people who identified themselves publicly using official terms denoting Black or Brown status as well as others who did not associate themselves with those categories but whose African ancestry appears to have been publicly known. As we will see, one might be of publicly known African descent, but not officially *de color* or *moreno* or *pardo*. I have chosen the term “Afro-descendant” over “Afro-Cuban” because the latter is associated with a cultural movement (*afrocubanismo*) that contained politically loaded representations of African influences on Cuban culture. It is also a term that has come to be associated by some with the influence of US racial ideologies on the island.

The boundaries of the region that this book refers to as Santiago de Cuba remained relatively volatile throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the region was hardly mapped until the 1860s. I will use the flexible regional definition of Santiago that appeared in the census of 1827, because it captures internal circulations and connections and thus the lived experiences of real people into the mid- to late nineteenth century beyond administrative boundaries.

Santiago was one of the first cities to be founded on the island. Starting with 1607, it became the seat of one of the two departments in Cuba: Oriente. The other larger and wealthier department was called Occidente, and its capital was Havana. The island did not include a clearly demarcated jurisdiction called Santiago de Cuba as we know it today until around 1846. In the 1827 census, Santiago appears as a city surrounded by several smaller towns and rural hamlets, and continued to be the seat of the Oriente Department. There were several other towns and cities subsumed to its political and military jurisdiction: Bayamo, Holguín, Mayarí, Las Tunas, Manzanillo, Jiguaní, Saltadero, and Baracoa. In the 1846 census, Santiago de Cuba was listed as a jurisdiction that included the city and forty-six rural hamlets. While it retained the status of the main military and political seat (a captaincy), the other cities acquired some measure of autonomy and were listed as separate jurisdictions. Conflicts over jurisdictional boundaries and over the political powers of the lieutenant governors overseeing these different urban areas ran rampant. This book focuses particularly on urban Santiago, its immediate rural hinterland, as well as the areas of Saltadero and Baracoa (to the north and east) and parts of Bayamo and Holguín (to the west). These areas were connected through rural pathways and agrarian pursuits (including coffee planting and tobacco cultivation). Individuals and

Note on Language and Region

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families living in these areas traveled to Santiago to use the local institutions of government, which suggests that they saw the city as a center of their social and political world.

I do not use the term “Oriente” here because it referred to a very large swath of Cuba’s east. In 1862, Oriente included Bayamo, Las Tunas, Manzanillo, Holguín, Jiguani, Santiago, Guantánamo (earlier known as Saltadero), and Baracoa. Some of the social features of this swath of territory, most notably the ranching culture of Bayamo (which was not significant in Santiago), appear only very briefly in this book. However, readers familiar with the island and with Oriente will recognize many of Santiago’s characteristics as those commonly associated with Oriente writ large: the presence of a large free peasantry of African descent, marronage, small population densities, a sense of local autonomy.

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MAP O.I Provinces of eastern Cuba

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FIGURE 0.1 “Cuba, Jamaica and Porto Rico,” from G. W. and C. B. Colton & Co., New York Heritage Collection. <https://digitalcollections.library.miami.edu/digital/collection/chco468/id/>

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