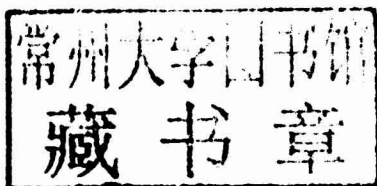


**RACE TO
REVOLUTION**

*The United States and Cuba during
Slavery and Jim Crow*

GERALD HORNE



MR

MONTHLY REVIEW PRESS

New York

Copyright © 2014 by Gerald Horne
All Rights Reserved

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Horne, Gerald.

Race to revolution : Cuba and the United States during slavery and Jim
Crow / Gerald Horne.

pages cm

ISBN 978-1-58367-445-1 (paperback : alkaline paper) — ISBN
978-1-58367-446-8 (cloth : alkaline paper) 1. United States—Relations
—Cuba. 2. Cuba—Relations—United States. 3. Slavery—Cuba—History.
4. Slavery—United States—History. 5. African Americans—Segregation
—History. 6. Blacks—Segregation—Cuba—History. 7. Cuba
—Race relations. 8. United States—Race relations. 9. Blacks—Cuba
—Politics and government. 10. African Americans—Politics and
government. I. Title.

E183.8.C9H65 2014

327.7307291'09034—dc23

2014011580

Typeset in Eldorado

Monthly Review Press
146 West 29th Street, Suite 6W
New York, New York 10001

www.monthlyreview.org

5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Introduction / 7

Chapter 1: Spanish Florida Falls, Cuba Next? / 28

Chapter 2: Texas, Cuba, and the African Slave Trade / 45

Chapter 3: Africans Revolt! / 65

Chapter 4: U.S. to Seize Cuba to Prevent “Africanization”? / 82

Chapter 5: Slavery Ends in the U.S.—and Cuba? / 100

Chapter 6: Toward De Facto Annexation of Cuba / 123

Chapter 7: War! And Jim Crow Enforced in Cuba / 151

Chapter 8: Race/War in Cuba? / 176

Chapter 9: The Rise of the Reds—on the Mainland and the Island / 204

Chapter 10: War! And Progress? / 232

Chapter 11: Race to Revolution / 260

Notes / 277

Index / 404

**RACE TO
REVOLUTION**

*The United States and Cuba during
Slavery and Jim Crow*

GERALD HORNE

MR

MONTHLY REVIEW PRESS

New York

Copyright © 2014 by Gerald Horne
All Rights Reserved

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Horne, Gerald.

Race to revolution : Cuba and the United States during slavery and Jim
Crow / Gerald Horne.

pages cm

ISBN 978-1-58367-445-1 (paperback : alkaline paper) — ISBN
978-1-58367-446-8 (cloth : alkaline paper) 1. United States—Relations
—Cuba. 2. Cuba—Relations—United States. 3. Slavery—Cuba—History.
4. Slavery—United States—History. 5. African Americans—Segregation
—History. 6. Blacks—Segregation—Cuba—History. 7. Cuba
—Race relations. 8. United States—Race relations. 9. Blacks—Cuba
—Politics and government. 10. African Americans—Politics and
government. I. Title.

E183.8.C9H65 2014

327-7307291'09034—dc23

2014011580

Typeset in Eldorado

Monthly Review Press
146 West 29th Street, Suite 6W
New York, New York 10001

www.monthlyreview.org

5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Introduction / 7

Chapter 1: Spanish Florida Falls, Cuba Next? / 28

Chapter 2: Texas, Cuba, and the African Slave Trade / 45

Chapter 3: Africans Revolt! / 65

Chapter 4: U.S. to Seize Cuba to Prevent “Africanization”? / 82

Chapter 5: Slavery Ends in the U.S.—and Cuba? / 100

Chapter 6: Toward De Facto Annexation of Cuba / 123

Chapter 7: War! And Jim Crow Enforced in Cuba / 151

Chapter 8: Race/War in Cuba? / 176

Chapter 9: The Rise of the Reds—on the Mainland and the Island / 204

Chapter 10: War! And Progress? / 232

Chapter 11: Race to Revolution / 260

Notes / 277

Index / 404

Introduction

THE AFRICANS¹ WERE APPREHENSIVE—with good reason.

It was early in 1862 and the nation in which they resided, the United States, was embroiled in a bloody civil war. As such, the Washington authorities sought to send hundreds of them to Key West to work on fortifications, as this small town was well behind the lines of the so-called Confederate States of America—which dominated most of Florida—and had sought secession precisely on the grounds of continuation of enslavement of Africans. But the Africans asked to take on this important task balked, assuming this might be a prelude to selling them into slavery in Cuba, just across the Florida Straits.² Their nervousness was understandable, since, for the longest period, there had been a robust slave trade—licit and otherwise—between the republic and the Spanish colony.³

Thus by 1862 the republic, which had countenanced this odious commerce for so long, was now ironically placed in jeopardy because Africans had long memories of being shipped to one of the world's most significant slave emporia.⁴ These were not unreasonable fears given that some Confederate rebels were then in the process of transferring or liquidating their human assets by sending them to or selling them in Cuba.⁵ Though in the long run the demise of slavery in the republic spelled doom for its counterparts in Cuba, in Barbados in 1863 sugar planters complained that the increase in slaves delivered to Havana by fleeing rebels and increased traffic from Africa (often captained by comrades of these rebels) was providing “unfair competition.”⁶

In short, given the intense traffic between Havana and the mainland, slaveholders taking their slaves with them to Cuba were not uncommon.⁷ Africans resisting their dispatch to Florida may also have heard about the rude reception those like them had received by colonial authorities in Cuba. In 1837, George Davis, a tailor—and U.S. Negro—was traveling in Cuba where he was suspected of being a dreaded abolitionist. He was arrested and almost immediately condemned to death. As an antislavery journal put it, he was “executed

by being screwed to death”—and this was not the first incident of this type. “Colored seamen” particularly from the republic were persecuted; generally they were barred from landing and if somehow they managed to evade this proscription, they were jailed, then tried, and if convicted were slated for execution or enslavement.⁸ “God only knows when we shall get out,” said a U.S. detainee in a prison in Santiago de Cuba in 1841, since “it has often happened that free colored persons put in prison here have been sold into slavery to defray the jail fees.”⁹

In 1849 the periodical published by Frederick Douglass, the leading Negro abolitionist, excoriated Cuba as the “great Western slave mart of the world” and “the channel through which slaves are imported annually into the United States.”¹⁰ Like others, Douglass saw the supposed ban on slave importations into the republic as being as effective in halting this practice as bans on illicit drugs were in halting ingesting of such substances.

Unfortunately, the impressment of U.S. Negroes into slavery in Cuba continued after the Civil War’s end in 1865, suggesting that ill conditions on one side of the Straits could have contagious effects on the other side.¹¹ In 1872 Margaret Ray of Owensboro, Kentucky, complained directly to President Ulysses S. Grant that “100 colored [*sic*] freedmen” were “decoyed to Cuba” after being offered “fabulous wages” but found themselves “forced into slavery more terrible than of which they could ever have conceived.” Adequate recourse seemed unavailing so she demanded that Grant “go and take Cuba and wipe out the stain” of “slavery,” so such a tragedy would not recur.¹²

THIS IS A BOOK ABOUT U.S.-Cuban relations in the bitter context of slavery and Jim Crow. It focuses heavily on the words and deeds of U.S. Negroes—and their “white” counterparts.¹³ This book engages the question of racism with an emphasis on the United States—which should not be interpreted to excuse Spain’s depredations in this conflicted realm: on the other hand, exploring race and racism in Cuba without reference to the gravitational pull exerted by the mainland seems shortsighted. U.S. slave traders were heavily responsible for the presence of so many Africans in Cuba and U.S. nationals were a potent presence there almost from the moment of independence. The U.S. Negro abolitionist Martín Delany was among those who crusaded against slavery in Cuba, seeing the eradication of this system as a precondition for freedom in the Americas. Like the Africans in Florida in 1862, U.S. Negroes came to understand that their freedom would be imperiled as long as bondage existed ninety miles from the mainland. Delany famously argued in 1852 that “in almost every town where there is any intelligence among them, there are some *colored persons* of both sexes who are studying the Spanish language,” not least because of fervent interest in Cuba.¹⁴ This was followed

in the twentieth century when U.S. Negro Communists and Reds of African descent in republican Cuba campaigned relentlessly against U.S. hegemony in Cuba—notably against the Jim Crow that predominated on both sides of the straits, which supplanted a different and, according to many commentators, milder form of racism that had prevailed in Cuba for centuries. Actually, slavery in the republic was so horrific that it tended to make Spanish slavery seem mild by comparison, according to many commentators of that era. And, as we shall see, repugnance toward the heightened racism imposed by Washington in Havana paved the way for the revolution that climaxed on 1 January 1959.

Yet even before independence, colonial Cuba often intimidated the slave South, as arming Africans had been the practice on the island since the sixteenth century¹⁵ and by the early eighteenth century St. Augustine in Florida had become notorious for its forays into the Carolinas featuring Spanish-speaking Negroes with guns.¹⁶ This was of significance when the republic and Spain jostled over control of Florida almost 200 years ago: Washington seemed to think that deploying armed Africans from Cuba to engage in combat was akin to a crime of war.¹⁷

After breaking from rule by London, the republic was hampered in trading with its neighbors—including Canada and the Caribbean—which left few options beyond commerce with Spanish possessions,¹⁸ including Cuba; hence, as early as the 1790s, aggressive Yankee merchants were dominating the slave trade to Havana.¹⁹ The arrival of these merchants coincided with a quantum leap in Cuba's African population.²⁰ Surely Cuba represented a lush opportunity—but it also represented danger, which dialectically gave impetus to the republican desire to penetrate the island, for early in the nineteenth century Governor William Claiborne of Louisiana limned the consensus of the U.S. ruling elite when he claimed that Cuba was “the real mouth of the Mississippi [River],” the serpentine spine of the mainland, and until the island was controlled by the United States, the republic itself would be imperiled.²¹ “We must have the Floridas and Cuba,” echoed Thomas Jefferson.²²

By bringing more Africans to Cuba and seeking to control more territory there, republicans could also attain a strategic goal, even without annexation. Constantly in search for new markets, by 1806 these creative entrepreneurs had veered from the traditional hunting ground for the enslaved—West Africa—and had headed southward, rounding the Cape toward Mozambique in search of human chattel destined for Cuba.²³ By 1838 Captain Brunswick Popham of the Royal Navy, then sailing off the coast of Africa, rued the “active and undisguised assistance given to the Slave Trade by citizens of the United States of America,” which was “as notorious as it is disgraceful”; in fact, he continued, “were it not for the active co-operation of the Americans, the Slave Trade

would very materially decline,” which would have had a salutary impact on “Havana and Brazil.”²⁴ By 1839 one U.S. Negro journalist was dumbfounded to find that “out of 177 slave ships which arrived at Cuba every year, five-sixths are owned and fitted out from ports in the United States,” with profits fueling robust development within the republic, as this filthy lucre was going disproportionately to Boston, New York, and Baltimore.²⁵

By 1840, a British diplomat estimated that U.S. nationals owned thousands of slaves in Cuba and often held property jointly with Spaniards: there had been a “great increase” in these categories “within the last ten or twelve [years],” it was reported.²⁶ That same year Joel Poinsett, a leading U.S. emissary in the region, had reason to believe that his fellow citizens controlled a “third of all the wealth of the island.”²⁷ By 1841, another Negro analyst opined that since 1808, when the slave trade was thought to be in remission, there had been “kidnapped and carried away from Africa to . . . Cuba and Porto Rico 1,020,000” unlucky souls.²⁸ As early as 1841, London had concluded that Spanish complicity in the dramatically extraordinary increase in the enslaved population was a desperate roll of the dice by Madrid whereby it would free and unleash Africans in order to foil U.S. annexation or a revolt by the Creoles, the Cuban-born population of Spanish ancestry. This phenomenal increase was also a kind of planned deflation, it was said, to drive down the price of Africans to the detriment of the U.S. nationals then flooding the island.²⁹

By 1849, London concluded that “those who are most active in encouraging the slave trade are the American settlers, who have bought land and wish to bring new land into cultivation, or extend the cultivation of existing estates.”³⁰ By the mid-1850s Cuba sold over 85 percent of its sugar to its northern neighbor—overwhelmingly produced by slave labor—as it slid uneasily into the role of becoming a *de facto* appendage of the republic.³¹

It was also during this time that a U.S. emissary in Trinidad, Cuba, estimated “at least nineteen-twentieths of the present slave population” had been imported since 1820. Though he did not add that his compatriots played a major role in this dastardly process, he did say that since London had pressured Madrid into anti-slave-trade provisions that suggested that Africans imported after 1820 were in Cuba improperly, it could mean a massive emancipation that “would be seriously injurious”—notably to the republic—since this “would amount very nearly to a total abolition of slavery.” And since the importation “has been almost exclusively confined to males, and that at this moment at least four-fifths of the whole number of slaves on the estates of the planters [are] composed of that gender,” this could augment the already formidable Cuban military.³² Correspondingly, by 1850 William Hunt, formerly of Philadelphia, was billed as “the most extensive sugar planter in the island of Cuba” and, as a result, “probably the richest man of his age in the Union.”³³

By 1858 there were so many Africans flooding into the mainland region abutting the Gulf of Mexico—a process driven by the seemingly insatiable appetite of Cuba for slaves—that the African slave trade, thought to be on the decline, had actually surged with a vengeance, a U.S. journalist claimed: this was evidenced by the depot for arriving Africans he had espied in the Pearl River delta in southern Mississippi.³⁴ It was with disgust during that same year that a British delegate in Havana denounced the “abuse of the flag of the United States in carrying on the Slave Trade.” “Indeed,” he averred mournfully, “it is only under that flag that slave-trading in this island is carried on” in what amounted to a “prostitution” of the Stars and Stripes.³⁵ As late as 1876, British officials were astonished to find the continuing involvement of U.S. flagged vessels in transporting enslaved Africans.³⁶

In short, the considerable role of U.S. nationals in promoting enslavement of Africans in Cuba was a poisoned chalice because Washington’s influence in Havana brought the abolitionist gaze of London, which had demonstrated previously that its antislavery stance could attract mass support from U.S. Negroes to the detriment of the republic.³⁷ As some fire-eaters in Dixie clamored for forcible annexation of Cuba, the dovish Congressman Joshua Giddings of Ohio warned pointedly in 1854 that these warmongers should be careful since a war for the island could paradoxically mean “the overthrow of slavery in Cuba,” which could easily spread to Dixie itself.³⁸ When Congressman William Boyce of South Carolina spoke balefully in 1855 about “two hundred thousand Spanish Free Negroes” in Cuba who “strike me more like two hundred thousand half-lit torches, which a single flash may light up and set the whole island in a flame at any moment,” he suggested how and why the republic would find it difficult to swallow and digest Cuba. “It was the same Free Negro race,” he argued, “under the workings of Spanish and French ideas, which upturned the entire social fabric in St. Domingo [*sic*] and wreaked infinite slaughter on the white race.”³⁹

Nonetheless, the importance of Cuba was signaled when Washington posted as its top diplomat there, Nicholas Trist, married to a granddaughter of Thomas Jefferson and maintaining varying ties of intimacy to four other U.S. presidents. Trist boasted of his tie to Jefferson as reflecting an “intimacy as close, a familiarity as unreserved,” as could be imagined. Andrew Jackson appointed him in 1833 and he served in Cuba for eight years, then resided in Cuba for over three more years and distinguished himself for his pivotal role in the slave trade.⁴⁰ He was “most unfit,” sniffed London’s man in Havana in 1839, this after the U.S. citizen had taken on the added assignment of consul in Portugal, a declining European power renowned for its prowess in the slave trade. Trist, it was said, was an “apologist for the Slave Trade” and “an abetter of slave dealers,” eager to “partake of the blood money of the slave.”⁴¹

To be sure, as suggested by the abolition of slavery in Cuba not taking effect until years after the Emancipation Proclamation, Madrid was able to teach Washington a thing or two about how best to maintain slavery, particularly in the training of fearsome dogs trained to capture—and mangle—runaways.⁴² As early as 1839, Zachary Taylor, a future U.S. president, thought it would be a grand idea to import these animals to the mainland to check an increasingly rambunctious population of Africans.⁴³ When in 1836 a New Yorker spoke movingly about how in Cuba “fat” Africans were killed and converted to “sausages,” the unwary would have been excused if they took this story seriously.⁴⁴

Still, given an antebellum Hobson’s choice, Africans tended to favor residing in Cuba rather than the republic, perhaps because escaping to the island generally meant gaining freedom and escaping mainland enslavement. This became clear during the tortuous transition from Spanish to U.S. rule in Florida. Africans fled en masse to Cuba during this era, not least because options for free Negroes were broader there. An illustrative case was that of Antonio Proctor, who because of his service to His Catholic Majesty, not least during the “Patriot War” of 1811 when Washington sought forcibly to annex Florida, received a land grant of 185 acres near St. Augustine around 1816, but by the late 1840s, with Florida firmly under U.S. rule, his family had been sold into slavery.⁴⁵ The case of the Proctors exemplifies a major theme of cross-straits history: the rise in influence of Washington was a catastrophe for Africans.

On the other hand, the case of the slave ship *Amistad* and its enslaved Africans who revolted in Cuban waters, then found themselves ensnared on the mainland,⁴⁶ is now part of U.S. lore. Less renowned is a case a couple of decades later in 1861 when a crew of African seafarers from Cuba sailed northward but rebelled on the open seas when they found their destination was to be Baltimore where they feared they would be sold into bondage.⁴⁷

The determined avoidance of U.S. jurisdiction by Africans of all stripes was a reflection of the fact that when Washington replaced Madrid as the sovereign in Florida, what one scholar has described as a “mild and flexible system of race relations” was supplanted by a different system “with a severe definition of slavery” that “viewed [Africans] as degraded members of a despised race and which erected institutional and social barriers between whites and all persons of African descent. . . . The United States brought a harsh two-caste system of slavery with rigid racial dimensions to the new Florida territory.”⁴⁸ To a degree, when Washington replaced Madrid in Cuba in 1898 there was a similar replacement in “race relations” which, I contend, contributed to the Cuban Revolution in 1959.

Nonetheless, as suggested by the rough treatment accorded to U.S. Negroes who found themselves in Cuba during the era of slavery, Havana watched the activities of the slave South with a keen eye focused on Negro unrest, as if it

were a contagion that could easily spread across the straits.⁴⁹ Beyond bilateral relations, this was understandable given the deep and liquid nature of the market in enslaved Africans, and Havana was wise to ascertain if any of those imported had reputations for obstreperousness. Thus it seemed almost routine in 1823 when Havana received a report from Charleston that Africans involved in a recent significant conspiracy were designated for expulsion.⁵⁰ Quite naturally, Havana watched carefully the unfolding 1830s war in Florida between indigenes—thought to be led by Africans—and federal troops.⁵¹ Colonial Cuba had become so leery of the republic that it had become nervous about the presence on the island of men of color who had roots in St. Augustine, a policy that befell Juan Romero in 1844⁵² and Juan Bernardo Marrero during that same year.⁵³ Havana may have known that as the slave trade to Cuba increased, driven by events in Texas, U.S. Negroes took an ever more determined interest in the island, leading to increased visits by them to Havana.⁵⁴

On the one hand, the republicans seeking to annex the island may have been enthusiastic about the unrest generated in Cuba in the 1840s, which was driven in part by the flux generated with their Stakanovite labors in enchaining Africans for the island: Cuba was rocked by major slave revolts during this time. On the other hand, as their investments grew in Cuba, republicans had to be concerned about their holdings being destroyed by rebellious Africans. By April 1844, John C. Calhoun, the hawkish doyen of Dixie, was bemoaning the “great outrages” inflicted on “white residents, especially of our citizens”⁵⁵ near Cardenas at the instigation of Africans and sought to dispatch “one of our ships of war” there.⁵⁶ If Calhoun and his ilk had been paying attention to the views of U.S. Negroes about tumultuous events in Cuba, they might have been even more sobered when Martín Delany seized the opportunity provided by this commotion to pen one of the more profound novels of the entire antebellum oeuvre, which suggested that a revolt of the enslaved in Cuba would lead to the downfall of that peculiar institution in the republic. Delany imagined a U.S. Negro protagonist who became embroiled in a plot to overthrow the illicit slave trade to Cuba and assisted Africans there in routing wealthy U.S. nationals who dominated the economy of the island.⁵⁷

Inspired by an actual revolt of enslaved Africans in Cuba in the early 1840s, Delany named one of his children after the renowned Cuban poet of that era, Plácido.⁵⁸ His novelistic conjoining of the fates of Africans on either side of the straits was redolent of thinking among Africans in the Republic,⁵⁹ a reflection of the tragic reality that kidnapping and illicit commerce could often transform a U.S. Negro into an African residing in Cuba. Delany, like most Africans of the era, had a sour view of the fruits of 1776 and saw the militant overthrow of slavery on both sides of the straits as a necessary corrective to the establishment of the United States itself.⁶⁰ It was Delany, speaking in Pittsburgh in 1855, who