

Crypto-Protestants and Pseudo-Catholics in the Nineteenth-Century Hispanic Caribbean

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This essay, which stems from a broader project on religion in the nineteenth-century Hispanic Caribbean, seeks to recreate the experiences of the thousands of Protestants who struggled tenaciously to retain or hide their faith in colonial Cuba and Puerto Rico before the declaration of religious tolerance in 1869 and before the establishment of the region's first Protestant churches, the Anglican congregation of Ponce, organised in 1869, the Episcopal mission of Havana, started in 1871, and the Anglican congregation of Vieques, an island located eight miles off the coast of Puerto Rico, founded in 1880.¹

AALH = Archivo del Arzobispado de La Habana; AGPR = Archivo General de Puerto Rico, San Juan; AHDASJ = Archivo Histórico Diocesano de la Archidiócesis de San Juan; AHMP = Archivo Histórico Municipal de Ponce; AHPM = Archivo Histórico Provincial de Matanzas; AHV = Archivo Histórico de Vieques; ANC = Archivo Nacional de Cuba; CIH = Centro de Investigaciones Históricas de la Universidad de Puerto Rico; FO = Foreign Office; MDA = Maryland Diocesan Archives, Baltimore; NA = National Archives, Washington, DC; PRO = Public Record Office; RG = Record Group

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¹ There exists a modest body of published sources on Protestantism in the nineteenth-century Hispanic Caribbean. Most of it examines the post-1869 period. The most general source on Cuba is Marcos Antonio Ramos, *Panorama del protestantismo en Cuba*, San José, Costa Rica 1986. On the Hispanic Caribbean in general one finds Justo L. González, *The development of Christianity in the Latin Caribbean*, Grand Rapids, MI 1969. Among the few extant more specific works are Rafael Cepeda, 'Joaquín de Palma: predicador revolucionario', *Juprecu* xv (January 1977), 8–11; Francisco González del Valle, 'El clero en la revolución cubana', *Cuba Contemporánea* xviii (1918), 161–79; Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, *Martí y las religiones*, Havana 1941; Harold Greer, 'Baptists in western Cuba', *Cuban Studies* xix (1989), 61–77; Luis Martínez-Fernández, "'Don't die here': the death and burial of Protestants in the Hispanic Caribbean, 1840–1885', *The Americas* xlix

The Protestant population residing in the Hispanic Caribbean constituted a relatively small minority. Its presence, however, had a far larger significance given that it was the result of recently established trade and migration links between the Spanish colonies of the Caribbean and the powers of the North Atlantic. The experiences of Protestants in Cuba and Puerto Rico during the first seven decades of the nineteenth century point to the tense and conflictive coexistence of rigid Spanish colonial rule and growing commercial ties, resting on the principles of economic liberalism, with the rest of the world. The sugar industry, with its demands for imported capital and technology, foreign markets and foreign labour, was at the heart of the problematic coexistence of colonial domination under Catholic Spain and dependence on the Protestant nations of the North Atlantic. It was not coincidental that the very first nuclei of Protestant communities to emerge in the region (Ponce, Havana, Matanzas and Vieques) resulted from the Hispanic Caribbean sugar industry's need for foreign investors and merchants, foreign technicians and field hands, and foreign sailing crews. Havana and Matanzas were the undisputed epicentre of Cuba's nineteenth-century sugar revolution. Ponce was Puerto Rico's biggest and most successful sugar-producing jurisdiction, while Vieques experienced a dramatic sugar boom during the last third of the century.

Since Protestant religious activities were outside the margin of the law – it was illegal for Protestants to reside in the Spanish colonies let alone practise their religion – reconstructing them from the historical record remains a challenging task. The methods and sources of social history so successfully applied by historians studying other historically marginalised groups allow us, however, to give a face and a voice to the otherwise anonymous early Protestants of Cuba and Puerto Rico. Ironically, those sources so carefully gathered and preserved by those seeking to silence this religious minority more than a century ago are the very ones that allow us to reconstruct in some detail the experiences, behaviour and values of the region's first Protestants.²

Needless to say, Protestantism was not indigenous to Cuba or Puerto Rico; it originally emerged as a religious force in the region as a result of immigration from the Protestant north and the non-Hispanic Caribbean beginning in the first decades of the nineteenth century. The different origins and the social status of the region's immigrants and transient (July 1992), 23–47. There are notably fewer sources focusing specifically on Puerto Rico. See Juan Jorge Rivera Torres, *Documentos históricos de la Iglesia Episcopal Puertorriqueña*, Santo Domingo 1983; Albert E. Lee, *An island grows*, San Juan 1963, and Angel Gutiérrez, *Evangélicos en Puerto Rico en la época española*, Guaynabo, PR 1997.

² See, for example, AHDASJ, justicia, procesos legales, Soltería, Ponce, leg. J–182; AALH, expedientes ultramarinos and matrimonios ultramarinos; various anti-Protestant articles and documents published in Puerto Rico's *Boletín Eclesiástico* and *Boletín Eclesiástico del Obispado de La Habana*.

foreigners help explain the distinct character and orientation of the first Protestant nuclei that formed in Ponce, Havana, Matanzas and Vieques. The class composition of the different Protestant groups and their relations with other segments of society are critical factors for our understanding of the Protestants' values and religious behaviour. The class variable helps explain, for example, the different Protestant responses to official Catholic exclusivism. While some Protestants responded by pursuing crypto-Protestantism, that is by maintaining a low religious profile, while privately adhering to the dictates of their faith; others responded as pseudo-Catholics, remaining Protestant at heart but publicly partaking of the sacraments and involving themselves in other ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church. The broader geographic and demographic context within which the Protestants functioned also affected their religious options as well as the responses of church and state authorities.

Beginning in the 1810s new immigration legislation permitted the arrival of thousands of non-Spanish immigrants and transients in the Spanish Caribbean each year, many of whom were Protestants. Transients could stay up to three months; those wishing to stay longer had to seek domiciliation and had to take an oath of Catholicity; those staying five years or longer were obliged to become naturalised Spanish subjects.³ In the Spanish Caribbean, however, where most matters were subject to negotiation, these and other laws were corruptible and applied with utmost flexibility. French settlers and black labourers arriving in Vieques from the British West Indies were exempt from these regulations, just as African slaves and Chinese contract labourers were exempt from most immigration requirements.⁴

Among the thousands of foreigners entering Cuba and Puerto Rico from predominantly Protestant countries there were many who stayed either permanently or for long periods of time. In Ponce, for example, a sizeable immigration from the West Indies, Germany, the United States and Great Britain settled in and established a solid foothold in commerce and commercial agriculture. Foreign-born residents, a good proportion of them from Protestant countries, dominated Ponce's burgeoning commercial agriculture during the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1827

³ See Puerto Rico's 1815 *Cédula de Gracias* in *Boletín Histórico de Puerto Rico*, ed. Cayetano Coll y Toste, San Juan, 1914–27, i. 297–304, and Cuba's 'Real Cédula de 21 de octubre de 1817, sobre aumentar la población blanca de la isla de Cuba', ANC, gobierno superior civil, leg. 1657, exp. 82745. See also D. C. Corbitt, 'Immigration in Cuba', *Hispanic American Historical Review* xxii (1942), 280–308, and Francisco Ramos, *Prontuario de disposiciones oficiales: disposiciones más notables del Gobierno Superior desde 1824 a 1865*, San Juan 1866, 212–16.

⁴ French settlers in Vieques reportedly lived many years on the island without seeking domiciliation: governor of Puerto Rico to the Spanish minister of government, 18 Nov. 1851, CIH, papeles de Vieques, 209–10.

80 per cent and in 1845 75 per cent of Ponce's planters were immigrants. Foreign-born merchants, many of them associated with slave-trading activities, also came to dominate Ponce's sugar trade with St Thomas and other regional entrepôts. Around 1870 several Protestants, among them José María Archevald, Thomas Davidson, William Lee, Thomas G. Salomons, James Gilbee, George Weichers, José Henna, Guillermo Oppenheimer, James Gallagher and John Van Rhyn figured among Ponce's wealthiest planters and businessmen.⁵ This foreign-born elite was highly endogamic and was intricately interconnected through marriage, co-godparenthood and business links. These Protestant families also had multiple familial and business connections with members of Ponce's Spanish-speaking elite and were, therefore, subject to close social scrutiny.⁶

As Puerto Rico's premier sugar-producing region, Ponce also attracted a considerable permanent or semi-permanent migration of black and mulatto skilled and semi-skilled workers from the British, Dutch, Danish and French West Indies. According to 1838 statistics, 39 per cent of Ponce's immigrants, not counting imported slaves, were black or mulatto.⁷ Sugar-cane workers from these islands also settled in large numbers in Vieques, a smaller island under Puerto Rico's jurisdiction that enjoyed a sugar boom during the 1860s and 1870s. Beginning in the 1850s and 1860s Vieques experienced dramatic demographic growth and economic transformation. The island's population quadrupled between 1846 and 1866 mostly as a result of a steady influx of sugar-cane workers from the British West Indies. By 1871 Vieques had become an important agro-exporting centre with a total of 3,700 inhabitants, 1,175 of whom were labouring Protestants from neighbouring islands.⁸

⁵ In 1876, according to Eduardo Newmann, there were 811 foreigners among the 33,514 residents of Ponce. José María Archevald owned Hacienda Cintrona, Thomas Davidson owned Hacienda Consuelo, William Lee owned Hacienda Constancia, Thomas G. Salomons owned Hacienda Santa Cruz, James Gilbee owned Hacienda Fortuna: Eduardo Newmann, *Verdadera y auténtica historia de la ciudad de Ponce desde sus primitivos tiempos hasta la época contemporánea*, San Juan 1913, 85; Francisco A. Scarano, *Sugar and slavery in Puerto Rico: the plantation economy of Ponce, 1800–1850*, Madison, Wis. 1984, 81–2; Ivette Pérez Vega, 'Las oleadas de inmigración sobre el sur de Puerto Rico: el caso de las sociedades mercantiles creadas en Ponce (1816–1830)', *Revista del Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe* ix (1987), 114–23; Padrón de productos y capitales, Ponce, 1869–70, and Riqueza territorial, 1871–2, both in AHMP, leg. 31, boxes 30A, 30C; secretaria del gobierno superior civil de la Isla de Puerto Rico, *Registro central de esclavos (6to. Depto.)*, San Juan 1872 (microfilm in CIH); Andrés A. Ramos Mattei, *La hacienda azucarera: su crecimiento y crisis en Puerto Rico (siglo xix)*, San Juan 1981, 22.

⁶ Lee, *An island grows*, 3.

⁷ Of a total of 227 foreigners (1838), race was determined for 208, 127 of whom were white and 81 blacks: statistics for 1838, AGPR, gobernadores españoles, Ponce, box 14.

⁸ *La Gaceta de Puerto Rico*, 28 Dec. 1872, 3. On Vieques see Juan Amédée Bonnet Benítez, *Vieques en la historia de Puerto Rico*, 2nd edn, San Juan 1977; J. Pastor Ruiz, *Vieques antiguo y moderno, 1493–1946*, Yauco, PR 1947; Antonio Rivera Martínez, *Así empezó Vieques*, Río

In Cuba Protestant immigrants arrived in even larger numbers, but it was a different migration playing a substantially different role and moving into a different position on the social ladder. Estimates produced in the mid 1870s point to about 2,000 foreign residents from the United States and about the same number of immigrants from Germany and Great Britain combined. Most of these foreigners settled in Havana, the island's mercantile and political centre, and a smaller number in the sugar exporting districts of Matanzas and Cárdenas.⁹ Unlike Ponce, where early nineteenth-century immigrants were able to move into a virtual capital vacuum and take command of commercial agriculture, in Cuba very few foreigners from the Protestant north, or elsewhere, managed to make any mark on the sugar industry, which native Cubans dominated throughout the first three-quarters of the century. The British, United States and German resident elite of Havana and Matanzas gravitated instead toward diplomatic, commercial, professional and skilled labour activities. Domiciliation request documentation for the 1850s shows that the bulk of immigrants seeking permanent residence in Cuba were skilled or semi-skilled artisans and technical workers, including US mechanics, Neapolitan cauldron makers, French carpenters and the like. Records of non-domiciled foreigners in Matanzas (1844) point toward a majority of clerks, machinists and carpenters, and to very few property owners. The 1871 register of US citizens in Cuba identifies 737 individuals by occupation. Among these the dominant categories were merchants (38 per cent), machinists (31 per cent), skilled or semi-skilled artisans (13 per cent) and professionals (9 per cent). Out of a total of 737, only 37 (5 per cent) are identified as planters, agriculturalists, property owners or 'labradores'. Another important category among Cuba's foreign-born residents were the seasonal and semi-permanent mechanics and engineers who served the island's expanding sugar industry. By mid century an estimated 1,000–1,500 mechanics, mostly from the United States and Great Britain lived in Cuba, many of them just for the grinding season.¹⁰

Piedras, PR 1963; Robert Rabin Siegal, 'Los tortoleños: obreros de Barlovento en Vieques: 1864–1874', unpubl. monograph, AHV; Andrés A. Ramos Mattei, 'La importación de trabajadores contratados para la industria azucarera puertorriqueña, 1860–1880', in Francisco A. Scarano (ed.), *Immigración y clases sociales en el Puerto Rico del siglo XIX*, Río Piedras, PR 1981, 125–42. See also transcripts of documents pertaining to Vieques in CIH.

⁹ Edward Kenney to Bishop Whittingham, 1 Apr. 1876, MDA, Cuba, folder V; Gobierno de Cuba, *Cuadro estadístico de la siempre fiel Isla de Cuba, correspondiente al año 1846*, Havana 1847, 69, 77; register of Americans [in Cuba], 1 Jan.–31 Dec. 1871, NA, records of foreign service posts, RG 84, Havana, c.14.1.

¹⁰ Domiciliation files for 1855 in ANC, gobierno superior civil, leg. 796, exp. 27003; register of non-domiciled foreigners, AHPM, negociado de orden público y policía, leg. 58, exp. 6001; register of Americans [in Cuba], 1 Jan.–1 Dec. 1871, 1, NA, RG 84, Havana, c.14.1; Robert L. Paquette, *Sugar is made with blood*, Middletown, CT 1988, 187; Edward Kenney to Bishop Whittingham, 1 Apr. 1876, MDA, Cuba, folder V.

As a group, Havana's foreign-born residents from the Protestant north never achieved the rank, visibility or social and economic power of their counterparts in Ponce. In fact many of them were wretchedly poor; in the words of US consul, Charles Helm, they were 'destitute... broken down in health, scarcely able to walk, without money, and unable to speak the language of the country... crippled, sick, ragged, hungry, weeping'.¹¹ Indicative of the social isolation of Havana's foreigners is the fact that many of them settled in the suburban districts of El Cerro and El Horcón, where they tended to reside in particular streets such as Tulipán and Buenos Aires.¹²

Transient foreigners added to the increasing number of residents from predominantly Protestant countries in Cuba and to a lesser extent in Puerto Rico. Developing trade, particularly in sugar, between the islands and the North Atlantic produced, for example, a large naval exchange with the United States and Great Britain. Each year thousands of sailors and officers from United States, British and other nations' vessels called at Havana, San Juan and other Hispanic Caribbean ports. In the mid 1850s a yearly average of 883 US ships with 14,682 passengers visited the port of Havana alone; three decades later the number reached approximately 32,000. Estimates for Puerto Rico suggest that as many as 8,000 North American sailors visited the island's ports each year. Some crews remained in port for weeks and even months while their vessels were being unloaded and reloaded.¹³

Although similar laws and parallel historical processes opened the entire Hispanic Caribbean to foreign and Protestant penetration, geographic, economic and social differences produced very different Protestant communities in Ponce, Havana, Matanzas and Vieques. In Ponce, foreign Protestants were able to move into the upper echelons of society, to establish firm and commanding economic positions and to interact intimately with the local elite. In contrast, the foreign elite settling in Havana, and other Cuban jurisdictions, was generally involved in much more mobile, temporary and even seasonal activities.

¹¹ Consul Helm, cited in Louis A. Pérez, Jr, *On becoming Cuban: identity, nationality, & culture*, Chapel Hill, NC 1999, 23.

¹² For information on the life of foreigners in El Cerro see Luis Martínez-Fernández, *Fighting slavery in the Caribbean: the life and times of a British family in nineteenth-century Havana*, Armonk, NY 1998, and Roberto Gómez Reyes, 'Informe histórico sobre la casa # 256 de la Calle Tulipán entre Santa Catalina y Falgueras: Cerro', Museo del Cerro, file 4.1.10.

¹³ Andrew Blythe to William Cass, 20 July 1857, NA, general records of the Department of State, RG 59, despatches from US consuls in Havana, microfilm roll T20, vol. 36; Pérez, *On becoming Cuban*, 23. Estimate for Puerto Rico based on 16 men per ship and data from Charles De Ronceray to Cass, 29 July 1859, US Department of State, San Juan consulate, *Despachos de los cónsules norteamericanos en Puerto Rico (1818-1868)*, ed. CIH, Río Piedras, PR 1982, 390.

They were also less cohesive as a community, less affluent and virtually detached from society at large. In the larger island there was also a much larger transient non-elite white Protestant presence. Foreign black Protestants settling in Ponce and Vieques, for their part, established close bonds among themselves but had very little interaction with their white fellow Protestants, and remained socially as well as economically marginal.

As attested by the considerable Protestant presence establishing itself in the region, it is evident that the oath of Catholicity required of all long-term foreign visitors was more of an obnoxious inconvenience than a real obstacle to Protestants wanting to settle in the Spanish islands. The oath, moreover, could not keep visiting Protestants from spending short periods of time on the islands. Contemporaries commented that few foreigners actually took the oath and that it was very mildly enforced. As reflected by the domiciliation documentation of scores of immigrants from predominantly Protestant countries the process had many holes and lacked an adequate system of verification. The Briton George Booth, for example, arrived in Havana in 1818 with the intention of establishing himself as a carpenter. He claimed to be Catholic but said that he had no documentation to prove it. Booth received the domiciliation status a few days later as government officials took his word. He may have been Catholic, but the odds are that he was not. David Clark, another Briton, declared upon his arrival in Cuba that he was Catholic. He failed to produce evidence but came up with three witnesses who had heard him say that he was a Catholic. These testimonies sufficed. In 1841, a Philadelphia merchant surnamed Beylle was certified Catholic by a witness who claimed to have seen him in Catholic religious activities.¹⁴

Some foreigners who took the religious oath in the presence of Spanish officials quibbled by omitting the word 'Roman', thus accepting allegiance to a more unspecific and inclusive Apostolic and Catholic Church. Others signed documents swearing adherence to the 'CAR Church' which could have meant to stand for Catholic, Apostolic and Reformed. George C. Backhouse, a British official stationed in Havana, reported that those kinds of omissions and substitutions were quite common and acceptable to both Spanish officials and the 'conscience of Protestant Foreigners who take the oath'.¹⁵ Some foreigners circumvented the matter altogether by hiring agents to handle their domiciliation

¹⁴ Consul-General Joseph T. Crawford to Lord Palmerston, 22 January 1852, PRO, FO, 72, 866; domiciliation documents of George Booth and Guillaume Perrone, ANC, gobierno superior civil, leg. 1656, exp. 82742; domiciliation documents of David Clark, leg. 787, exp. 26754; testimony of Luis Mariátegui on behalf of Juan Emilio Beylle, AALH, matrimonios ultramarinos, exp. 25 (Jan. 1841).

¹⁵ Grace M. Backhouse to Catherine Backhouse, 6 Jan. 1854, and George Backhouse to his aunt, 3 Aug. 1853, in John Backhouse papers, Special Collections Department,

procedures. Yet others avoided presenting actual proof of Catholicity by paying a fee or by purchasing a certificate either on the islands or abroad. Still, the oath requirement remained a constant source of humiliation that hung over Protestants and could be, and at times was, used to harass and deport foreigners. It forced many to either lie or falsify documents.¹⁶

For the thousands of Protestants residing in the Spanish colonies of the Caribbean at any given time during the nineteenth-century, the presence of a resident Protestant minister of their own faith would not become a reality until the early 1870s. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, foreign and native practising Protestants had to settle for private house services, services on board British or United States ships, and on occasion an illegal private service held by a sojourning clergyman. The other options were to forgo Protestant practices and pass for Catholic, or to genuinely convert to Catholicism.

As several travelogues and foreigners' diaries attest, many foreign Protestants carried out private Sunday services either in the seclusion of their own homes or quietly in hotel rooms. The English and American Episcopalian Prayer Books both provided the offices of mattins and evensong which could be led by non-ordained people in private house services. The diaries of George C. Backhouse and his wife Grace attest that they held one or two house services almost every Sunday during their stay in Havana in the mid 1850s, including the reading of the Scriptures, prayers and sermons. Another contemporary Protestant, Julia Woodruff, a US visitor to Cuba, after exploring other options came to the conclusion that the best thing was 'a quiet reading of our own helpful and satisfying Liturgy, in my own room'.¹⁷

The calling of a British or US man-of-war was a source of joy to many of the islands' practising Protestants because public Protestant services were usually held on board on Sundays. British naval vessels provided Anglican holy communion while their United States counterparts held

Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, NC. See also domiciliation papers of Mary Callaghan, ANC, gobierno superior civil, leg. 791, exp. 26855, and of Jorge Y. Finlay, AHDASJ, justicia, procesos legales, certificaciones de soltería, Ponce, leg. J-182.

¹⁶ David Turnbull, *Travels in the west Cuba with notices of Porto Rico*, New York 1968, 67; declaration of Jorge Y. Finlay, AHDASJ, justicia, procesos legales, certificados de soltería, Ponce, leg. J-182; James Kennedy to Lord Palmerston, 21 June 1850, and Crawford to Lord Palmerston, 22 Jan. 1852, both in PRO, FO 72, 886; Spanish minister of Gracia y Justicia to the president of the Spanish Council of Ministers, papeles de Vieques, CIH, 267-72.

¹⁷ Joseph John Gurney, *A winter in the West Indies*, London 1840, 211; Rachel Wilson Moore, *Journal of Rachel Wilson Moore, kept during a tour to the West Indies and South America in 1863-64*, Philadelphia 1867, 32; George Backhouse to his aunt, 3 Aug. 1853; diary of Grace M. Backhouse, 25-7 Mar., 24 Apr., 10 June 1853, 9 Apr. 1854, Backhouse papers; [Julia Louisa Matilda Woodruff] J. L. M. Jay (pseud.), *My winter in Cuba*, New York 1871, 157.

Episcopalian, Methodist, Baptist or other Protestant denominational services. Non-ordained people, usually the ship's captain, officiated at most services, which could include the reading of sermons and prayers, and on occasion communion services.¹⁸

A few of the British and US naval vessels calling at Spanish Caribbean ports carried ordained chaplains who could perform the sacramental ceremonies of the Protestant Churches. These chaplains, however, were generally not the most inspiring sorts of ministers. Referring to a Revd Mr Hannan, the naval chaplain of HMS *Alban*, Grace M. Backhouse said that his visit had 'resulted in no benefit to us with regard to the services of our Church'. She described another British naval chaplain as 'a sad subject!'. Other Protestants have left corroborating testimonies to the effect that they were not altogether satisfied with the naval chaplains' sermons. Naval chaplains and other visiting clergymen at times ventured ashore and administered communion and other sacraments to the spiritually-neglected Protestant communities of Cuba and Puerto Rico. These clandestine amphibious services usually took place at the British, German or US consulates. Such visits were few and far between and only benefited those belonging to the consular circle of relatives and friends.¹⁹

Far from ideal as sporadic visits by Protestant clergymen were, they remained about the only source of sacraments for the islands' crypto-Protestants. Pseudo-Catholics, or Protestants who passed for Catholics, participated in the Catholic rites. Protestants residing in the region and not willing to pass as Catholics had few options regarding the most vital moments in their lives. Some parents waited months and years before having their children baptised by a passing clergyman of their own faith. Marriages were postponed indefinitely and Protestant couples lived in concubinage either because they rejected Catholic matrimony or because it was denied to them. Dying Protestants passed on, their minds tormented with images of inadequate burials in some God-forsaken potter's field.

Foreign Protestants with greater social capital, whose actions were more closely monitored by other members of the elite tended to have their children baptised according to the rites of the Catholic Church. This was canonically acceptable to Anglicans and Episcopalians, who recognised as valid the sacraments administered by Roman Catholic priests. In so doing

¹⁸ Ramos, *Panorama*, 78; diary of Grace M. Backhouse, 4, 11, 18 Feb., 4 Mar. 1855, Backhouse papers; Carlton H. Rogers, *Incidents of travel in the Southern United States and Cuba*, New York, 1862, 173–5; Amelia Matilda Murray, *Letters from the United States, Cuba and Canada*, London 1856, ii. 64, 77; diary of William Norwood, 24 Mar. 1844, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

¹⁹ Grace M. Backhouse to Mary Backhouse, 30 June 1853, Backhouse papers; Hiram H. Hulse, 'The history of the Church in Cuba', *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* vi (June 1937), 249; George A. Leakin to 'Dear Madam', 16 Mar. 1906, Archives of the Episcopal Church, Austin, Tex, Cuba scrapbook.

they also secured the inheritance rights of their children. This was the case among many foreign-born Protestants of the Ponce elite and among some of Havana's long-term resident foreign Protestants. The parish books of Ponce's Catholic church show that the Davidsons, Salomons, Oppenheimers, Van Rhyns, Penders, Lions, Dodds, Finlays, Ecklemans, Weichers and other Protestant families who passed as Catholics had their newborn children baptised as Roman Catholic. Their high social status and visibility within Ponce's elite made leaving their children unbaptised not an option. Baptising them as Protestants would have been not only illegal but socially unacceptable, scandalous in the eyes of the Catholic members of society with whom they mingled.²⁰

In contrast, Protestants with less social capital who were less vulnerable to social pressures could afford to wait for a visiting clergyman or to put off baptism altogether. This was particularly true within the somewhat socially-alooft group of Protestants of Havana, who seemed to care little about what the Catholics thought, and among working-class black Protestants from the British West Indies living in Ponce and Vieques. When Grace M. Backhouse asked Fanny Runge, the Lutheran sister of the wife of the British consul-general in Havana, whether she intended to baptise her child, her response was that she 'had not thought about it'. For some reason, a few years later the Runges had another child baptised Catholic. At a later point an Episcopalian priest reported that there were many unbaptised children among Havana's Protestants and that their parents remained 'indifferent about the matter'. The parish books of El Cerro's Salvador del Mundo, on the outskirts of Havana, contain virtually no entries with names from predominantly Protestant countries. There were also very few Catholic baptisms among West Indian labourers settled in Vieques. One finds just a few Anglo names in the Catholic baptismal books of the Vieques parish during the 1850s and 1860s.²¹

The other option for crypto-Protestants was to have their children illegally baptised by a Protestant minister passing through the region. One could not count on this, however, as these visits were infrequent and short. There is at least one recorded instance of a Ponce family travelling to St Croix to have their child born outside Roman Catholic Puerto Rico,

²⁰ For example, on 6 May 1869 the curate of Ponce baptised Matilde Luisa Belén Eckleman who was the daughter of Bernardo Eckleman and Enriqueta Luisa Van Ryhn; on 11 June 1869 he baptised Carlos Manuel Bonifacio Weichers who was the son of Jorge Federico Weichers and Ysabel Pieretty; on 26 July 1869 he baptised Tomás Antonio Oppenheimer who was the son of Guillermo Oppenheimer and Ana Salomons: books of baptisms of Ponce's Roman Catholic Church, microfilms at CIH.

²¹ Grace M. Backhouse to her mother-in-law, 3 Mar. 1854, Backhouse papers; baptismal entry of Gustavo Runge, 14 July 1858, book of baptisms, no. 3, Iglesia Salvador del Mundo, El Cerro, Havana; Revd E. Kenney's report of 1874 in Edward Kenney, *Report of our mission in Cuba: October 1874–October 1877*, Detroit 1878, 15; books of baptisms of Vieques's Roman Catholic Church, microfilms at CIH.

where it would have been difficult to have the child baptised. This was the case of the Anglicans William Lee and Sarah Baggs, whose three previous children, William, Charles Henry and Ana Isabella, had died unbaptised in Ponce.²² When Grace M. Backhouse was pregnant with her third child in 1855 she left Cuba; one of the reasons she cited was ‘to have my confinement in England where the child might receive Holy Baptism’.²³

Some adult Protestants also partook of Catholic baptism after publicly renouncing their faith. This was the case, for example, of the Irishman John Nott, who in 1840 requested the sacrament of Catholic baptism from the bishop of Puerto Rico. In a similar petition the Londoner Robert McPherson declared that although he had been a Calvinist since an early age, he had realised that the Catholic Church ‘was the only one where man can find eternal happiness’. In 1870 Charles Basanta, the son of Ponce’s British vice-consul, abjured Protestantism and was baptised Catholic at the age of twenty-eight.²⁴ The parish records of El Cerro’s Nuestra Señora del Pilar reflect at least two similar cases. On 11 June 1858 María Luisa Iraste, a Protestant and a native of Venezuela, was baptised Catholic as an adult; as was Emilia Bloisant of Alabama, who first renounced her Protestant faith.²⁵

The sacrament of holy matrimony posed even greater difficulties and challenges to Protestants residing in the Hispanic Caribbean since unlike baptisms, which Catholic priests did not deny even to the children of known heretics, church marriages were reserved exclusively for communicants of the Roman Catholic Church. In Puerto Rico curates received strict instructions that whenever either the bride or groom was from a Protestant country no marriage was to be performed until the bishop or his provisor could first verify their claimed Catholicity. Foreigners were also required to obtain expensive and time-consuming Catholicity and *soltería* (bachelorhood or spinsterhood) certificates from which natives were exempt.²⁶

With regard to marriages a similar geographical and social pattern held true, whereby the foreign Protestants of Ponce were more likely to go to greater lengths to comply with the social and religious mandates of Catholic matrimony. The sons and daughters of several of Ponce’s pseudo-Catholic Protestant families were married under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church. Since confession was part of the pre-nuptial

²² Lee, *An island grows*, 5.

²³ Grace M. Backhouse to Catherine Backhouse, 25 Mar. 1855, Backhouse papers.

²⁴ AHDASJ, justicia, procesos legales, papeles de extranjeros, leg. J-229; procesos legales, certificados de soltería, Ponce, leg. J-182.

²⁵ Lourdes Sampera González, ‘Breve reseña: la parroquia el Salvador del Mundo del Cerro’, file 6.1.1, Archivo del Museo del Cerro.

²⁶ See circular by Bishop Gil Esteve, 23 Dec. 1852, AHDASJ, gobierno, circulares. See also files in AHDASJ, justicia, procesos legales, certificados de soltería, legs. J-181, J-182; AALH, matrimonios ultramarinos.

preparations, these Protestants went along with a requirement which must have been extremely odious to some of them. Many had to make false declarations and even falsify documents to prove their Catholicity and secured witnesses – many of them also Protestant – to lie on their behalf. A small group of pseudo-Catholics regularly served as witnesses in most of these cases. In one case, the crypto-Protestant groom, George Weichers, claimed that he was Catholic but was unable to prove it because he had no baptismal certificate and could not get one because his birthplace, Vienna, was far from Puerto Rico. Actually a native of Hamburg, Weichers got by with the testimony of Bernardo Eckleman, who himself was a pseudo-Catholic. In another instance, twenty-eight-year-old Charles Basanta could apparently not pretend that he was born a Catholic, so he converted publicly to Catholicism before marrying Hortensia Mirailh, a pseudo-Catholic herself. For these upper-class families neither concubinage nor a public embracing of Protestantism were options.²⁷ The high propensity amongst them to marry Catholics reflected, in part, the critical importance of marriage as a vehicle to secure upward social mobility, whether this was achieved through marriage with foreign-born women or women of the native elite. In contrast, among Vieques's foreign Protestant labouring poor there were virtually no Catholic marriages since cohabitation was an acceptable option among the working poor of all races and religions. Even the island's highest authority, Governor Francisco Saínz, openly mocked the sacrament of matrimony by maintaining a long-term adulterous relationship with a married woman, Doña Pepa; even after the local curate intervened to put an end to the scandalous affair and had the lady banished from Vieques, the lovers continued their relationship on a commuter basis.²⁸

In Havana and Matanzas the foreign Protestant population was of lower social rank than that of Ponce, was less immersed in the greater

²⁷ Process of certification of bachelorhood and spinsterhood and Catholicity of Augusto Lion and Elena Catalina Salomons (1862); their witnesses were Bernardo Eckleman, Emilio Overman and Degetau. Roberto Graham and Ysabel Spense married Catholic, their witnesses being Tomás A. Dodd, William Lee and Jorge Finlay, all of whom swore that they were Catholics. On 18 Aug. 1868 Juan Hernán Van Rhyn and Juana Francisca Van Rhyn married with Catholic rites. Jorge Finlay and Emilia Francisca Van Rhyn went through the process of certification of bachelorhood and spinsterhood and Catholicity; his witnesses were Ramón Berartain, Juan Sullivan and Francisco Antonsanti; hers were Pedro Minvielle and James Gallagher. They married on 5 July 1866. Certification of bachelorhood and spinsterhood of Guillermo Oppenheimer and Ana María Salomons (1864): Carlos Juan Oppenheimer and Ana María Van Rhyn were married on 18 June 1865; Pedro Minvielle and James Gallagher testified on behalf of Emilia Francisca Van Rhyn; and Bernardo Eckleman served as witness for Jorge Federico Weichers (1862): books of marriages of Ponce's Roman Catholic Church, microfilms in CIH; AHDASJ, justicia, procesos legales, certificaciones de soltería, legs. J-181, J-182.

²⁸ Books of marriages of the Roman Catholic Church of Vieques, microfilms in CIH; declaration of the Vieques curate (1851), papeles de Vieques, CIH, 820-1, 213.

society, and was far less concerned with social appearances and therefore less compelled to marry a Catholic. In that context, pseudo-Catholic marriages were less prevalent than in the more sparsely populated and less anonymous context of Ponce. Havana's crypto-Protestant couples were more likely to live in concubinage, which was reportedly quite widespread among the British and North Americans. There were very few exceptions to this. In El Cerro's Salvador del Mundo parish, Carolina Smith of New York State renounced her Methodist faith and was baptised according to Catholic rites in 1862 as a precondition of her Catholic marriage to Francisco Javier Molina y García, a member of a wealthy local family. They had already been married by a Methodist minister in New York but decided to ensure the legitimacy of their two children.²⁹

Those Protestants who rejected or were denied Catholic matrimony but still considered it a sin to cohabit out of wedlock, could either wait for a visiting clergyman or could travel to the United States or to some other destination in the Caribbean, where marriage vows could be sanctified with fewer complications and expenses. At least four couples residing in Puerto Rico travelled to St Thomas in 1855 to be married at All Saints' Anglican church: British vice-consul Charles Lindegren, an Anglican, and the Roman Catholic Rafaela Gautier; planter John Henry Van Rhyn and Grace Louisa Basanta, both communicants of the Church of England; the Anglican planter Isaac Easton Bedlow and Lucy Dupont Penchoen; and the merchant Manuel Toro and Evelina Basanta of the Church of England. Toro and Basanta had married earlier according to Catholic rites in Puerto Rico. A few years later, the marriage of her sister, Josephine Basanta, to Thomas Edward Lee was solemnised during a visit to Ponce by the Anglican bishop of Antigua.³⁰

Travelling to St Thomas or New Orleans to seek the sacrament of marriage was also an option for some Catholics who faced consanguinity or other obstacles. Dispensations were reportedly cheaper and more expediently granted at these destinations. Luis Bonafoux and Clemencia Quintero of Guayama and a Mr Valton and Miss Quilmin of the French West Indies, residing in Vieques, for example, travelled to St Thomas to be married; in the latter case the Vieques curate had not been positively convinced that Valton was a widower. The register of marriages of the Dutch Reformed Church of Christiansted, St Croix, includes entries for several weddings between residents of Puerto Rico, some of whom were

²⁹ Kenney, *Report of our mission*, 12; Kenney to Whittingham, 25 Nov. 1873, MDA, Cuba, folder IV; Grace M. Backhouse to her mother-in-law, 3 Mar. 1854, Backhouse papers; marriage entry of Carolina Smith and Francisco Javier Molina y García, book of marriages no. 2, Iglesia Salvador del Mundo, El Cerro.

³⁰ Lee, *An island grows*, 5, 9; Antonio de las Barras y Prado, *Memoirs: La Habana a mediados del siglo xix*, Madrid 1925, 84; [Woodruff], *My winter*, 128; marriage records of All Saints' Church of St Thomas (microfilms at the Williams Library of St Croix).

Catholic. Church and State authorities could and in some instances did nullify matrimonial ties sought outside the place of residence of the bride and groom.³¹

The notoriously unhealthy climate of the region made the issue of funeral and burial rights particularly critical and pressing for unacclimatised foreigners, many of them from predominantly Protestant countries. Foreign visitors and travellers were especially vulnerable to the onslaught of tropical diseases. In Havana, mortality rates among recently-arrived foreigners reached appalling levels, between 260 and 400 deaths per 1,000 population. One United States consul referred to mid nineteenth-century Havana as one of the 'foulest' ports in the world. Another observer dubbed it a 'hot-bed of pestilence'. Puerto Rico's principal ports were somewhat healthier, but still a concern among foreigners, many of whom faced the prospect of a premature death there. On one occasion US consul Charles De Ronceray said of San Juan: '[it is a place with an] unhealthy climate, where a man's life is in danger'.³²

The deaths of ailing Protestant immigrants and visitors marked the end of their sufferings, but it also marked the beginning of a very sad, difficult and frustrating period for their relatives, friends, concerned compatriots and consular representatives. Survivors seeking decent funerals and adequate burials for their non-Catholic dead encountered numerous obstacles. One United States official stationed in Havana summarised the predicaments of deceased Protestants when he bluntly advised his compatriots: 'Don't Die in Cuba'. In the words of another contemporary observer, '[a]ll that accompanies death...in Cuba is particularly repulsive. Difficulties are thrown in the way of the becoming burial of those who die out of the communion of the Holy Church of Ferdinand VII and Isabella II'.³³

Justifiably, many Protestant visitors and immigrants were much concerned about the possibility of dying in the Catholic islands. This was a particularly pressing preoccupation among invalids and ill seamen. As US consul Andrew K. Blythe put it, '[t]he knowledge on the part of a sick

³¹ AGPR, audiencia territorial, acuerdo real, box 34, exp. 19; curate of Vieques to the bishop of Puerto Rico, 12 Mar. 1857, AHDASJ, gobierno, correspondencia parroquia-obispo, Vieques, leg. G-29; books of marriage of the Dutch Reformed Church of Christiansted, St Croix (microfilms at the Williams Library of St Croix); Ramos, *Prontuario*, 313.

³² D. Ramón Hernández Poggio, *Aclimatación é higiene de los europeos en Cuba*, Cádiz, Spain 1874, 67–70; Roberto Marte, *Cuba y la República Dominicana: transición económica en el Caribe del siglo XIX*, Santo Domingo [1988?], 191; Consul Robertson to William Marcy, 27 July 1854, NA, RG 59, despatches from US consuls in Havana, microfilm roll T20, vol. 28; Maturin M. Ballou, *Due south: or Cuba past and present*, New York 1969, 141; De Ronceray to William Cass, 3 Dec. 1860, US Department of State, *Despachos consulares*, 308.

³³ James William Steele, *Cuban sketches*, New York 1881, 185; [William Henry Hurlbert], *Gan-Eden: or, pictures of Cuba*, Boston 1854, 136–7.

person that his remains will be uncared for is calculated to produce a morbid effect upon the mind unfavorable to his recovery'. Some foreigners wrote testaments leaving specific instructions with friends and consuls in which they spelled out what was to be done in the event of their death. One United States visitor, after returning from a sobering tour of Havana's Espada cemetery, instructed his hotel's attendant that if he were to die on the island, he must be buried at sea. '[A]nywhere', he added, 'but in a Catholic country'. Another visitor, a New Yorker suffering from consumption, was horrified by the mere thought of dying in Cuba. His only wish was that the steamer *Cahawba* arrive on time so he could die on board the vessel rather than on the island.³⁴

Protestants wishing to get married or to have their children christened within their faith could continue with their lives while they waited for a visiting clergyman or until they travelled abroad to receive the desired sacrament. Dead Protestants and their survivors could do neither. The Catholic Church in the Spanish colonies of the Caribbean maintained a firm control over funeral services, burials and cemeteries. In the words of one critical contemporary, '[t]he Mother Church is the mistress of ceremonies of all kinds. She owns the cemeteries practically, is interested in the sale of coffins and management of hearses, buries the dead, licenses the inhuming and exhuming of all bodies'. Since licences granted by parish priests were required before any corpse could be interred in the cemeteries, the authority to determine who could and who could not be buried lay strictly with the Catholic Church. North American and British foreigners were denied funeral ceremonies and burial in consecrated ground unless their surviving friends and relatives could produce evidence of their Catholicity. Not even the highest-ranking members of the foreign consular corps could claim exemption from these requirements. In Santiago de Cuba, the body of Consul Parsons was barred from the city's consecrated burial grounds for not being Catholic. The remains of James Gallagher, his US counterpart in Ponce, came close to a similar fate, which in the end was avoided because during the course of the day a document was found – or fabricated – which attested to his Catholicity.³⁵

Crypto-Protestants and nominal Catholics who either avoided Catholic rites or received Protestant sacraments were well aware of the situation and, not surprisingly, many of them were either converted to or returned

³⁴ Blythe to Cass, 20 July 1857, NA, despatches from US consuls in Havana, microfilm roll T20, vol. 36; George W. Williams, *Sketches of travel in the old and new world*, Charleston, SC 1871, 55; Richard Henry Dana, Jr, *To Cuba and back: a vacation voyage*, ed. C. Harvey Gardiner, Carbondale, IL 1966, 102–3.

³⁵ Steele, *Sketches*, 174; Demoticus Philaethes, *Yankee travels through the island of Cuba; or the men and government, the laws and customs of Cuba, as seen by American eyes*, New York 1856, 222, 251; Ramos, *Panorama*, 77; Alexander Jourdan to William Seward, 2 June, 19 July 1866, US Department of State, *Despachos consulares*, 707, 719.

to the Catholic faith during their last days. Abraham Nicolas Souquin, a Swiss agriculturalist who had settled in Puerto Rico, faced the disturbing prospect of dying outside the communion of the colony's official religion. He abjured his Protestant faith and converted to Catholicism before dying in San Juan's military hospital. In El Cerro's Salvador del Mundo parish, Enriqueta Winch y Shepherd, as she faced the possibility of death in the summer of 1863 renounced 'the errors of the unitarian sect', was baptised and received the last rites. A few years later, while awaiting execution, the Cuban Protestant revolutionary Luis Ayestarán reluctantly re-embraced the religion into which he had been born. For her part, Tomasa Hernández of Ponce requested, on her death bed, absolution for the sin of having received the sacrament of matrimony from a Protestant minister. She and her husband, Jaime Roura, attested that they were carrying a 'great weight on their consciences and that they felt disturbed'. They justified their actions on the grounds that the certificate of *soltería* required by the Catholic priest had been too expensive for them. As documented in the Ponce and El Cerro parish records, dozens of Catholics living in concubinage sought to solemnise their vows shortly before their deaths. The prospect of being denied a Catholic burial was at the heart of many of these decisions.³⁶

There is also evidence that before the 1870s many Protestants died as they lived, as pseudo-Catholics, and were buried with the rites of the Catholic Church. Ponce's Salomons family, for example, the ones who later hosted the island's first public Protestant service, owned a splendid mausoleum in Ponce's Catholic cemetery. The Van Rhyns, Basantas, Mirailhs and most other Ponce Protestant families buried their dead as Catholics in the municipal burial ground. According to an 1849 report by the capitán pedáneo of the jurisdiction of Havana's Espada Cemetery, most Protestants were buried in the Catholic cemetery 'under the false assurance of Catholicity'. The same occurred in Matanzas.³⁷

Most Protestants dying in the Spanish colonies who did not or could not pass for Catholics ended up in potters' fields or unfenced, unconsecrated, makeshift cemeteries in desolate and remote places. One of these was established in the mid 1820s in the El Vedado section of Havana by a British hotel-keeper named Francis Nichols. Upon Nichols's death

³⁶ *Boletín Eclesiástico* 1:19 (1 Oct. 1859), 219; Roura and Hernández to the bishop of Puerto Rico, 28 Apr. 1887, AHDASJ, justicia, procesos legales, validación de matrimonios, leg. J-218; book of baptisms no. 4, Iglesia Salvador del Mundo, El Cerro; Ramos, *Panorama*, 140; books of defunções of Ponce's Roman Catholic Church (microfilms at CIH).

³⁷ AHMP, Índice del Cementerio Antiguo, vol. 1, p. 166; capitán pedáneo de San Lázaro to the captain-general, 22 Dec. 1849, ANC, gobierno superior civil, leg. 745, exp. 25568; letter of 1853 quoted in Mariano Torrente, *Política ultramarina que abraza todos los puntos referentes a las relaciones de España con los Estados Unidos, con Inglaterra y las Antillas*, Madrid 1854, 198–9.

someone by the name of James Thompson took charge of the graveyard but soon after his death it fell into disrepair, the gate keys were lost and part of the walls collapsed. Scavenger animals roamed the ruined 'American' graveyard where they feasted on human remains. During the early 1840s a yearly average of about forty corpses, including foreign Protestants, suicides and the unbaptised were buried in this so-called American or English cemetery.³⁸

Several foreign residents and travellers have left revolting descriptions of El Vedado's potter's field and other similar places for Protestant burial. The controversial British consul-general, David Turnbull, raised a cry of outrage in the early 1840s concerning the state of Protestant burial sites. He wrote an impassioned letter to Cuba's captain-general in which he underscored 'the horrors which prevail at the place known at the Havana by the name of "the American burial ground", where dead bodies are left exposed in the face of day, and where the Vulture contends with the worm for his share of the human spoil'. Other reports confirmed the decaying state of Havana's Protestant graveyard and the fact that vultures and other beasts profaned the bodies. At a later point a traveller described what he saw thus: 'the ground [is] strewn with the bleaching relics of mortality, and in some corner is a heap, mostly of skulls, several yards high'.³⁹

There was another Protestant burial ground in Matanzas. It measured half an acre and it consisted of mass graves in which bodies were lined side by side; earth was thrown over the first layer of cadavers and then the next layer was started above it. Scenes at the Matanzas Protestant burial ground moved a visiting Episcopalian bishop to write: 'for the first time in my life I saw and realised what is implied in the phrase, "the burial of a dog"'. Also within the jurisdiction of Matanzas existed a burial ground for non-Catholics in the area known as Playa de Judíos. An 1841 report described it as being in a state of abandonment, having a broken gate, and its dead 'barely buried'.⁴⁰

Around the time when the El Vedado graveyard fell into disrepair, Dr Charles Belot, a hospital-owner and physician serving the foreign community, created another option for Protestant burial. Dr Belot, it so

³⁸ Leví Marrero, *Cuba: economía y sociedad*, Madrid, 1971–92, xiv. 88; minutes on Protestant cemetery, 8 Nov. 1841; Ángel Cowley of la Junta Superior de Sanidad to the gobernador superior civil, 17 Feb. 1847; capitán pedáneo de San Lázaro to the captain general, 22 Dec. 1849, ANC, gobierno superior civil, leg. 744, exp. 25546; leg. 745, exp. 25568.

³⁹ David Turnbull to the captain-general of Cuba, 16 Sept. 1841, ANC, gobierno superior civil, leg. 744, exp. 25346; Richard J. Levis, *Diary of a spring holiday in Cuba*, Philadelphia 1872, 109.

⁴⁰ Bishop Young, 'Cuba', *Spirit of Missions* xlix (October 1884), 486–7; governor of Matanzas to the curate of Matanzas, 15 Sept. 1841, AHPM, gobierno provincial, órden público y policía, leg. 74, exp. 8349.

happened, could not only bury his mistakes, he also managed to profit from them after he inaugurated a private cemetery near one of his clinics. In 1858 US consul Blythe denounced the practices of the lowland clinics, that of Dr Belot in particular, stating that their proprietors obtained ‘a large part of their profits’ from burying the dead. He pointed out scathingly that patients were better clients dead than alive, for each death produced a net profit of seventeen dollars. Dr Belot finally yielded to mounting pressures and consented to surrender ‘all profit in the futur [*sic*] from the private cemetery attached to the hospitals’.⁴¹

In neighbouring Puerto Rico, with fewer foreign Protestants, and many of these passing for Catholics, there was no Protestant burial ground as such, but locations close to the coast or offshore, where the bodies of Protestants and other non-Catholics were cast into shallow graves without ceremony or mark. According to a description by the US consul at San Juan, ‘the burying place [in Ponce] is often profaned by filthy animals roaming there in the night or in the second case left exposed to the open air and often washed away by the beating of the sea’. Some foreign Protestants were not even allowed burial on the island. In January 1817 two foreign Protestants, James Coggeshall and his ship’s mate, died of yellow fever. According to James’s surviving brother, Charles, since ecclesiastical burial was out of question, he had to take care of the entire matter:

We accordingly had a coffin made on board, and on the following day in the afternoon, with our own crew took the body to a small uninhabited island [most probably, Cayo Cardona], about two miles from the main land of Porto Rico, and interred the remains of this worthy, brave and ingenious young man. To prevent them from being disturbed or desecrated, I left no trace of a grave, but levelled the ground so that the spot where his remains repose, should not attract the idle curiosity of those who should hereafter visit this lonely island.

More than half a century later, Wilbert M. Clifford, a twenty-nine-year-old North Carolinian, died of yellow fever in Ponce during the summer of 1871, and the local ecclesiastical and civil authorities would not allow his remains to be buried anywhere on the island. Instead, they ordered his body to be interred on the neighbouring key of Isla Cardona, a place that had housed a lepers’ colony since 1836.⁴² In sharp contrast, as early as 1845 foreign Protestant labourers from the Lesser Antilles were granted funeral rights in the island of Vieques, where the Catholic Church had a much weaker presence. Foreign labour immigration was deemed essential

⁴¹ Blythe to Cass, 20 July 1857, Belot to Charles Helm, 28 Apr. 1860, and Helm to Cass, 28 Apr. 1860, NA, RG 59, despatches from US consuls in Havana, microfilm rolls T20, vols 36, 40.

⁴² Acting consul Jourdan to Seward, 27 July 1854, NA, RG 84, San Juan, vol. 7228; George Coggeshall, *Voyages to various parts of the world made between the years 1800 and 1831*, New York 1853, 144–5; AHMP, leg. 35, exp. 14.

to the peopling and development of this frontier island and thus state authorities offered a greater degree of religious tolerance.⁴³

In sum, much to the chagrin of the region's state and church authorities, Protestants found their way into Cuba and Puerto Rico from the first decades of the nineteenth century. Unable to worship freely according to their religious preference, the region's Protestants became either crypto-Protestants or pseudo-Catholics. In either case, the opportunities to live and die as practising Protestants were few or non-existent. Demography, geographic location and the particularities of the specific area's social structure had a strong influence on the religious behaviour of the foreign Protestant population and on the capacity of church and state authorities to enforce religious orthodoxy. In spite of – and perhaps precisely because of – their poverty and majority status, the working-class Protestants of Vieques avoided pressures to comply with the dictates of the Catholic Church. In contrast, Ponce's more socially elevated foreign Protestants felt compelled to pass for Catholics and to partake in the Catholic sacraments. On the other hand, the larger, more anonymous, urban setting of Havana, especially its suburbs, allowed its foreign Protestant population more space to escape the demands of official Catholicism. Havana's Protestants, with less social capital than their Ponce counterparts, felt fewer pressures to live and die as pseudo-Catholics.

The five-and-a-half decades following the opening of the Spanish colonies to foreign non-Spanish immigration and preceding the declaration of religious tolerance in 1869 demonstrated the inherent tensions of a colonial system in transition, one seeking to hold on to old exclusivist restrictions while opening the Spanish sugar islands to trade with the Protestant north. Despite the fact that the mere residence of Protestants was illegal, the early Protestant populations that emerged in Ponce, Havana, Matanzas and Vieques laid the foundations for the type of Protestant congregations that would eventually form in the 1870s and 1880s. Furthermore, it could very well be argued that one of the keys to understanding the disparate trajectories of Cuban and Puerto Rican Protestantism during the twentieth century are to be found during the foundational stages of Protestantism in the region in the early and middle decades of the nineteenth century.

⁴³ Asiento de difuntos protestantes en la isla de Vieques desde 1 de septiembre de 1845, registro del gobernador de Vieques, 1838–45, CIH, vol. 4, copy in AHV; budget for the Vieques government, 1879–80, AGPR, Vieques, box 5, exp. 41A.