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THE CULTURE HISTORY OF A PUERTO RICAN SUGAR CANE PLANTATION: 1876-1949

SIDNEY W. MINTZ*

The present article is an attempt to combine the analysis of historical documents with the use of data from aged informants for purposes of historical reconstruction. The subject is the changing way of life of the people living in a community on the south coast of Puerto Rico; the aim, to show the relationship of social forms to the prevailing agricultural system. Field work in a south-coast community in 1948-1949 provided first-hand materials for describing the present system.¹ Materials used for purposes of historical reconstruction proved to be incomplete, necessitating frequent inferences in making the reconstruction. A collateral source for checking was provided by the reminiscences of ten chief informants of advanced age.²

Because of the doubtful reliability of both local historical documents and the reminiscences of aged persons, the anthropologist who would project his data backward in time when studying modern communities leaves himself open to serious criticism. The writer feels, however, that the disadvantages should not rule out this kind of attempt at historical reconstruction. It would seem that the bias against such reconstructions which still persists in anthropology often leads to an underestimation of the role the past plays in shaping the present. While the subsequent interpretation may be found incomplete or inaccurate in part, the writer hopes that comment and criticism will take in more than specific *errata* in order to consider the broader implications of the value of such reconstructions for comprehensive culture history.

Stages of Development of the Puerto Rican Sugar Industry

The plantation has been defined as:

“ . . . a capitalistic type of agricultural organization in which a consider-

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¹ Field work was conducted under a joint grant from the Centro de Investigaciones Sociales of the University of Puerto Rico, and the Rockefeller Foundation, under the supervision of Profs. Julian H. Steward and John V. Murra. The author wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to Mr. Murra and to Prof. Irving B. Rouse, Yale University for criticism and advice.

² The names of these informants can be supplied on request to any interested readers.

able number of unfree laborers were employed under unified direction and control in the production of a staple crop.”³

In its operation, the plantation system was marked by four distinguishing characteristics: (1) the roles of the laboring and employing classes were set sharply apart; (2) the aim of the system was continuous commercial agriculture; (3) the trend was to specialization in monocrop production; (4) the capitalistic character of the system is revealed in that the value of slaves, land, and equipment required the investment of money capital, frequently in large sums and frequently borrowed, and the planter tended to assume the role of the business man, testing success by the ratio of the net income to the capital invested.⁴

This general description of the plantation as a type was formulated for the American antebellum South, but it may be applied with equal usefulness and appropriateness to the plantations of the West Indies, Brazil and the Guianas, and certain other New World areas. While additional characteristics undoubtedly distinguish various plantation types from each other in terms of the amount of equipment required for processing, the annual or perennial character of the crop, and so on, the above description provides us with a typological base-line. The facts that most plantations arose in the tropics, and that these were prevailingly staffed with Negroes and Indians, are coincidental to the organization of the system itself, and do not underlie it. Plantations as defined above were found mainly in the tropics because tropical areas have long been an accessible economic frontier, particularly suitable for expanding capitalist agriculture, and this agriculture has been most profitably expressed in plantation organization. It was the means used for relating labor to the land, rather than the racial character of the slaves that was basic to the system. During the history of the slave-based plantation forced white labor was at times employed; toward the close of the slave period contract labor, white, East-Indian, Chinese, and Negro, became popular. These essential features of the plantation, then, were its dedication to the production of a commercial staple, the large-scale capitalistic organization of this production, and the unfree character of its labor supply. Climate, geography, and race were irrelevant.⁵

³ L. C. Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* (New York, 1941), p. 444.

⁴ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

⁵ E. T. Thompson, “The Plantation” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of Soci-

From 1815 until 1876 a full-scale plantation system operated in Puerto Rico; in 1876 a modified form of plantation organization developed when all forced-labor practices in Puerto Rico were abolished. In 1899, when the island was occupied by the United States, radical new changes in the form of sugar production were introduced which proved to have far-reaching social and economic effects. I have tentatively labeled these three periods the slave-and-*agregado*⁶ plantation period, the family-type hacienda period, and the corporate land-and-factory combine period (presently in operation). In each period, it seems to be possible to describe the prevailing organization of sugar production in terms of several traits which, taken together, stand for a type of organization. Such types are necessarily abstractions and incomplete descriptions, but in a subsequent section it will be possible to fill in part of the picture by describing the historical development of the agricultural organization in a particular south coast Puerto Rican community.

It was not until after the start of the nineteenth century that commercial sugar production was undertaken in earnest in Puerto Rico. At this time the Haitian revolution had reduced the most advanced sugar-producing area in the world to a largely self-contained peasant economy; the sugar-producing British West Indies had fallen upon hard times; the revolutions in South America had restricted the scope of Spanish colonial rule so that Spain's Antillean possessions increased proportionately in importance; royalist emigrés from South America were in need of a place to settle; and Spain was eager to secure and to develop her remaining holdings in the New World. These conditions, taken together, were responsible in the main for the subsequent development of Puerto Rico as a sugar-producer of first importance and for the maturation of the plantation system on that island.

The *Cédula de Gracias* of 1815⁷ permitted the entry of Catholic

ology, University of Chicago, 1932), pp. 13-14; also cf. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, 1944), pp. 3-29. Most plantation crops could be grown only in sub-tropical or tropical climates, but these same crops can be grown by the use of agricultural organization other than the plantation. Further, plantation organization has not been restricted to tropical areas (cf. Thompson, *op. cit.*).

⁶ The term *agregado* is used here to mean a free plantation laborer, who received some wages, housing and other perquisites for his labor. During the period 1824-1873, landless laborers were forced by law to work as *agregados* on plantations in Puerto Rico. Cf. S. Mintz, "The Role of Forced Labour in Nineteenth Century Puerto Rico," *Caribbean Historical Review*, No. 2, (1951), 134-141.

⁷ *Boletín Histórico de Puerto Rico*, XIV (1927), 3-24; also cf. F. A. López Domínguez, "Origen y desarrollo de la industria azucarera de Puerto Rico," *Revista de Agricultura de Puerto Rico*, XIX, No. 3 (1927), 103.

entrepreneurs who were granted land from the royal domain in accordance with the number of slaves they owned; provided for the tax-free importation of machinery; removed taxes on slaves and on agricultural implements; established free commerce with Spain; and allowed direct commerce with foreign nations. The effect of this *cédula* on Puerto-Rican agriculture was revolutionary. The volume of sugar produced increased as the slave population mounted.⁸ Illicit slave-trading, in defiance of treaties with Great Britain signed in 1817 and to go into effect in 1820, continued during the first half of the century;⁹ and the shortage of labor power was compensated for by the passing of laws which compelled landless citizens and squatter farmers (*agregados*) to work as wage earners on plantations alongside the slaves.¹⁰

The slave-and-*agregado* sugar plantation was a small enterprise by modern standards, ranging in size from one hundred to four hundred acres in total extent, with perhaps one-quarter of this land in cane.¹¹ Steam or cattle provided the power for the grinding mills, which were of rather crude construction, consisting of vertical iron rollers. Fertilizing was limited to the use of animal manure and this was not uniformly practiced; rudimentary hook-type plows were used in field operations. Potential profits were lost in badly ground cane, poorly manured land, low quality sugar and excessive interest rates. Owners were usually individual families with agents or single members of the family supervising the operations. The system expanded, however, during the first part of the period 1815-1876 because the market remained favorable during this time and a constant profit could be assured

⁸ Year	Sugar, in tons	Year	Number of Slaves
.....	1812	17,536
1827-28	9,391	1824	22,725
1834-35	21,928	1834	41,818
1846-47	52,089	1846	51,216
1860-61	65,517	1860	41,736

Sugar figures are from the *Annual Book on Statistics of Puerto Rico: 1939-40*, Dept. of Agriculture and Commerce of the Government of Puerto Rico, p. 116; figures on slaves are from T. Blanco, *El perjuicio racial en Puerto Rico* (2d. edition, San Juan, 1948), p. 74.

⁸ Eric Williams, "The Negro Slave Trade in Anglo-Spanish Relations," *Caribbean Historical Review*, No. 2 (1951), 22-45.

¹⁰ Mintz, *op. cit.*

¹¹ Matthew Bagg, "Journal of Two Months' Residence in St. Thomas, Santa Cruz and Porto Rico in 1851-1852," (MS, New York Public Library), pp. 38-40 (typed copy of original).

without additional investment in irrigation, improvement of technology, or enlargement of operations. Small-scale individual producers were able to set up operations and reap a dependable profit in spite of the inefficiency of the system. But the slave-and-*agregado* system was doomed by the development of more advanced techniques and the employment of more efficient free labor in other world areas. What had been a reluctance to invest in increasing the size and efficiency of plantations in the 1840's and 1850's had turned to sheer inability to do so by 1870.¹²

The most important distinction between the family-type hacienda and the slave-and-*agregado* plantation which preceded it was its use of free, rather than slave and forced, labor. Coincident with emancipation, certain economic guarantees were made to the sugar producers by the government. The labor contracts for freed slaves which obtained for the three-year period 1873-1876 stipulated that the freed slave must reside on the farm of the contractor; that he must get his ex-owner's permission to leave the municipality, and so on. The increase in population and the proportionate decrease in available land for peasant farming also helped to stabilize the labor power of the sugar industry. The ex-slaves had won an important economic and political victory via emancipation, but were still bound economically by the contracts and the necessity of eking out their living on the soil. They merely joined their *agregado* neighbors in the hacienda shacks, and came a step closer to being competitors on the free labor market.¹³

Barring the distinction between free and slave or forced labor, the family-type hacienda was only a continuation of the slave-and-*agregado* plantation. The functions of laborer and employer were still sharply distinct, with labor provided predominantly by *agregados*, many of them ex-slaves; the system was based on commercial rather than subsistence agriculture; it was still a capitalistic enterprise based on the investment of money capital; and the production of a single product for market still prevailed.

The industry as a whole was technologically far behind developments in the sugar industry in the British West Indies and elsewhere. It had been revolutionized there by the development of great, centralized grinding mills to which the lands of a great many former small-scale plantations supplied cane. This "fac-

¹² S. Mintz, "Cañamelar: The Contemporary Culture of a Puerto Rican Rural Proletariat," MS doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, ch. iii.

¹³ *La experiencia abolicionista de Puerto Rico* (Madrid, 1874), 92-96.

tory central" system enabled small-scale producers to contract to provide the central with all the cane that they grew, so that the losses inherent in the use of outmoded and inefficient methods could be eliminated. In the period 1876-1899, Puerto-Rican sugar producers made repeated attempts to establish such centrals but nearly all of them ended in failure for lack of the necessary capital.¹⁴ The inability to convert to more efficient production led to widespread deterioration of the industry. In 1899 eighty-one of the 289 plantations in forty-five municipal districts were not in cultivation.^{14a}

Immediately after the United States occupation, American capital began to flow heavily into the island, re-creating the "sugar way of life" in radically different form. Capital, the lack of which had spelled the doom of the preceding system, could now be had in unlimited supply. In 1899, a mill rendering 5,000 tons of sugar annually required an investment of \$500,000. Control of cane-producing lands in sufficient quantity by the factory-central was, of course, essential to economic success.¹⁵

The new land-and-factory combines developed first in the south coast zone of the island, seat of the early expansion of the slave-and-*agregado* plantation of the preceding century. In the periods of slave-and-*agregado* plantation and the family-type hacienda (which were not so different from one another) capital investment was mainly restricted to slaves and machinery, and the machinery was of a less complicated and expensive sort. Land was cheap, frequently granted by the crown as a gift: cultivation was unscientific, investment was speculative. In the third and now continuing period capital investment was shifted to machinery, primarily, and to land. Labor was paid money wages, and agriculture became intensive and scientific. Perquisites were no longer supplied to workers in place of wages and there was a greater standardization of effort and techniques. "Permanent investment and a long-term interest in a defined area of land" are important aspects of the modern plantation.¹⁶

So sweeping were the changes in Puerto Rico after 1899 that they can be demonstrated by simple statistics. Between 1909 and 1919 the number of holdings increased from 6,816 to 8,839; the percentage of arable land in cane from 9.3 to 17.5. In the same period, the number of sugar factories belonging to indivi-

¹⁴ F. A. López Domínguez, *op. cit.*, 167-169.

^{14a} Henry K. Carroll, *Report on the Island of Porto Rico* (Washington, 1900), p. 116.

¹⁵ Brig. Gen. W. D. Davis, *Civil Affairs of Puerto Rico, 1899* (Washington, 1900), 37-38.

¹⁶ I. C. Greaves, *Modern Production Among Backward Peoples* (London, 1935), p. 170.

duals had decreased from fifty-one to twelve, while the number owned by corporations had increased from twenty-three to thirty-three. In 1909 enterprises in sugar representing a capital of less than \$5,000 were forty-eight in number; in 1919, not one of this size remained. In 1909, there were three enterprises (all of them established after 1899) with capital investments of \$500,000 to more than \$1,000,000; in 1919 there were thirty-two. Individual ownership in 1909, in terms of the value of these various establishments, totaled \$1,328,809, and corporate ownership \$13,129,453; in 1919, individual ownership in terms of value totaled \$3,333,521; corporate ownership had increased to \$45,925,205.¹⁷

The corporate land-and-factory combine is a logical continuation of early agricultural systems but with notable differences, largely produced by changes in size and technology. The functions of laborer and employer are even more sharply distinct than before—the “employer” is corporate, and contact between the corporate personality and the laborers is completely impersonal, wage-based, and mediated through an employed managerial hierarchy. The new system is similar to the older ones in that commercial agriculture prevails, but whereas the older forms tended to fall back on subsistence production in times of depression, the corporate land-and-factory combine can maintain its production even in the face of world contraction of markets.¹⁸ This is the system of sugar-cane and sugar production presently prevailing in Puerto Rico.

*The Development of Hacienda Vieja: Regional and Municipal Setting*¹⁹

The municipality in which Hacienda Vieja was located, called

¹⁷ F. A. López Domínguez, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

¹⁸ Arthur D. Gayer, Paul T. Homan, and Earle K. James, *The Sugar Economy of Puerto Rico* (New York, 1938), p. 159.

¹⁹ The names of informants are not given, and the name of this hacienda, like the names of the *barrios*, and of the municipality discussed here, are fictitious. This cloaking of identity has been carried out in order to protect informants who supplied confidential information to the writer. Any interested reader desiring more explicit information for purposes of research can secure it by directing queries to the writer.

Documents referred to in the remainder of the article include the following:

a. The Registry of Property (Registro de Propiedad) for the administrative district of Ponce, of which the municipality herein discussed is a part, for the year 1881.

b. Records of proceedings of the municipal council (Libro de Actas del Pueblo), for the years 1859, 1860, 1872, 1880, 1882, 1888. These are handwritten records in an exceedingly poor state of preservation, and with whole volumes missing or largely illegible. In many cases, pages are not numbered. Of particular value among these records was the “Resumen general de las riquezas del pueblo,” for March, 1880, which provided a

here "Cañamelar," was a *barrio* of the Villa de Coamo until 1842.²⁰ Between the time of the establishment of Cañamelar as an independent municipality (1842) and 1899, six sugar estates operated within the municipal limits.²¹ Of these, five began operations long before the emancipation, but probably not as early as the start of the nineteenth century. No record of the exact dates when these estates began operations could be secured. The mass baptism of fifteen African slaves by one plantation owner in 1844, however, suggests that his plantation was already operating or about to begin.²² There were no corresponding group baptisms by other plantation operators at that time. In 1852, the baptisms of African slaves by another Cañamelar plantation owner are recorded, and by 1855, all four plantation owners who could be identified were baptising newborn slaves in Cañamelar.²³ These dates do not indicate the starting dates of the plantations but they suggest the year (1855) by which all these four were probably in operation. Of the four documented slave-holding plantations, one was started by the son of a Venezuelan royalist emigré,²⁴ another by a Spaniard from the Canary Islands,²⁵ the other two by Spaniards whose more exact origins are not known. These four estates operated until a few years after the start of the twentieth century. Very little is known of the other two estates, one of which could merely be identified by name. The

census of workers by *barrio* (agrupación de braceros), and listed the taxable wealth of the community in terms of cattle, sugar haciendas, etc. Other minutes indicate the number of sugar haciendas for certain years, the names and places of residence of their owners, refer to agricultural problems, labor problems, etc. The writer readily admits that a professional historian could have made much more profitable use of these records.

c. Parish records of the baptisms of slaves for the parish of Coamo (of which "Cañamelar" was a part until it built its own church in 1852), for the years 1815, 1820, 1824, 1830, 1835, 1840, 1843, and 1844.

d. Municipal records of the baptisms of slaves for the municipality of "Cañamelar," for the years 1852-1858, and 1863. ("Cañamelar" became an independent municipality in 1842. Before 1842, it was an administrative *barrio* of Coamo, but the municipal records of Coamo were entirely destroyed by fire in 1898).

²⁰ *Boletín Histórico de Puerto Rico*, IV (1917), p. 93.

²¹ This figure is based on the mention of particular haciendas in municipal records, and on the reminiscences of aged informants. The "Libro de Actas" of Cañamelar for 1872 mentions four haciendas by name, as do the records for other years. As will be indicated shortly, the data on the remaining two haciendas is extremely sketchy.

²² Coamo Parish Records, November, 1844.

²³ Cañamelar Parish Records, 1852 and 1855, "Libro de bautismos de esclavos."

²⁴ Information secured from informant residing in Ponce, who is a descendant of the founder, D. Pedro Juan Capó.

²⁵ Information secured from informant in Cañamelar.

other came into operation, it would seem, somewhat later than the others.²⁶ It is interesting to note that of the four known plantation owners of the slavery period, only one is definitely described in municipal records as living outside the municipality.

The cane acreage cultivated by these plantations is difficult to estimate for the period before 1880. Cultivation on the south coast was limited by the need to exploit the poorly drained lowlands (*poyales*) and river flood plains. Irrigation before the United States occupation apparently depended mainly on the plantation owner's own capacity to construct and improve water facilities.²⁷ In some cases deductions in taxes were granted by the crown to plantation owners who invested in building irrigation works.²⁸ Although severe droughts were frequent in this area, the 1899 census states that the Ponce District (of which Cañamelar was a part) had the largest acreage in cane that year, and the highest average hacienda area—115 *cuerdas*.²⁹ The first Governor's Report issued after the United States occupation gives the average size of a Puerto-Rican sugar hacienda as thirty-five acres (i.e., about thirty-four *cuerdas*), so that south-coast estates in the Cañamelar region were relatively large for Puerto Rico at this later time.³⁰

While all of Cañamelar suffered from the severe and persistent droughts which characterize this coast, ground water was most accessible in Cañamelar in the eastern lowland parts. It was in this eastern section of the *municipio* that the four main slaveholding plantations developed. Settlement of the western section of Cañamelar came later, and was much sparser. The only sugar mill to be built in the western part of the municipality in the nineteenth century was built later than those in the east and is said to have failed for lack of water.³¹ This important local

²⁶ The Libro de Actas for 1872 reads in part: "... debiendo advertir para mayor claridad de todos los particulares que se indican en este acuerdo que la concesión de riego fue otorgada veinte y tantos años despúes que se hicieron las obras de regadío y consiguientemente que empezaron a disfrutar de este beneficio a excepci3n de la Hacienda Mercedes de D. Juan Cortada que es de nueva creaci3n." This suggests that Hacienda Mercedes began operations some time after the other haciendas then operating in Cañamelar.

²⁷ The Libro de Actas for 1872 (p. 12) notes: "... por virtud de los beneficios otorgados a las haciendas denominadas. . . , que establecieron obras de riego, ascendente a 19,054 pesetas y 1 céntimo."

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ U. S. War Dept., *Report on the Census of Porto Rico, 1899* (Washington, 1900), p. 154.

³⁰ *First Annual Report of Chas. H. Allen, Governor of Porto Rico, 1901* (Washington, 1901), p. 39.

³¹ According to aged informants in Cañamelar.

variation in surface water supply in the municipality had considerable effect upon its later development. Agricultural wealth and population remained concentrated in the east as late as 1880; population increases and concentration of holdings in the west did not occur until after the American occupation when the expansion of the cane industry and the development of irrigation systems made the western half of Cañamelar as productive potentially as the eastern half. Municipality records for 1880 illuminate the local situation.³² The estimated value of property in the municipality was 121,585 *pesos* in that year, nearly half of which was classified as agricultural wealth (57,326 *pesos*). A census of the town's workers by name and *barrio* (rural district) is provided. Three hundred and ninety-five workers were living in the municipality in 1880, the largest aggregates, as would be expected in view of the hacienda distribution, in the two easternmost *barrios*. The *barrio* adjoining the town on the east and containing two haciendas, had 131 workers; Barrio Poyal, easternmost *barrio* of the municipality and the subject of study in this report, also had two haciendas, and 95 workers.³³

The two *barrios* showing highest land valuations were also to the east: 32,137 *pesos* for Barrio Llanos adjoining the town, and 22,204 *pesos* for Barrio Poyal, on the eastern border. While the twelve farmers in Llanos and Poyal represented agrarian wealth of over 54,000 *pesos* (52,000 *pesos* of this on the four haciendas), the twelve farmers in Cañamelar's northwest *barrio* owned a total agricultural wealth valued at but 1,179 *pesos*. Wealth in cattle at that time came to 17,678 *pesos*, as represented by forty-seven owners. Apart from the cattle-raising hacienda owners, who needed animals for draft use and for food, cattle owners were concentrated in the northwest of the municipality. Apparently cattle raisers were numerically important but their invested wealth was limited. There were also in Cañamelar twenty-six taxable businesses, with a total valuation of but 2,215 *pesos*, and other valuations were likewise small in comparison with the agricultural figure.

These records provide another hint about municipal history. The surnames of the four original plantation owners in the east of Cañamelar were carried by sixty-four workers in the 1880

³² Libro de Actas, "Resumen general de las riquezas del Pueblo," Marzo, 1880.

³³ The difficulty of establishing a successful hacienda in the poorly watered western portion of the municipality without extensive irrigation is suggested by the absence of Hacienda Mercedes from these listings. The hacienda was apparently established only shortly before 1872 (see above, note 26), and by 1880, was no longer operating.

local census.³⁴ That is, about one-sixth of the *agrupación de braceros* for that year had the names of the original plantation founders. Twenty-five workers carried the surname of Cañamelaar's wealthiest hacienda operator in 1880; nineteen the surname of the second wealthiest. The baptismal records for 1863 show that slaves in that year had begun to acquire the surnames of their owners.³⁵ There is no doubt, then, that these laborers of 1880 were in large part freed slaves or the children of freed slaves. It remains to this day a commonplace in Cañamelaar that the Negro people of the town are concentrated in the eastern *barrios* and in the urban *barriadas* along the eastern fringe of the town. The relatively well-developed eastern half of Cañamelaar has meant more demographic stability as well. Between 1920 and 1940, Barrio Poyal to the east gained only 109 persons in population, while two western *barrios* gained 863, and 442.³⁶ The most stable population is found in the two eastern *barrios*, Llanos and Poyal, seats of four of the nineteenth-century sugar estates.

Cañamelaar in 1880 was a "sugar town" more than anything else—as it had been in 1855 and as it is today. Its agricultural wealth, its rural labor supply, and most of its Negro population were concentrated in 1880 on the poorly drained lowlands of the four eastern haciendas.

We can surmise that Cañamelaar changed very little from 1880 until the turn of the century. Local hacienda operators became increasingly aware of the threat of outside competition in sugar production and the weakened condition of the industry, but could do little. An extract from a statement submitted to the government of the island by the town fathers of Cañamelaar in 1888 suggests their unfortunate situation:

La única agricultura aquí existente la constituyen cuatro haciendas de caña si atendemos a que las prolongadas sequías que castigan a esta localidad hacen que sean insignificantes las siembras de frutos menores. Aquellas haciendas corroborando las teorías de Ricardo se fundaron en los terrenos de primera calidad y gracias a la asombrosa fertilidad de estos y a los buenos precios del fruto en aquella época [1835-1855?], pudieron sufragar las cuantiosos gastos de maquinaria, establecimientos,

³⁴ Libro de Actas del Pueblo, "Agrupación de braceros," Marzo, 1881.

³⁵ Entries 173, 174, 177, 178, 179, 190, 192, 195, 196, 197, 198 in Cañamelaar Parish Records, "Libro de Bautismos de Esclavos," 1863. Full names are not given for the infants in most cases, but for their godparents, who are identified as slaves in most cases, and have the same names as their owners, who are also indicated.

³⁶ U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940: Population, 1st Series; Puerto Rico Bulletin No. 1, Number of Inhabitants* (Washington, 1942), p. 11.

riego, etc. . . Hoy se sostienen dichas fincas gracias a un esmeradísimo y costoso cultivo y al abono que se emplea; pero, si su producción es poco más o menos la misma, su renta es muchísimo menor. A esa ilustrada Corporación no puede ocultarse que la utilidad hoy tiene que ser inferior a la de hace diez o veinte años, aún sin tener en cuenta la depreciación en el valor del azúcar en estos últimos años a causa del poderoso impulso al cultivo de la remolacha en Europa y al que se ha unido la extensión de la caña por países antes consumidores y el aumento en otros. Otra de las causas que abaten nuestra Agricultura es el codicioso interés del dinero. . . .³⁷

About ten years after the American occupation a modern central was built with local (i.e., Puerto-Rican) capital in Cañamelar,³⁸ but this central sold out to the expanding American corporation in the area in the 1920's.³⁹ As noted earlier, the south coast is typified by a high degree of coördination and even ownership, of a unified land-and-central productive unit, rather than by the contractual relationship which obtains between independent landowning cane farmers and the factory administration in other areas such as the north and west coasts. Cañamelar demonstrates through its history the simultaneous development of large estates and factory centers, as parts of the same productive process.

The almost complete absence of small, independent cane farmers (*colonos*) in Cañamelar has had an important effect on local social structure. As the great centrals replaced the local, outmoded haciendas, old time hacienda owners, to a man, sold or rented their land to the large corporations. These hacienda owners and their descendants, living off the interest on the capital received for their fertile lands and reinvested, moved to urban centers and left a social vacuum in the municipality. In other areas, such as the west coast, these same hacienda owners frequently became *colonos* of the mill and continued to be a social force in their communities. One possible determinant of the difference was the water factor. American corporations, and a few Puerto-Rican corporations as well, paid good prices for dry range at the turn of the century and afterwards. Corporate organizations of this kind had sufficient capital to build their own wells and irrigation systems, and by 1920 a vast insular

³⁷ Libro de Actas del Pueblo, January 28, 1888.

³⁸ Information kindly supplied by Mr. A. L. Foss, of Luce & Co., landholding corporation associated with the Central Aguirre Sugar Corporation.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

irrigation system was supplementing private works. Construction on this scale was never feasible for the nineteenth-century hacienda operators of Cañamelar and its neighbors. At the present time there are probably no irrigated farms on the south coast smaller than five hundred acres.

Around 1905 Cañamelar hacienda owners began to buy range land near their haciendas, serving in fact as commission agents for an expanding American corporation.⁴⁰ Cañamelar land was re-sold in large tracts to this and another corporation.⁴¹ Other extensive holdings were leased. Between 1905 and 1930, over seven hundred *cuerdas* of land were bought outright by a single mill-owning corporate entity in Cañamelar; another five thousand *cuerdas* were leased by the same organization between 1909 and 1929.⁴² The twenty-five year period from 1905 to 1930 saw the productive control of more than 12,000 *cuerdas* marshaled under a single corporate owner-lessee.⁴³

As the following figures demonstrate, all data from 1897 on point to the progressive spread of sugar-cane cultivation throughout the community.

TABLE I
SPREAD OF SUGAR-CANE CULTIVATION

Year	1897 ^a	1910 ^b	1940 ^c
Number of farms	141	77	16
<i>Cuerdas</i> in cane	1,328	3,071	6,031
<i>Cuerdas</i> in minor crops	193	169	less than 25

^a Henry K. Carroll, *Report on the Island of Porto Rico* (Washington, D. C., 1900), p. 118.

^b U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States* (Washington, 1910), Vol. VII, *passim*.

^c U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States* (Washington, 1943), *passim*.

The effects of the invasion of capital in the municipality of Cañamelar are many. From 1910 to 1940, the average farm size in Cañamelar changed from 162.8 *cuerdas*⁴⁴ to 1,405.1 *cuerdas*.⁴⁵ Production of tobacco, fruits, and minor crops, never extensive

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Information kindly supplied by Mr. J. García of Luce & Co.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States*, Vol. VII, p. 999,

⁴⁵ U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States*, 1940, V, 184.

in Cañamellar, has become negligible since 1910. The ownership situation has reached an extreme which it is never likely to exceed. Out of sixteen farms reporting in 1940,⁴⁶ seven are owner-operated, and six manager-operated. The average size of the seven owner-operated farms is 5.9 *cuerdas*, while that of the six managed farms is 3,731.8 *cuerdas*; the percentage of crop area controlled by owner-operated farms is .2 as compared with 99.6 by the managed farms.

Hacienda Vieja During the Nineteenth Century

By the time of the emancipation, four of the six sugar estates that developed in Cañamellar had been operating for at least twenty years. These all lay in the fertile southeastern portion of the municipality, in an area watered by several man-made irrigation canals and endowed with large stretches of fertile marshland.

Hacienda Vieja, which, as Colonia Vieja, is the subject of much of this part of the discussion, was founded as a cane plantation during the first half of the nineteenth century. Its founder was the son of a Spanish royalist, a captain of cavalry, who had come to Puerto Rico fleeing Bolívar's government in Venezuela. It was not possible to ascertain whether the founder of Vieja received the land in a grant from the *real hacienda* before the practice of making such grants was discontinued, but it is likely. The founder is first mentioned in the available municipal records in 1860 when he and other plantation owners of Cañamellar appealed to a royal official for a reduction in taxes. The reduction was asked because the terrible local droughts had been killing the cattle and necessitating expenditures for irrigation on the part of the estate owners. Mention is also made of the lack of free labor ("*pocos brazos libres*") in the municipality.⁴⁷ The owner

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

⁴⁷ The Libro de Actas for 1860 reads:

Se dió cuenta a la Municipalidad con una instancia que ha elevado al Excmo. Sr. Intendente de Ejército y Real Hacienda de esta Isla el hacendado D. Pedro Juan Capó vecino de Ponce y hacendado de este pueblo por sí y a nombre de los de igual clase. D. José Alomar, de los Señores y Compañía y demás hacendados de esta jurisdicción esponiendo lo recargado que se encuentra el subsidio que se le ha impuesto a las riquezas de este territorio y la Junta Municipal convencida de la verdad de cuanto se expresa en el referido escrito hacía presente a S. Ex. el Excmo. Sr. Intendente que en este gran pueblo naciente que no ha mucho pertenecía al limítrofe pueblo de la Villa de Coamo, de mezquino comercio, sin industria apenas, muy escasa la riqueza urbana y su agricultura tan miserable que la mayor parte de los años. [sic] Se pierden las cosechas por las continuas y horrorosas secas que se experimentan muriéndose la mayor parte del ganado, pues las haciendas tienen que valerse de regadío para poder tener provecho. Además este pueblo tiene una

of Vieja plantation at that time resided in the city of Ponce, and not on his estate. As early as 1852, this man had brought the children of two of his slaves to the local parish for baptism, suggesting that his hacienda may have been operating at that time.⁴⁸ In 1861 this plantation owner wrote his will, making the earliest documented assignment of the hacienda lands that could be found.⁴⁹

In 1872, along with other plantation owners of Cañamelaar, the owner of Vieja shared in a royal subsidy or tax exemption to agriculturalists who had invested privately in irrigation works. An additional item in the same record indicates that the laws providing for a royal subsidy were enacted some twenty years after the irrigation systems were constructed. This is further evidence that Vieja plantation was in operation by 1852.⁵⁰ The amount of cane under cultivation or irrigation in 1872 is not given, but since only 1,328 *cuerdas* were planted to cane as late as 1897,⁵¹ much of it unirrigated, irrigation was probably not extensive.

In 1880, the agricultural wealth of the Vieja estate was assessed at nearly 14,000 *pesos*, while the cattle of the estate were worth 1,000 *pesos* more. It was at that time the third most valuable enterprise in Cañamelaar.⁵² The Registry of Property for 1881 described Hacienda Vieja as a property of 1,796 *cuerdas*; partly in cane, with pasture, mangrove swamp, and forest. Grinding mill capacity is not given, nor is any figure stated for the amount of land planted to cane, so that informant information had to be used in the following reconstruction. The grinding mill was equipped with three evaporators, and stood, together with a small distillery, on the plaza of the hacienda. A large house for the owner or administrator, barracks remaining from slavery days, an "orphans" home (which, according to old informants, had been used for the quartering of orphaned slaves purchased before 1873), a small hospital or infirmary building, and storehouses of various kinds were among the other hacienda facilities. A small house was located at the *tala*, or subsistence

jurisdicción muy reducida, pocos brazos libres y muy pocos recursos para poder emprender empresas lucrativas.

⁴⁸ Entries 12 and 13 of the Cañamelaar Parish Records, "Libro de Bautismos de Esclavos," 1852.

⁴⁹ "Registro de Propiedad," Ponce, 1881, Vol. II, folio 4.

⁵⁰ Cf. note 26, above.

⁵¹ Henry K. Carroll, *Report on the Island of Porto Rico* (Washington, 1900), p. 118.

⁵² Cf. note 32, above.

crop area, for the workers.⁵³ Some woodland was located on the hacienda, supplying the starting fuel for the grinding mill (the fires were kept up with the dried cane pulp, or bagasse), and tinder for the *agregado* families. A plantain grove supplied some food and the leaves were used to plug the perforations in the bottoms of the sugar barrels, when the sugar crystals were strained out, and the molasses allowed to drain through. There was also a grove of arrowroot on the hacienda for the *agregados*' use. Large stretches of pasture were required to graze the hacienda stock, and pasture was set aside as well for the livestock owned by the *agregados* and artisans of the hacienda. The description indicates that Hacienda Vieja at the time was a highly developed productive unit with its own laborers and many facilities provided for their use.

By 1882, the property of Hacienda Vieja was incorporated.⁵⁴ It continued to operate in this form until the turn of the century, at which time it was still owned and supervised by the members of a single family. Its lands and buildings had been substantially unchanged for many years, and its sugar production was based on the cultivation, grinding and processing of 300-500 *cuerdas* of land, part of it irrigated, and part naturally watered lowland.

North of the hacienda itself lay the subsistence plots of the workers, some as large as five *cuerdas*. Here *agregados* could, on their own time, raise minor crops for their home use without cost to themselves. Nearby was the *pieza de los pobres*. This plot of cane was ground about Christmas time every year and the molasses, sugar, and rum produced from it were given to the poor of the neighborhood.

About a hundred to a hundred and twenty-five workers lived on the land of Vieja as *agregados* at that time. Most of these were the descendants of the hacienda slaves, but not all. There were many white *agregados*, and many *agregados* of mixed and indeterminate ancestry. Work was not divided on any racial basis, nor did the Negroes and whites live separately. There is good evidence, however, that slaves, rather than *agregados*, had been given the mill jobs and artisans' work in the previous slavery period, since there was no question of the regularity or dependability of their labor. In a report by a British consular official in Puerto Rico, written in 1875, we read:

⁵³ "Registro de Propiedad," Ponce, 1881, Vol. II, folios 2 and 4.

⁵⁴ "Libro de Actas," 1882.

In fact, in the process of sugar-making, the more skilled "liberto" is generally employed within the boiling-house, while the free labourer does the rougher tasks of cutting and carrying the cane.⁵⁵

Work on Hacienda Vieja lasted nearly the whole of the year. Then, as now, there were three growths of cane, planted so as to provide the mill with a regular flow of cane for grinding. Actually, two such grinding seasons took place each year, the first from Christmas till June, and the second from August to October. The productive process was geared to the limited capacity of the small steam-driven mill and the most efficient use of local low-paid labor. Daily wages in this period, according to aged informants, ran at about a thirty-cent daily maximum for men, except for one special type of field labor and the artisans' jobs; women received eighteen to twenty-two cents per day, children still less. Unable to mobilize the capital needed to shift to large scale production, local estate owners leaned heavily on low labor costs, a minimum of capital reinvestment, and paternalistic labor arrangements in order to eke out a profit. For most of his work the *agregado* was paid in services rather than in cash. On many haciendas (though as far as could be determined not at Hacienda Vieja) *agregados* were paid half their wages in *vales* or scrip, redeemable at the hacienda store. Nevertheless, the hacienda economy must be thought of as a wage economy, at least in part; none of the *agregados* owned land, though many were allowed to work subsistence plots of hacienda land.

Women worked on Hacienda Vieja alongside the men. They fed cane into the grinders, loaded it on the hammocks which carried it into the mill, spread manure, cleaned seed, weeded, cleaned the fields after harvesting, and emptied the evaporating cauldrons into the purging barrels. Evaporator tending, and later, centrifuge tending, barrel making, rope making, cane cutting, seed planting, ditching and draining, and technical jobs were done by the men.

The processing apparatus of the Hacienda was not very modern. Three horizontal iron cylinders were used for crushing the cane. Double extraction, although developed much earlier, was not practiced here. The cane juices were boiled, using the old Jamaica Train method. Thickening little by little, they were transferred from cauldron to cauldron, then poured into the purging barrels. Here the molasses would drain out, leaving the

⁵⁵ Great Britain, Foreign Office, "Paper Respecting the Abolition of Slavery and the Condition of the Libertos in Porto Rico," *Slave Trade No. 3*, presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty (London, 1876), p. 2.

crude, brown *moscovado* sugar. Hacienda artisans supervised this process, and the packing of the sugar for shipment. The sugar was shipped in the same barrels in which it drained. The barrel-makers worked on the hacienda itself, though other haciendas had their barrel makers in the town of Cañamelar. From Hacienda Vieja, the barrels were carried by ox cart to Ponce, an eight-day trip, or loaded on small launches at the hacienda docks on Poyal Bay and carried thence to larger vessels for export.

Except for the grinding mechanism itself, the hacienda was operated entirely by human and animal power. The work day began at five or six o'clock in the morning and continued until five or six o'clock in the evening. A ten to twelve-hour day, with perhaps an hour for lunch, was maintained. Long midday breaks seem to have been common even in slavery times. The brief ten o'clock pause for breakfast which is religiously observed by the cane workers of Cañamelar today was also a custom in the past century. Lunch was brought to workers in the field by their wives or children. Much of the food was grown locally, since workers had small subsistence plots and could keep animals, and the area was at that time one of considerable beef and work-cattle production.⁵⁶

The standard of living of the Vieja workers of the eighties was much lower than that of today. As has been pointed out, most of the workers were *agregados*, living in the barracks, relics of slavery, which stood around the plaza of the hacienda. The kitchen was located centrally, a building lined with crude hearths, and wives of the *agregados* prepared the food there. The food was then carried to the one-room quarters of the families. Furniture was of the crudest sort. There was only one laborer who had an iron bed at Hacienda Vieja in the eighties. Clothing was very simple. Several competent seamstresses and tailors made most of it by hand. The only kind of shoes used by the working people were rope-soled sandals. For dishes, utensils carved out of coconut shells and gourds were used, with perhaps a glass or china plate or two held in reserve for special occasions.

⁵⁶ Yet there is conflicting evidence about the kind and quantity of food available. The subsistence plots, barring the danger of serious drought, were able to supplement the imported polished rice, dried codfish and red beans with other items. Chickpeas, plantains, yams, taro, sweet potatoes, and corn were among the locally grown subsistence crops. A variety of herbs was gathered and used, in food and medicinally. While greater variety in diet seems to have been the rule in this earlier period, the rice-beans-salt-cod pattern preferred today seems to have been already established in the food choices of the people.

There was no hacienda store on Vieja. When workers had some small purchase to make, they would visit the village of Oriente. *Quincalleros*, ambulant peddlers, visited the hacienda irregularly, as they visit the colonia to this day.

Medical care came from the hacienda owner's shelf, or in the form of the herbs, roots, etc., used for making teas, compresses and other medicines. The nearest doctor was in Ponce, several days' journey by carriage. Aged informants can recall numerous cases where death might have been averted had a doctor been available. Hacienda workers also lacked schools and churches. The Catholic Church in town was visited by a few *agregados*, but it was a long and difficult trip. The custom of maintaining chapels on the haciendas themselves did not obtain here, probably because the average size of these enterprises did not justify it. The only school was a private institution with one teacher, run mainly for the sons of the middle class and inaccessible to the workers' children.

The work of the hacienda was supervised by an administrator who was a member of the owning family. Three *mayordomos* directed the labors of the *agregados*. The artisans of the hacienda included two barrel-makers, two carpenters, a blacksmith and his assistant. These men earned more, of course, than any of the field laborers, and held a higher status. Intermediate in status and income were the *paleros*, or ditchers, who were field laborers with special skills. They earned more than the common field laborers and were respected by all on the hacienda.

The limited contact between Cañamelar and the rest of Puerto Rico and the world required the local economy to be self-sufficient. While sugar was the cash crop, the land of Cañamelar in the 1880's was not so fully dedicated to cane cultivation as it later came to be. Balancing the cane agriculture was the locally contained and sustained processing of cane. Other industrial, agricultural and handicraft activities were also important. A flourishing brick industry was located in the town. Tanbark was collected from the mangrove swamps for the tanneries of Ponce. Tailors and seamstresses worked in the town of Cañamelar. Enough artisans lived there to support a social club, after the custom of artisans in all Puerto-Rican towns of the time—"a casino of the second [artisans'] class." The artisan listings for 1880-1881 include: barrel-makers, masons, carpenters, coach repairmen, blacksmiths, rope-makers, and mechanics.⁵⁷ While the

⁵⁷ Cf. note 34, above.

absolute number of specialists in Cañamelar has increased since the turn of the century, proportionately far fewer workers are so engaged today.

The hacienda was primarily a family-owned and family-operated enterprise. Usually a member of the family would administer the property, as in the case of Hacienda Vieja. If no member of the family lived on the hacienda, then some executor or manager employed by the family would take up residence in the hacienda house, and assume the responsibilities of the hacienda's operation. The hacienda was thus the seat of continuous face-to-face, reciprocal deference-respect relations between the owner or manager and his family on the one hand, and the hacienda *agregados* on the other. The resulting attitudes were formalized, personal, and of long standing.

When Don Jaime would come with his family to watch us dance the *bomba* (an Afro-Puerto-Rican dance) on the plaza, what a good time we would have! The family wouldn't stay long, but they would joke with all the *negritas ancianas*, and Don Jaime would laugh every time a new verse was sung. Sometimes he would call over the children and tease them, never badly.

Don José Sanchez always blessed the little Negro children who would gather around him when he walked from the house to the boiling house. He was a hard man, but he was accustomed to joke with the children, and throw pennies for them to fight over.

There was never a problem in those times about money. One needed very little. People weren't so proud, or always so ambitious then. And if you needed a few cents very badly, you would always be able to borrow it from the *mayordomo*, who would know you, and the kind of work you were able to do.⁵⁸

Conduct of the members of the different groupings on the hacienda—the owner or manager and his family, the assistant *mayordomos*, the artisans, the workers of the fields—was disciplined by previous law and present custom. Hacienda *agregados* did not challenge the authority of the hacienda owner. He cared for them when they were ill; he provided them with employment; he was often godparent to their children. Life was lived very largely within the hacienda itself, the owner its ruler.

The *barrio* setting, toward the close of the century, was one of apparent internal stability and tranquility. Actually, the situation was not stable because of the losing battle local operators

⁵⁸ Statements by Barrio Poyal informants, personal interviews, 1949.

were waging against the more cheaply produced sugar of their foreign competitors. In 1902, Hacienda Vieja added a centrifuge to its mechanical equipment and was thus able to produce finer sugar than the crude *moscovado* type. This kind of improvement was part of the patching and mending that typified most pre-occupation changes. But by 1902 great factory centrals already were going up both to the east and west of Cañamelaar. The patchwork improvements of the small hacienda owners were in vain.

From Hacienda to Colonia: 1905-1929

By 1905, the owners of Hacienda Vieja had decided to sell their lands to one of the new American corporations. One of the members of the owning family became a land agent for the purchasing corporation. Vieja ground its last crop in 1905, and in the following harvest the raw cane was carried by boat to the new factory central of the corporation. Stoppage of the hacienda reduced the work available for women. Since the cane in subsequent harvests would go to the American central, much of the processing from the time of cutting onward would take place elsewhere. An old-time cultivation chief for the new corporation reports that at least twelve haciendas such as Vieja stopped grinding in 1904 alone, in only three municipalities on the south coast.⁵⁹ Barrel-makers, hacienda mechanics, and technicians found themselves out of work. A railroad was constructed along the coast, and cane could travel to the central more rapidly and efficiently. Working cattle lost some of their importance and many ox-tenders became cane-cutters. In areas adjoining Hacienda Vieja some landowners chose not to sell their lands to the new corporations, and rented them instead.⁶⁰ But in most cases the high prices of cane and the opportunity to make a clean break with Cañamelaar and the sugar industry was very tempting to local estate owners. One by one they sold or leased their land and moved away from the municipality.

⁵⁹ "On the present area of the estate of one of the largest American companies, there were formerly thirty-one old mills. The cane now grown on this area is ground by one factory." U. S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, *The Cane Sugar Industry*, Miscellaneous Series, No. 53 (Washington, 1917), p. 248.

⁶⁰ One such owner would never sell, and his land is still leased to a corporate organization by his descendants, who reside in the Canary Islands. Something of the quality of the hacienda way of life is revealed by this man's stipulations regarding the hacienda he owned. The machinery was to be oiled and kept in operating condition, and each year enough cane was to be ground and processed into sugar to test the machinery. The promise was kept until 1929. Several years later, the rusting machines were sold to Japan.

Shortly after the mill of Hacienda Vieja stopped grinding, engineers visited the area to see what irrigation might do to expand the cultivated acreage. The hacienda artisans had been displaced occupationally. The center of hacienda activity now lay outside its grounds and, in fact, to some extent outside Puerto Rico. By the dissolution of the local connection between hacienda mill and land tracts, the sale or lease of the lands, and the centralization of the productive process outside the hacienda community a new axis of social organization was introduced. Vieja was no longer a largely self-sufficient community (with production for market, of course, excluded), but rather, a tributary farm and labor reservoir of the great central. Hacienda Vieja had become Colonia Vieja.

By 1912 the irrigation works were well under way. Both a public and a private system were being developed. In 1913 the workers' subsistence plots were put in cane. Much of the land which formerly served as pasture or unexploited woodland was likewise converted to cane. Wood for fuel had formerly been gathered freely by the hacienda *agregados*, but now became a cash commodity. Charcoal making and retail selling developed as a business, as the coastal woodland was rapidly cleared, the logs being used as railroad ties.

Work opportunities increased enormously and wages rose as more and more dry range was converted into fertile cane land by irrigation. A one-dollar head tax was levied on cattle owned by *agregados* and pastured on land of the Colonia. The local subsistence pattern of home-grown vegetables, livestock, free sugar, molasses, and rum, and occasional gifts of fresh meat by the *hacendado* was largely upset in this transitional period. Before 1913 hacienda workers had gone to the highlands when the sugar harvest ended, to work in the coffee harvest. Coffee, in the nineteenth century, had been the more important crop. But as the area of land in cane increased sharply the situation was reversed. Workers began to come from the highlands and many stayed on after the cutting was over. The coastal wage scale was, and has remained ever since, higher than that paid in the coffee harvest.

Although conditions of life on south-coast haciendas were exceedingly rough at the turn of the century, they were apparently much less so than those which prevailed in the highlands. It is not surprising, therefore, that highland workers came to the coast to fill the need for cheap labor engendered by the expansion

of cane lands. There was rapid expansion on the coast—of population, economic production, land use—as the old family-type hacienda patterns crumpled under the impact of the centralization of the sugar industry. In the highlands, old hacienda patterns were passing too, but owing to lack of capital and markets, neglect, and hurricanes rather than the expansion or new adaptation in the zone.

Migrants from the highlands were mainly farmers and sharecroppers of Spanish ancestry. They had lost their lands because of the hurricanes, the exorbitant rates of interest and the loss of the European coffee markets. Now they chose to compete in the wage-labor market. The coastal population came from a long tradition of simultaneous slavery and forced wage labor. While a largely Caucasian labor force had always been plentiful in the sugar industry because of the forced labor laws, the new influx of highland workers, also mainly Caucasian, had a marked social effect on coastal life. At first the highlanders stayed apart as much as they could.

When I came here in 1907, the colored people lived on the Colonia. I got work with the wood-cutting crew that was clearing the land here, and they let me put my house here near the beach. At first, I stayed mainly with my crew. But there was a group of white slaves [*agregados*] living on the Colonia and I got to know some of them. They told me not to be bothered by the colored people. You know that in the highlands we say the colored folk are witches. I soon found out they are all right. The white slaves, some of them lived here their whole lives and they got along fine with the Negroes.

When we came here from the highland (*altura*), we settled near the Rillieux family (a large Oriente family descended from the slaves of a French *hacendado*). There would be *bomba* dances each weekend and I would go to watch and dance. Well, my father would get furious because I was dancing with Negroes, and he would blame my mother, who was not so white as he.⁶¹

Because of the practice of training slaves as hacienda technicians while *agregados* were given the less specialized jobs, some of the Negro people of the coast were economically more secure, better educated, and more fully adapted to a wage-earning way of life than were the highland newcomers. The expansion of American influence in the zone had displaced many of the technicians and specialists of the coast, but these people had reinte-

⁶¹ Statements by Barrio Poyal informants, personal interviews, 1949.

grated themselves in the newly expanding pattern. Then, as today, the older coastal dwellers sought to disassociate themselves from the rougher and poorer paying jobs in the cane: cutting, loading, and so on. The white coastal *agregados* who had worked alongside the Negro people of the coast before the American occupation, helped to cement social relations between white highland newcomers and the Negro people on the haciendas. No distinctions were made in the giving out of jobs in the field phase of the industry; as had always been the case, black and white worked together, often with the Negro the teacher, the highland white the willing apprentice. Social activity on the hacienda took in the whole local population. Each Saturday and Sunday night, the *bomba* drummers beat out the *Belén*, *Calindá*, *Holandés*, *Lero*, *Punjab* and other Afro-Antillean rhythms, and the white newcomers would learn to lose their fear of *los brujos de la costa*, dancing on the plaza of the hacienda.

In these and other ways, white highlanders came to be an accepting and intermixing part of the coastal population. Marriages between highland and coastal people became more and more common, for, as one old ex-slave says, "*De la' cosa' de amor, no hay nadie que se lo' manda.*"

It was in 1905-07 that the lands of Hacienda, now Colonia, Vieja passed formally into the direct ownership of the American corporation.⁶² We have noted that among other changes, subsistence crop lands and pastures were put into cultivation, a tax leveled on *agregado* livestock, woodlands were cleared, and family management was replaced with a managerial hierarchy composed mainly of outsiders. Shortly after the acquisition of Vieja land, a company store was set up on the Colonia, and a system of token money introduced. Medical services were supplied by the corporation in the form of a small hospital located at the large central and a medical practitioner who would visit the neighborhood *colonias* of the corporation to attend the sick. A strong tendency developed to use piecework methods rather than set new standards for the field labor performed. This may have been due to the fact that the American corporation wanted to estimate the maximum efficiency of the labor force for later standards or, more likely, that the corporation felt that maximum labor could be extracted in this fashion. Until the corporation had worked out its own estimates on labor performance it left the jobs of recruiting, bossing and arranging pay of workers with labor recruiters. Even the hardest and most skilled jobs in the field came to be done by incentive piecework.

⁶² Information kindly supplied by Mr. J. García of Luce & Co.

The company store on the Colonia Vieja offered commodities at prices equal to or below those of competitors at Oriente village and in Cañamelar. It carried a wide variety of stock and was conveniently located; consequently it rapidly became entrenched in the local consumer buying pattern. The "ticket system" was employed in paying company store bills. Workers purchased goods on credit, and the purchases were charged against their pay slips at the end of the work week. The store managers sat at the pay tables at each *colonia* having a company store and the debt charged the worker was subtracted from his wages before they were paid out. A week's pay of a few cents after deductions was not unusual, according to older informants. Furthermore, informants insist that cheating by managers and clerks was common, and that scales were kept behind a wire frame which made it difficult for the customer to see if he were being cheated.

Company credit and incentive piecework wages were tied neatly together by the managerial system. As cane land expanded and the need for labor grew, labor recruiters were employed. Some of these recruiters became labor contractors for a whole *colonia*; they were called *rematistas*. Others were crew bosses (*encabezados*). These recruiters, familiar with the time and labor needed for a given job, would come to an agreement with the manager of the *colonia* on the price for a particular job. On pay day, after deductions for store purchases, the pay would be turned over to the *rematista* or *encabezado*, and he would set the pay for each man, according to his personal estimate of the man's ability. The cooperation between *rematista* and manager, the utter dependence on the *rematista's* judgment, the credit system at the company store, and the lack of any standardization of rates, meant that unscrupulous managers and *rematistas* could cheat the worker of part of his wages and control his outside activities both through control of his credit and of his opportunities for work. Because so much of the land of Cañamelar had been consolidated under one corporate system, a "malcontent" or "agitator" who lost his job might search in vain for another, throughout the municipality. Another aspect of this piecework system was the control exercised by the *rematistas* over highland immigrants seeking work. These men frequently were forced to buy their food and lodgings at the houses of the *rematistas*. It was part of the stipulation on the basis of which they would be given a chance to work. When this happened, *rematistas* would compete fiercely to get their crews the most work, often to the dis-

advantage of local workers. The abuses of the work system during this period resulted from the lack of any revised standardization of rates after the corporate central system had replaced the family-type hacienda system in the area. The shift from thoroughgoing paternalism to an impersonal, pure wage competition system took some time to accomplish, but it was throughout a disorganizing period. No longer was the *hacendado* available for appeals which would have been listened to in the past, however condescendingly. Wages were relatively good, but still hardly enough to live on, and the labor supply grew day by day as new migrants arrived. Local workers sought to establish personal relationships with the managers, store managers and labor foremen, but this was difficult. The managerial hierarchy consisted of employees, not of proprietors; it could be shifted from place to place; its interest in the productive process was impersonal; its status with relation to the laborers was determined by salary and occupation, rather than by a long personal history.

The socio-political atmosphere was menacing. Most of the workers were *agregados*, always at the beck and call of the *mayordomos*. The threat of losing one's house, one's job, one's credit at the company store, hung over everyone. Dependent on the corporation for credit, housing and labor, workers could not organize easily. But a strong spirit was not long in developing. An ex-slave talks proudly of having shaken the hand of Samuel Gompers, when that labor leader visited Ponce in 1905. A union was created, intimately connected with the Socialist Party of that period. Political rallies were attended by the managerial staff of the Colonia, checking on the *agregados*. Political activity on the Colonia itself was unheard of.

The maturity of the land-and-factory combine system came during the First World War. The violent and important sugar industry strikes of that period have never been forgotten in Cañamelar. One of the notorious company administrators remarked at the time that he hoped the wives of the strikers would end up walking the streets wrapped in dresses made of the fertilizer sacks. "*No hay cuña mas mala que la de la misma madera,*" say the older workers today when they reminisce grimly about the harshness of this native Puerto-Rican administrator.

The Last Twenty Years: 1929-1948

The land-and-factory combine continued unchanged and, if anything, expanded, until the time of the great depression. During the depression the productive apparatus sought to maintain

its customary high rate of return in the face of plunging prices and contracting markets. This required cutting costs of all operations in the productive process, and a significant curtailment of any features of paternalism still obtaining which did not result in a profit entry in the company ledgers. The depression period was marked by a great increase in covert political activity on the part of the workers and the continuation of union organizational activities. Puerto-Rican workers had seized eagerly the privilege of the franchise extended to them in 1917 and in the forty-year period between the establishment of American control and the later depression years these people acquired a political education. It was shortly before the end of this period, in 1938, that the roots of a new political party were established. Up to that time, the Socialist Party, with the backing of the Free Federation of Labor (*Federación Libre de Trabajadores*), affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, had held some power, but only at the expense of jettisoning part of its own program. It was precisely to the now disillusioned, now politically awakened workers of the south coast—and sugar workers everywhere—that the new Popular Democratic Party (*Partido Popular Democrático*) made its appeal. This party, which won a slim but crucial control of the legislature in 1940, followed its victory with a series of politically important reforms: workers who were *agregados* could not be summarily deprived of their residence rights; at the same time, land purchases were begun to enable *agregados* to resettle on government-owned land. Workers' rights to participate openly in political and union activity were reasserted, and workers could not be fired for such activities. The right to organize unions on the *colonias* was established. Token money was abolished, the labor recruiter (*encabezado* and *rematista*) patterns were weakened, and the company stores were ordered to dissolve their legal connection with the landholding and central-owning corporations.⁶³ Large tracts of fertile cane land were purchased by the government, to be run as government farms.⁶⁴

Medical care, which had been meager and largely in the hands

⁶³ This last reform appeared to have had little effect on the economic importance and influence of these stores at the time the field work was being carried on.

⁶⁴ The so-called "Five-hundred-Acre Law," which prohibits the owning of more than five hundred acres of land by a single mill-corporation, was used by the reform government to expedite the purchase of large tracts of land from corporate owners. Such land is then operated through an insular government instrumentality, the Land Authority. The first such purchase of land from corporate holdings on the south coast was not made until 1949. The cane land in Cañamelar and most adjoining municipalities was still in corporate hands at the time of this writing (1952).

of the corporation, came more and more to be the responsibility of the government, implemented through the municipal administration, and the municipality now spends much more on medical care than the corporation ever did.

Some of these reforms were successful; others were evaded by legal circumvention. The new freedom of political activity led to the establishment of a new union for workers, including an all-important sugar-cane workers' branch. This union replaced the *Federación Libre*, and allied itself unofficially with the new party in power.

Demographic movement in the *barrio* during the past ten or fifteen years has been away from the *colonias*, out to the beach and to the village of Oriente. The municipality of Cañamelaar bought a *cuerda* of land in Barrio Poyal in 1940, for the use of squatter families. By 1949 the plots on this tract had been redivided; each plot holding a single family in 1940 held two (or three) in 1949. The beach of Barrio Poyal had but a scattering of houses in 1940, mainly of fishermen; in 1949 it was a growing community in its own right. Most of the newcomers were migrants from the highlands; some were *ex-agregados* from the *colonias*.

From this brief sketch it will be seen that the period from 1873 to 1948, just seventy-five years, was one of intense social change for Barrio Poyal. The laboring population of the *barrio* and, in fact, of the whole coast, had been converted in this short period from slave and bound laborers to the status of free and competing workers. The land ownership pattern, which never had been one of peasant farming in this area, reached an unsurpassed degree of concentration. With this marked change in ownership came concomitant changes in the productive process. Capitalist, corporate agriculture took the place of the paternalistic family-type hacienda pattern. The workers of Barrio Poyal came to be part of an insular "rural proletariat," with rights to union organization and the vote. Their way of life no longer rested on the locally based, tradition-bound, face-to-face social system of the hacienda. The people of Hacienda Vieja were much more members of a community than participants in the wider society; the people of Colonia Vieja are at least as much participants in the wider society as they are members of the *colonia* community. The culture of today is largely a synthesis of old hacienda patterns of thought and activity with newly developed ways of behaving, conceived under the pressures of rapid proletarianization.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Cf. note 12, above.