

**Carolina Sunset, Cuban Sunrise:
A Comparative Study of Race, Class, and Gender in the
Reconstructed South and Colonial Cuba, 1867 – 1869**

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Editor's Note: The Language of Reconstruction

Readers should be aware that the primary sources analyzed in this article contain racial slurs and direct references to racial stereotypes that are offensive. The language of Reconstruction was violent and racialized, and slurs and stereotypes figured prominently in the discourse of elite whites in the Reconstruction-era South. Language was a powerful tool used to reinforce the social, cultural, and political order of segregation and this article explores some of the ways that language reflected the racial antipathy that white elites felt towards formerly enslaved people.

Maintaining the integrity of historical vernacular language in order to understand both the world of Reconstruction and roots of racism in American society rests in tension with the political and deeply offensive ways in which racial slurs, in particular “n—” continue to be used in the present day to reinforce systems of oppression against Americans of African heritage. The Madison Historical Review in no way condones the use of such language.

As such, the editorial staff made the decision to remove this word entirely from the article and replace it with “[racial slur].” Other references to racial stereotypes cited

in the primary source literature have been retained as a way of conveying accurately the class, gender, and racial dynamics of the time period.

The loss of the American Civil War and the consequence of Reconstruction literally turned the South on its head, profoundly altering the dynamics of race, class, and gender that previously shaped and defined antebellum Southern society. The letters of Harriet Rutledge Elliott Gonzales reveal one formerly elite South Carolina family's struggle as they faced a radically altered social landscape. New challenges abounded, particularly surrounding emancipation and the drastic reversal of social norms characteristic of Southern society that development entailed. The adversity, poverty, and social upheaval Harriet experienced in the aftermath of the war called into question her sense of identity and place within the Southern social hierarchy. Despite these challenges, Harriet never abandoned a sense of her aristocratic origins and her "good blood."²⁰⁹ Her perceptions of her new situation reflected the norms that previously reigned in antebellum society and reveal the way that elite Southerners, particularly elite Southern women, viewed and interpreted the myriad changes brought about by Reconstruction. Hers is a story of the way one woman and her family dealt with and responded to these changes, which ultimately led them to abandon the South and the United States completely as they sought to

²⁰⁹ Harriet Rutledge Elliott Gonzales (HREG) to Ann Hutchinson Smith Elliott (AHSE), 11 November 1867, Box 5 Folder 88, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*. Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

reaffirm their status and identity in a place that seemed to still conform to their preconceived notions of the natural order of things – Cuba.

The war drained the Elliott and Gonzales families' fortunes and status. With much of their property destroyed and stripped of the slave labor that previously provided the basis for their material support, Harriet found herself face to face with physical and material woes that she likely never imagined suffering. Harriet's husband was Ambrosio Jose Gonzales, a former Cuban independence fighter and member of Narciso Lopez's ill-fated filibustering expeditions to the island. After the failure of his filibustering efforts and subsequent banishment from Cuba, Ambrosio ingratiated himself into antebellum South Carolina society. This included Hattie's influential father William Elliott, whom Ambrosio met through mutual acquaintances.²¹⁰ Ambrosio later became a colonel in the Confederate Army during the Civil War.²¹¹ Harriet and her husband were accustomed to a life of relative leisure, comfort, and status. Colonel Gonzales (or as he was known to his friends and family, "General" Gonzales) struggled to put his wife and children on a solid footing during Reconstruction. He faced the constant trials of a ravaged economy and social upheavals that made

²¹⁰ Ambrosio and Hattie married in 1856. They met when Ambrosio visited his friend William Elliott at the Elliott family's summer home in Flat Rock, N.C. The couple had six children together: Ambrosio (Brosio) Jose, Jr. (1857-1926), Narciso Gener (1858-1903), Alfonso Beauregard (1861-1908), Gertrude Ruffini (1864-1900), Benigno (1866-1937), and Ana Rosa (Anita, born 1869).

²¹¹ For a full biography of Ambrosio, see Antonio Rafael de la Cova, *Cuban Confederate Colonel: The Life of Ambrosio Jose Gonzales* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

inconsistency the only consistent factor in his family's life. Often away attempting to secure new business deals, Ambrosio left Harriet (or "Hattie," as her friends and family called her) to secure and manage the family's small homestead and struggling sawmill enterprise with only the help of her young sons and whatever servants and laborers, often the very people her family formerly held in bondage, she could manage to hire and maintain with the limited resources available to her.

Harriet and Ambrosio found little success in their efforts. After several years of struggling to rebuild a life in a South Carolina that was anything but the place Harriet remembered from her youth, the Gonzales family set out for Ambrosio's homeland, Cuba. There, in a society alien yet strangely familiar, Hattie found renewed hope. In Cuba, Hattie found a place that felt to her more like home than her actual homeland had become. Still a slaveholding society at the time, the social, racial, and gendered norms of Cuba were akin to that of the antebellum South. For Hattie, the island represented a return to a social hierarchy she understood, with all its corresponding dynamics of gender, race, and class. Yet, as much as Cuba represented for Hattie a return to and reaffirmation of a social hierarchy that conformed to her own assumptions and conceptions, it too was undergoing profound changes that had the potential to once again leave Hattie and her family disconcerted and disconnected from their preconceived assumptions about what they believed to be the correct order of things.

Gender dynamics, relationships of power, and normative conceptions are unquestionably essential tools of historical analysis.²¹² Historians since the 1970s have made great strides in creating a space for gendered historical perspectives to be heard and taken seriously. However, as at least one historian that has studied the social dynamics of the pre and post-Civil War plantation households points out, “gender wielded as a primary category of historical analysis often obscures as much as it reveals...”²¹³ Gender, race, and class are social concepts that are so intimately intertwined that to separate them, isolate them, and study them independently is akin to putting on scholarly blinders. Only by examining the ways these three concepts merge, morph, and mingle together can a greater understanding of social relations and their influence on the course of historical events be achieved. Arguably, no other period in American history showcases the miasma of gender, race, and class more acutely than the Reconstruction era in the South.

To understand the extreme social upheaval of Reconstruction, its effect on the Southern psyche, and the Southern society that emerged from it, it is imperative to understand the social norms of the antebellum South. Southern men took it as a given that they had the “right to run their households and rule their women without

²¹² Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5, (1986), 1053-075.

²¹³ Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 21.

interference from the government.”²¹⁴ Women were expected to submit to patriarchal authority in exchange for physical, economic, and social protection. Yet, while men overwhelmingly dominated women in the public sphere of the wider community and world beyond, “male dominance was not a controlling force in a plantation household.”²¹⁵ The Southern gender ideals of women’s passivity, delicacy, pursuit of leisure, and submission to male dominance clashed with the reality of female dominance in the individual household.²¹⁶ As mistresses of the plantation household, elite Southern women’s very identity was intertwined with the perceived importance of owning slaves and running the household.²¹⁷ According to historian Drew Gilpin Faust, this “...fundamental sense of identity depended on having others to perform life’s menial tasks.”²¹⁸

The antebellum Southern household was in its own way a “public space” with a woman at the head of everyday activities, managing their children and the work of household slaves.²¹⁹ The “plantation...served as the primary site of social and political organization” and “embodied the hierarchical structure of Southern paternalism”.²²⁰ On the

²¹⁴ Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 86.

²¹⁵ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 3.

²¹⁶ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 6, 21-22.

²¹⁷ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 4.

²¹⁸ Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 77.

²¹⁹ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 3.

²²⁰ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 32.

plantation "...men and women, boys and girls, slave and free learned the roles appropriate to their age, gender, and race" within the social order of the plantation.²²¹ The very meaning of elite Southern civilization required the order, management, and discipline of the plantation household that Southern ladies provided.²²²

The plantation household was the locus for the "construction of white womanhood."²²³ The concept of race itself was integral to this process, signaling the intersections of race, class, and gender that buttressed perceptions of identity amongst Southern elites. "The omnipresent issue of race," writes Faust, "tied white men and women together and undermined white southern females' willingness to challenge patriarchy."²²⁴ The one place where elite women could express agency was within this uniquely social atmosphere of the plantation household. This agency existed within the dynamic between women's submission to patriarchy and household slaves' submission to the authority of the mistress. Historian Thavolia Glymph states, "...slaveholding women stood before slaves as the bedrock upon which slavery rested."²²⁵ The Southern white elite in general, and elite women in particular, evaluated their own elite status relative to "the distance that separated them from enslaved and free black people."²²⁶

²²¹ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 32.

²²² Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 64.

²²³ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 65.

²²⁴ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 253.

²²⁵ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*.

²²⁶ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 74.

The void between elite Southern women and their lower-class counterparts was almost as wide as the void between whites and African Americans. After the Civil War, with much of the economic backbone of the South destroyed, both physically with the burning and looting of lands by the armies of both the Union and the Confederacy, and ideologically with the crumbling of their slave-based society, many elite Southern ladies found themselves in a position not too far removed from that of the lower class soldiers' wives. Both lower-class women and elite ladies faced a fear of "becoming as poor and disrespected as slaves."²²⁷ Even then, many elite Southern women expressed "revulsion" at poor whites even as their own situations began more and more to mirror that of those they despised.²²⁸ Poor white women, in return, often felt extreme resentment for the elite.²²⁹ These profound challenges to class and race-based assumptions and distinctions shaped the dynamic of many women's lives during the Reconstruction era.

The Civil War, emancipation of the slaves, and Reconstruction destroyed the "fundamental unit" of Southern society—the plantation household and lifestyle—and shattered the norms of Southern civilization.²³⁰ The social dislocation of the war stripped many elite women from the "accoutrements of superior status" and "the substance and trappings of gentility."²³¹ The story of Harriet "Hattie" Rutledge Elliott Gonzales exemplifies this

²²⁷ McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 170-172.

²²⁸ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 42.

²²⁹ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 161.

²³⁰ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 31.

²³¹ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 42.

dislocation. Hattie's husband, Ambrosio Jose Gonzales, volunteered for the Confederate Army the moment he heard the guns firing on Ft. Sumter in early 1861.²³² Faced with insubordinate slaves and the threat of Union invasion later that same year, Hattie's father William Elliott abandoned the family's multiple plantations in South Carolina's Low Country and moved further inland.²³³ He died at the family's summer home in Flat Rock, NC in February of 1863.²³⁴ This left Hattie, her mother, sisters, and growing brood of children without a male head of household even before the end of the war. The Elliott women found themselves far removed from the society they once knew and faced an uncertain future.

At the end of the war, the family tried to pick up the pieces of their lives as best they could. Sherman's army left two of the Elliotts' plantations, Oak Lawn and Social Hall, utterly destroyed on their way through the Carolinas. The family lost nearly everything, and economic hardships soon clashed with their tenuous claims to elite status. In 1866, Ambrosio Gonzales managed to put enough money together to purchase Social Hall from William Elliott's eldest son, Ralph Elliott.²³⁵ Seeing some potential in the vast pine

²³² Antonio Rafael De la Cova, "Ambrosio Jose Gonzales: A Cuban Confederate Colonel," (PhD diss., West Virginia University, 1994), 142.

²³³ McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 242-245.

²³⁴ Lawrence S. Rowland, "Elliott, William, III," *South Carolina Encyclopedia*, <http://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/elliott-william-iii/>.

²³⁵ Ambrosio J. Gonzales to William Elliott, undated, Box 3 Folder 52, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel

forests on the property, he moved his family there in early 1867 and attempted to set up a sawmill business. The Gonzaleses struggled over the next two years, facing numerous setbacks, false starts, and dashed hopes as they attempted to eke a living while also maintaining some sense of dignity and semblance of their former lives. Hattie's letters during these years shed much light on the dramatic transformations of many elite households during Reconstruction and the ways that white women tended to respond to them.

The most fundamental challenge to Southern white women's understanding of the world, relationship to society, and relationship with their household, was emancipation. The disappearance of the institution of slavery from Southern plantations and elite households represented a profound upheaval of the social and domestic sphere.²³⁶ According to Glymph, many Southern white women found the experience "paralyzing."²³⁷ Hattie's correspondence with her mother and sisters from 1867-1868 is filled with examples of the transformative nature of African American freedom on the elite Southern household. Most elite Southern white women lacked knowledge of basic domestic skills. The loss of household slaves forced many to learn on the fly in order to maintain their homes.²³⁸ Used to simply managing the household and relying on slaves to do the actual work, elite Southern ladies for the first time had to learn what it meant to be a housewife. Hattie's

Hill.

²³⁶ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 74.

²³⁷ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 142.

²³⁸ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 77.

correspondence often speaks of these troubles. Hattie wrote to her mother in one letter that having “no one to work is a trial,” and implores her mother to “pity the sorrows of a housekeeper for the first time.”²³⁹ She laments her loss of free time and inability to visit her relatives. “I had hope to be with my dear Mama and sisters ere this,” she writes in October of 1867, “but you see how impossible it is for poor little housekeepers to form plans.”²⁴⁰ Women often found their only help was from their male children, obligating young boys to assist them in their domestic duties.²⁴¹ Hattie found this challenging as well. In December of 1867 she writes, “Boys are ‘no good’ as the Irish say!” She felt physically overwhelmed at times by her new responsibilities, adding “... I cannot work myself without getting so fatigued as make me useless for some time after.”²⁴² Yet, Hattie found ways to cope, adjust, and even found some pride in her new role. Writing of a recent delivery of a gift of venison for her family she beams, “...all the housekeeper was aroused in me. It was so delightful not to have to think up a dinner for five or six days.”²⁴³

The loss of their slaves did not mean that elite white women abandoned the idea that they and their families were entitled to the services of African American labor. The

²³⁹ HREG to AHSE, 16 December 1867, Box 5 Folder 89, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁴⁰ HREG to AHSE, 6 December 1867, Box 5 Folder 89, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁴¹ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 130.

²⁴² HREG to AHSE, 6 December 1867, Box 5 Folder 89, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁴³ HREG to AHSE, 13 May 1867, Box 5 Folder 86, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

occupational transformation from plantation mistress to housekeeper only made their sense of need and entitlement to household assistance more acute. White women resolved to cling to African American labor, even if that meant they had to pay for it.²⁴⁴ This created what Drew Gilpin Faust describes as the “servant problem.” “From being queens in social life,” elite white women became “mere domestic drudges.”²⁴⁵ To maintain their sense of status and racial separation under these conditions, control over the labor of the formerly enslaved was essential. “To do without a black servant, in the South,” argues Glymph, “was not an option.”²⁴⁶ For the first time, “former mistresses had to learn how to be employers,” which most elite white women found “demeaning” and “appalling” as it was so counter to their sense of the proper racial roles in society.²⁴⁷ To be forced to rely on the formerly enslaved was “provoking” to their very sensibilities.²⁴⁸

Hattie’s newfound domestic role and her relations with servants co-existed with her new, more public role, of assisting her husband to run the family’s farming endeavors and sawmill business. This represents the unique ways that the Civil War and Reconstruction often altered “deeply held assumptions about women’s nature and proper roles” in the South.²⁴⁹ Often away from Social Hall, Ambrosio left Hattie in charge of overseeing the day-to-day affairs. “You don’t

²⁴⁴ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 8.

²⁴⁵ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 250.

²⁴⁶ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 76.

²⁴⁷ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 7.

²⁴⁸ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 139.

²⁴⁹ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 136; McCurry, 86.

know what a business woman I have become,” she writes to her sister, Emmie, in September of 1867. “I keep a book and an account of all that is sold and supplied the hands white and black all sick days and loss of work.”²⁵⁰ Hattie describes her new role to her mother in May of 1867, “But then we are very busy late every evening with the hands coming in for rations and buying provisions. All the workmen at the farm but one are paid in provisions or cloth. I determine the prices of the last.”²⁵¹ She often complains of the difficulties in obtaining necessary provisions with which to pay employees and the potential repercussions of the failure to do so. “The buying of corn for horse, hands, and ourselves is a fearful business....it is a cash article, too,” she tells her sister Emmie in June of 1867. “The negroes...will only work for corn which we must give or have what we have planted ruined.”²⁵² This concurs with Glymph’s assertion that “mobilizing and managing a free labor force appeared unintelligible, inconvenient, and even sinister.”²⁵³

Also part of the new role was the act of negotiating wages, a previously unheard of proposition for a woman of her antebellum status. In December of 1867, she writes to her mother to make an offer to one of the Elliott family’s more reliable hands, offering a wage of “\$30 per month and mill hands rations.”²⁵⁴ Many times, the very people she was

²⁵⁰ HREG to Emily Elliott, 7 September 1867, Box 5 Folder 88, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁵¹ HREG to HREG, May 1867, Box 5 Folder 86, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁵² HREG to Emily Elliott, 7 June 1867, Box 5 Folder 87, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁵³ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 155.

²⁵⁴ HREG to AHSE, 6 December 1867, Box 5 Folder 89, *Elliott and*

negotiating with were men and women the family previously held in bondage. In the same December letter, Hattie communicates to her mother that “George Sanders, your former slave” came to her to offer to work one of the Elliott plantations that fell into disuse after the war.²⁵⁵ The frequent demands for high wages from free African American laborers were a concern not just because of the expense, but also because it upset the social hierarchy. In November of 1867, she wrote to her sister, “Carpenters in this neighborhood, [racial slur], are full of air and ask 45 per month.”²⁵⁶ Due to the nature of the new circumstances, with African Americans now free to move from employer to employer seeking better opportunities, they generally had at least some advantage in wage negotiations.²⁵⁷

Even as the Elliott and Gonzales families came to rely more and more on free African American labor, their inherent racism and distrust of African Americans, coupled with their sense of consternation over the disruption of the normal racial order and hierarchy, can be seen again and again in Hattie’s correspondence. Many of her letters express her distrust and condescension towards the African American work ethic. Writing of her role in determining prices for the provisions the family used to pay many of their hands, Hattie contends that her husband “thinks I am too exorbitant, but I tell him I am sure the [racial slur] do not do

Gonzales Family Papers #1009.

²⁵⁵ HREG to AHSE, 6 December 1867, Box 5 Folder 89, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009.*

²⁵⁶ HREG to Annie Elliott, November 1867, Box 5 Folder 88, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009.*

²⁵⁷ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 150.

full work.” She seems to revel in her ability to exact some revenge on the workers for not working hard enough. “A piece of nice blue cloth, which costs 22 cts by the piece, your Jewess of a daughter gets 60 cts for and the freedman gets 12 yds at a time.” Yet, even her small revenge is bittersweet, “as store articles are paid for in work of course my satisfaction at getting high prices is greatly diminished.”²⁵⁸ Her doubts extended beyond the perceived laziness of African American laborers, and she questioned the inherent viability and profitability of labor using freed slaves. In June of 1867 she writes to her sister Emmie, “I am sorry to hear that you think it impossible to make money with free labor, but I agree with you. It distresses me to see what the negroes get for one day’s work which I know to be badly done.”²⁵⁹

The Gonzaleses’ frustration with their free African American laborers rears its head on several occasions in Hattie’s letters. In July of 1867, the family hired back one of their hands, known as Gen’l Prince Wright who had previously stolen from them. Hattie notes that he “had taken in different articles a month and a half pay in advance and as soon as we began to make him useful carpentering, he skedaddled.” However, she hired him back, noting that “he is one of the untried rascals you think preferable to the discovered ones.”²⁶⁰ In December of 1867, she complained in a letter to her mother of an African American employee

²⁵⁸ HREG to AHSE, 3 May 1867, Box 5 Folder 86, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁵⁹ HREG to Emily Elliott, 7 June 1867, Box 5 Folder 87, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁶⁰ HREG to Emily Elliott, 26 July 1867, Box 5 Folder 87, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

named Louis that lost one of the family's mules. She writes, "We have suffered too much from not having one negro who felt interested sufficiently to care what became of us. In this respect we are worse off than very body else for all who live on a plantation have some of their former domestics about them but we are left to the tender mercies of the turned off scamps in the neighborhood..."²⁶¹ Hattie seems to have a difficult time understanding why the same people that she previously relied on for almost every need were unconcerned for her family's well-being after emancipation. She could not comprehend that without the coercion and threat of violence implicit in the condition of slavery, former slaves found it easy to drop any pretense of affection for their former masters.

Even as dependent as elite Southern white women were on slave labor during the antebellum period, emancipation did not change their belief that African Americans could not function without their protection and guidance.²⁶² In an undated letter from 1868, Hattie expresses shock at the thought "that the negroes in the neighborhood, about two hundred, intend on hiring out or buying Aleck Chisolm's place... for themselves!" The instigator of this endeavor was none other than Gen'l Prince Wright, the former employee that had caused such trouble for them earlier that year. The sarcasm almost drips from her pen, "Should Chisolm consent, it will make this neighborhood a

²⁶¹ HREG to AHSE, 16 December 1867, Box 5 Folder 89, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁶² Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 145; LeeAnn Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 122.

charming location.”²⁶³ To elite Southerners, African American men and women’s “...survival was impossible... outside of the framework of the white household and the authority of the white master.”²⁶⁴ Yet, Hattie was not without her sympathies, especially when those sympathies reinforced African Americans’ perceived helplessness without their former masters and mistresses. She writes to Emmie sometime in either 1867 or 1868, “The negroes are ragged and look so hungry that I can’t help feeding them. Encouraged, they beg extensively...”²⁶⁵

However, this idea of African American dependency, and the concepts of class and race as elite whites understood them, were frequently challenged. The Gonzaleses often found themselves dependent on the willingness of freedmen and women to oblige their needs. Circumstance sometimes left the family face to face with the reality of trading with their African American neighbors, with often frustrating results. “The miserable negroes refuse to sell their corn, but tis wise of them,” she tells her mother on October of 1867.²⁶⁶ In December she complains, “The negroes won’t sell corn at 8 ¼ . Whiskey is the only thing that will open their corn bins.”²⁶⁷ Hattie’s sense of class, as well as racial norms, are also evident in these interactions. She tells her mother in

²⁶³ HREG to AHSE, 1868, Box 5, Folder 93, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁶⁴ Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*, 128.

²⁶⁵ HREG to Emily Elliott, n.d., Box 5 Folder 89, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁶⁶ HREG to AHSE, 23 October 1867, Box 5, Folder 88, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁶⁷ HREG to AHSE, 16 December 1867, Box 5 Folder 90, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

November of 1867, "...bacon, molasses, and whiskey is what the freed people care for. They have passed the stage for fancy hats and jewelry, at least in these regions."²⁶⁸ These interactions also sometimes challenged gender roles as Hattie and her sons occasionally had to step in to help her husband. "Tis very amusing to see Gonzie trading with them. Several times he was about to cheat himself badly when Brosio and self came to the rescue."²⁶⁹

Perhaps nothing contested the concept of African American dependency on whites, and the racial hierarchy of Southern society itself, more than African American suffrage. The Fifteenth Amendment gave African American men the right to vote and 1867 was the first year they could exercise this right. This event caused much disruption in the Gonzaleses' lives and the operation of their business. In November of 1867, Hattie complains to her mother:

The darkeys are all going to vote tomorrow and have taken their departure for Walterboro... They came to sell their produce in order to get money for their journey which they seem to think will be expensive. Perhaps the Yanks make them pay for the privilege of voting, who knows? The mill hands all went off yesterday. "Nothing in the world could induce them to miss the election" they said so the mill lies idle until Wednesday when the noble patriots expect to return.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ HREG to AHSE, 18 November 1867, Box 5 Folder 88, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁶⁹ HREG to AHSE, 18 November 1867, Box 5 Folder 88, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*

²⁷⁰ HREG to AHSE, 18 November 1867, Box 5 Folder 88, *Elliott and*

A week later, Hattie wrote to her sister, “The mill hands have returned after an absence of one week. The delight of voting for the first time seems to have intoxicated their wooly heads.” Hattie seems to have resented the obvious relish the freedmen displayed as they exercised their newfound rights. Yet, she could not imagine that it was more than a temporary development and the world would somehow right itself in time; “I trust they will be in their right places this time next year,” she concludes.²⁷¹

Beliefs of African American dependency intermingled, often paradoxically, with ideas of protection, both physical and material, in the Southern mind during Reconstruction. Concern for protection is a theme that recurs regularly in Hattie’s correspondence and is deeply connected to conceptions of gender, class, and race that stretched back into the antebellum days and did not die with the Confederacy and its promises.²⁷² With Ambrosio often away on business, not only did Hattie have to help manage the family business, she had to find a way to ensure their domestic and economic protection as well. Her letters often reveal her concerns about free African Americans pillaging her lands and resources—whether real or perceived. “I have a dislike to the land of Florida since the [racial slur] are being sent there” she explains to her mother in October of 1867. “...I don’t think there can be an advantage to having a large body of undisciplined blacks near us. They would steal

Gonzales Family Papers #1009.

²⁷¹ HREG to Emily Elliott, 26 November 1867, Box 5 Folder 88, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009.*

²⁷² McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 144-146.

everything we made. Do you know they steal all of our corn!" She goes on to implore her mother to do something about the situation at the Bluff plantation, for "Tis nothing but a harbor for vagrants who steal where they can."²⁷³ In June of 1867 she tells her sister, Annie, of her worries that their potato patch was being "grazed upon" by local African Americans and notes it only happened since her husband left.²⁷⁴ The next month she tells Emmie, "We will put a mill hand to take care of the corn and pease that the [racial slur] and raccoons have left..."²⁷⁵ Their hired hands were no better than the vagrants in her eyes, "A freedman with a gun and dog guards the garden. He has his family with him. Fortunately a small one to steal for." Only the presence of a "white man" in the vicinity who could respond in the event of an emergency eased Hattie's apprehensions.²⁷⁶

The shift from a slave-based to waged-based economy created opportunities for new social and economic relationships based on class as well as race. The new social and economic paradigm brought upper and lower-class whites into interactions and relationships that were far from the norm in the antebellum South. One of the first places this manifested was within the elite household between elite women and their poor white counterparts. Difficulties in managing free African American female servants led many

²⁷³ HREG to AHSE, 2 October 1867, Box 5 Folder 88, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁷⁴ HREG to Annie Elliott, 24 June 1867, Box 5 Folder 87, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁷⁵ HREG to Emily Elliott, 26 July 1867, Box 5 Folder 87, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁷⁶ HREG to AHSE, n.d., Box 5 Folder 86, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

elite Southern households to attempt to find white servants to fill their roles. In September of 1867, Hattie wrote to Emmie that the formerly enslaved were "...very provoking now and people seem very desirous to get rid of them as house servants." She tells Emmie that her neighbors, the Rhetts, were "anxious to get a white cook" and that they were "often without a servant of any kind and can't stand such discomfort longer!"²⁷⁷ The importance of servants, and of being served, as a necessary element of the elite Southern way of life is clearly implied by such language.

In the household, female servants were indispensable. Hattie expresses shock to Emmie in July of 1867 when she learns that she was "without a female servant."²⁷⁸ As much as they desired to hold onto and control free African American domestic labor, elite Southern women were able to pragmatically, in their perspective, adapt their concepts of what constituted a proper servant. This adaptation was not taken without some chagrin, however. Hattie asked her mother in November of 1867, "Is Mamie's new servant (I call things by their proper names) white or black? 'Help' is a northern word which has, helped, to bring about the present state of affairs."²⁷⁹

This adaptation quickly collided with class perceptions. Hattie, like many others of her ilk, found that white servants were not an improvement over their African

²⁷⁷ HREG to Emily Elliott, 7 September 1867, Box 5 Folder 88, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁷⁸ HREG to Emily Elliott, 15 July 1867, Box 5 Folder 87, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁷⁹ HREG to AHSE, 11 November 1867, Box 5 Folder 88, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

American counterparts.²⁸⁰ Sometime in the spring or early summer of 1867, Hattie secured the services of two Irish servants. Hattie's constant reminder in her correspondence of the Irish origins of her white servants unconsciously signals the interweaving of race and class so present at the time. Not only were they *poor* whites, they were *Irish*, which many still viewed with only slightly less contempt as African Americans. In fact, in some ways Hattie saw her Irish girls as even more backward than the slaves she once knew. She comments to Emmie in June of 1867, "They are excellent servants but they lack the refinement so striking in our former slaves."²⁸¹ At first the arrangement proved beneficial; "Our servants are not paid by the month, don't desire it. And if their wages are higher than the blacks they work harder and save much by their honesty."²⁸² The hope of a more ordered household was soon dashed, however, and Hattie found her patience constantly tested. "Managing a household of obstreperous boys and Irish maids had been more trying than very hard work," Hattie tells Emmie in November of 1867.²⁸³

Issues with white workers were not exclusive to the Gonzales family's household servants. The white men they hired as workers and managers were consistently inconsistent. In May of 1867, Hattie writes to her mother about "Old Simmons" who "...did not like to get up early to

²⁸⁰ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 161.

²⁸¹ HREG to Emily Elliott, 7 June 1867, Box 5 Folder 87, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁸² HREG to Emily Elliott, 7 June 1867, Box 5 Folder 87, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁸³ HREG to Emily Elliott, November 1867, Box 5 Folder 88, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

feed the horses. Said the sun rose at 7 o'clock. He could work himself but could not direct others and was so afraid of negroes that he would not stay by his garden to guard it at night. His wages were much too high and we were glad to see him go of his own accord."²⁸⁴ In July of 1867, a "Mr. Duc" was added to her "list of white scamps" after being hired as a carpenter at the sawmill only to abscond from his duties within days. "Honesty don't do in this country now," Hattie lamented.²⁸⁵

It was this lack of "honesty" from these white men that so struck Hattie and called into question her perceptions of her own race. In November of 1867, she regales her sister, Emmie, with a tale of another "white scamp." This one even more disappointing because he was apparently a Confederate veteran. After detailing the extra care, including food and medicine, they provided the man and his family due to his veteran status, Hattie fumes that the man owed "us ever so much but won't finish the miserable day affair he has been about for weeks and quick goes away and leaves us in the most open condition."²⁸⁶ Hattie concluded her tirade with the pointed, "Our poor whites are just as mean as [racial slur]," bringing full circle the sometimes amorphous nature of race and class that so colored the South during Reconstruction.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ HREG to AHSE, May 1867, Box 5 Folder 86, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁸⁵ HREG to Emily Elliott, 26 July 1867, Box 5 Folder 87, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁸⁶ HREG to Emily Elliott, 26 November 1867, Box 5 Folder 88, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁸⁷ HREG to Emily Elliott, 26 November 1867, Box 5 Folder 88, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

Concepts and ideologies of gender, race, and class also collide in Hattie's perceptions of herself and her family's situation. The destruction of the family's plantations during the war destroyed the base of their economic well-being, significantly lowering their status. Forced to attempt to rebuild their standing in a ravaged landscape, alien social atmosphere, and shattered economy, Hattie's family struggled to re-orient their sense of self throughout the late 1860s. Hattie was acutely aware of the challenge to her status, its implications for previously established racial norms, and her sense of self-worth that the circumstances entailed. "I am more aristocratic now than I ever was," she confides in her mother in November of 1867, "and the poorer I am the more I am proud of my good blood. Perhaps in heaven two classes might live together on the same footing, religion making ladies and gentlemen of us all, but on earth certainly not."²⁸⁸ Her sense of pride gave her the strength to face economic hardship and bristle at the thought of incurring debt. "My dear, if the world was to come to an end tomorrow," she wrote Emmie in June of 1867, "our chief regret would be that we left it owing."²⁸⁹ Whatever the fates threw her way, Hattie's letters express a consistent determination to persevere and maintain the heritage she felt entitled to, no matter the material and social condition in which she found herself.

Hattie's perseverance was tempered with shame at her lowered standards. Forced to live in a one-room log

²⁸⁸ HREG to AHSE, 11 November 1867, Box 5 Folder 88, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁸⁹ HREG to Emily Elliott, 7 June 1867, Box 5 Folder 87, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

cabin—a former slave quarters—struck a blow to Hattie's aristocratic ego. In November of 1867, Hattie wrote her mother:

There will be families in their neighborhood but I don't care for neighbors, living in such a cabin as I do so low to the ground and so impossible to keep clean. The poultry pig and even the pony "roam at their rise" and come into the shanty whenever they please. I don't object to clean poverty but I to rebel against dirt and dirty we must be as long as we are in such a low building.²⁹⁰

Dress was a particularly Southern way to express status, especially for elite Southern women. In many ways, refined dress was firmly wrapped up in elite Southern women's conceptions of identity and their place in society. Faust describes clothing as the "language Southerners used to explore and communicate their relationship to personal, cultural, and social transformations of war" and shortages of cloth and clothing were one way Southerners marked their loss of wealth and status.²⁹¹ Hattie's correspondence is full of conversations about clothing, and her sisters often played seamstress to her children as the Gonzaleses struggled to provide their children necessities, much less the finer things. Hattie's response when her sister, Emmie, sent her a dress is particularly telling of the dislocation from her former life as an elite Southern lady. She writes, "The flannels are beautiful and thank E very much for the trouble she took

²⁹⁰ HREG to AHSE, 11 November 1867, Box 5 Folder 88, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁹¹ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 221.

about the dress. Is it to be worn without a hoop and on which side fastened? She must excuse my stupidity but I have been out of the fashion so long I find it difficult to accommodate myself to the present style.”²⁹²

Her embarrassment over her clothing also extended to her children, as their condition reflected the family’s condition. Her fears of what others, even her own relations, might think of her children’s country bumpkin appearance frequently prevented the family from visiting her relatives. She excused the children’s inability to visit their grandmother in October of 1867 because “...they were minus capes and proper shoes and their warm clothes were not finished yet.” It may be easy to interpret this as merely displaying Hattie’s concern over her children having warm clothes with which to travel during the cold winter months, but another letter to her mother in January of 1868 reveals the truth behind Hattie’s hesitations and excuses. She again acknowledges the invitation for the boys to see their grandmother “... but Brosio is using his father’s shoes and Nigno is still without his. None of them “have hats or capes and pride keeps me from letting them be seen on the cars until furnished with these indispensable articles.”²⁹³ It was not so much that the children might need these articles to brave the cold winter months, it was the way they would appear on the train, in public, that was Hattie’s greatest concern. Her sense of pride, so intimately engaged with her notions of race, class, and gender, made her wary of the

²⁹² HREG to AHSE, 16 August 1867, Box 5 Folder 88, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁹³ HREG to Emily Elliott, 18 January 1868, Box 5 Folder 90, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

potential for socially ruinous rumor. She begs her sister, Annie, in June of 1867 after extolling a list of her troubles to not "...tell them to strangers or people who would like to hear them."²⁹⁴

The litany of financial struggles and difficulties in adjusting to the new paradigm of a Reconstructed South led the Gonzales family to make the decision to move to Cuba. This was not a decision that came suddenly or lightly. Almost immediately after the Civil War the Gonzaleses considered moving to Cuba to escape the degradations and loss of status but were talked out of the notion by the Elliotts.²⁹⁵ Less than a year after the Gonzales family moved to Social Hall, Hattie confided in her mother, "I am anxious to leave this country forever. The only attraction here is yourselves."²⁹⁶ By January of 1868, besieged by debt and the failing sawmill operation, Ambrosio resolved to abandon the venture at Social Hall and seek new opportunities in Cuba where he still had family and numerous personal and business connections. Perhaps Hattie's own physical condition, described as "emaciated" by Ambrosio's biographer Antonio Rafael de la Cova, influenced his decision.²⁹⁷

In March of 1868, the Gonzaleses paid a visit to Cuba to begin preparations for their move. While there, former Confederate President Jefferson Davis, also in Cuba at the

²⁹⁴ HREG to Annie Elliott, 24 June 1867, Box 5 Folder 87, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁹⁵ De la Cova, *A Cuban Confederate Colonel*, 252.

²⁹⁶ HREG to AHSE, 16 October 1867, Box 5 Folder 88, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

²⁹⁷ De la Cova, *A Cuban Confederate Colonel*, 280.

time, visited with his former Colonel and his family. Ambrosio helped to arrange an introduction for Davis into the Matanzas Lyceum, a local social and cultural fraternal organization, as an honorary member. The family spent their time in Cuba as “guests of wealthy relatives and friends” and the trip invigorated the ailing health of Hattie and the children.²⁹⁸ Unfortunately, there is little correspondence in the archive between Hattie and her relatives during this period, but it can easily be ascertained that the visit likely cemented the appeal of the planned relocation, as she was exposed to a society that still aligned to her antebellum ideals of gender, race, and class. Former Confederates were welcomed in Cuba with open arms. Men like Jefferson Davis and her husband could still roam the halls of high society and were granted dignity and respect. In June the Gonzaleses returned to South Carolina to settle their affairs, which included legal disputes over debts they incurred from the failed saw mill operation at Social Hall, ultimately leading the family to file for bankruptcy in December of 1868.²⁹⁹ This was the final nail in the coffin for the Gonzaleses’ life in South Carolina. The family looked to Cuba as a land of opportunity that could restore their fortunes, their sense of place within an ordered society they understood, and ultimately their sense of self.

Immediately upon entering Havana Harbor in January of 1869, Hattie was enthralled with the splendor of Cuba’s ancient capital city. “The view of the Havana harbor,” she wrote her mother late that month, “is worth alone a trip to the island! Tis grand and lovely, both the sky

²⁹⁸ De la Cova, *A Cuban Confederate Colonel*, 281.

²⁹⁹ De la Cova, *A Cuban Confederate Colonel*, 281-283.

and water. The view of the town, the Morro Castle, the splendid ships, some of them with bands of music on board. The numberless boats with colored awnings. The vendors of delicious fruit who crowd around the vessel, all combine to give a most delightful sensation.” The “wealth and magnificence of the city” was “great” and she imagined it “more beautiful than Paris even.”³⁰⁰ She marveled at the local markets, “Every vegetable that is seen at the North and South at all season.” The “fruit and the fish, too pretty to be eaten,” and “potatoes (Irish) brought from Spain weighing about two pounds a piece...” She rubbed elbows with families “of the old nobility” that lived in a “palace (to me)” with “such spacious halls, marble floors, beautiful vases, and adornments from Italy” and “fountains and gardens, quite a novelty to me.” She went on to note, “Tis very nice to be rich in this country!” Sabbath day in Havana most impressed Hattie, “...the streets filled with people, most of them ladies, in splendid costumes all going to visit the churches which are brilliantly illuminated and adorned.”³⁰¹ The affluence she witnessed in Havana was above and beyond even her own privileged upbringing. Her immersion in surroundings filled with such opulence—wealth, riches, and finely dressed “ladies”—helped to invigorate Hattie and provided her comfort despite the differences in language and culture.

In April of 1869, the family still resided in Havana as Ambrosio attempted to secure permanent employment. She continued to be awestruck by life in Havana, soaking up the

³⁰⁰ HREG to AHSE, 23 January 1869, Box 5 Folder 94, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

³⁰¹ HREG to AHSE, March 1869, Box 5 Folder 94, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

“sea breezes as we have a night and such moonlights! I never imagined anything more beautiful.” The family’s health improved and they feasted on fried bananas, fresh oranges, and raw sugar cane. Hattie delighted at the “reasonable” cost of dresses for her and her youngest daughter, an especially pleasant development for Hattie, as concerned as she was with appearance and presentation. The family thrilled at the “great festivals” of the city, with “beautifully decorated streets” and “nights brilliantly illuminated” with “oil lights, Chinese lamps, flowers, music, and fireworks.”³⁰² Hattie’s son Alfonso quickly adapted to “Cuban ways and cooking.”³⁰³ He obviously adjusted well, with “...lots of friends among the little boys and being separated from his brothers is obliged to speak Spanish.”³⁰⁴ The children did experience some sickness in Havana in the spring of 1869 and Ambrosio still struggled to find employment, leaving Hattie to remark to her mother in mid-April of “poverty and sickness” that was sometimes “hard to bear.”³⁰⁵ Despite this, the tone of Hattie’s letters of this period are full of wonder at her new locale and hope for a brighter future.

That brighter future seemed to be just over the horizon in May of 1869 when Ambrosio secured a teaching position at a college and moved the family to his hometown

³⁰² HREG to AHSE, 29 April 1869, Box 5 Folder 95, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

³⁰³ HREG to AHSE, March 1869, Box 5 Folder 94, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

³⁰⁴ HREG to AHSE, 9 July 1869, Box 5 Folder 96, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

³⁰⁵ HREG to AHSE, 14 April 1869, Box 5 Folder 95, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

of Matanzas.³⁰⁶ On May 21, the Gonzaleses welcomed another edition to their clan with the birth of Ana Rosa Gonzales.³⁰⁷ Hattie managed to hire “an excellent nurse, black, a slave and one who speaks English perfectly” to help her with the infant.³⁰⁸ This reference to the slave nurse was the first mention of someone of African descent or slaves in any of Hattie’s correspondence with her family back in South Carolina since arriving in Cuba. This silence speaks volumes about the society in which Hattie now found herself, with its familiar racial hierarchy and etiquette. It was simply normal to her and therefore required little comment. When her “famous black nurse” became ill and could not support Hattie during the birth of Ana Rosa she found a replacement, a slave girl originally from South Carolina whose “missus” sounded “natural and very pleasant.” The slave girl’s presence reminded Hattie of home and provided her great comfort.³⁰⁹ The “good lady” Mrs. Ximeno, wife of Ambrosio’s high school friend Jose Manuel Ximeno, a “distinguished socialite” in Cuban aristocratic circles, provided Hattie with “...linen... and embroidery, beautiful shoes, lace caps, bibs, and embroidered diapers” for the young Ana Rosa.³¹⁰ Hattie greatly admired Mrs. Ximeno,

³⁰⁶ HREG to AHSE, 29 April 1869, Box 5 Folder 95, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

³⁰⁷ De la Cova, *A Cuban Confederate Colonel*, 289.

³⁰⁸ HREG to AHSE, May 1869, Box 5 Folder 95, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

³⁰⁹ HREG to AHSE, 8 June 1869, Box 5 Folder 96, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

³¹⁰ De la Cova, *A Cuban Confederate Colonel*, 288; HREG to AHSE, May 1869, Box 5 Folder 95, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

describing her as “a clever, handsome woman, quite independent for a Cuban. She drives her children out herself and digs about her plants and waters them with her own hands” despite being “tremendously rich.”³¹¹ This independence seemed to inspire Hattie and provided her an example of how a woman could maintain her aristocratic charm while also stepping outside of traditional gender roles. Willing to adapt to her new country, Hattie even contemplated adding the name Hutchinson (her mother’s maiden name) to Ana Rosa’s name as per typical Spanish custom.³¹²

Hattie and her family quickly settled into their life in Matanzas. “So far I am delighted with the climate,” she wrote to her mother in July. “The nights are charming... In the afternoon we often stroll to the seaside, a delightful walk. Beautiful villas surrounded by gardens of lovely flowers... some of which have clusters of gorgeous blossoms.”³¹³ Hattie and the children’s health continued to improve, prompting Hattie to write in August, “I have not seen the children look so well for two years and I am fat and feel strong and well.”³¹⁴ This was a far cry from the emaciated state in which the family had seen her in Charleston in late 1868.³¹⁵ She regaled her mother with descriptions of her

³¹¹ HREG to AHSE, 14 August 1869, Box 5 Folder 97, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

³¹² HREG to AHSE, 8 June 1869, Box 5 Folder 96, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

³¹³ HREG to AHSE, 9 July 1869, Box 5 Folder 96, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

³¹⁴ HREG to AHSE, 10 August 1869, Box 5 Folder 97, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

³¹⁵ De la Cova, *A Cuban Confederate Colonel*, 280.

family's abode and its furnishings in Matanzas. "We are living luxuriously," she remarked to her mother, "at least it would be considered so at the South."³¹⁶ This comparison reveals the juxtaposition of her new life in Cuba with what she left in her native land, as luxury there became foreign to her in the years after the war. She reveled in the availability of provisions and new taste sensations like avocado, pineapples, mangoes, coconuts, and guava and the accessibility of local cafes and the "cool drinks" that could "be had at all hours." She could not help but quip to her mother, "No wonder the Yankees love to live here!"³¹⁷ Hattie enjoyed leisurely pursuits like she seldom experienced since before the Civil War, remarking to her mother in July about driving into town and walking in the evenings among "crowds of well behaved, well dressed people, took in an ice cream at Lola's Café, heard good music, paid a visit to some friends and drove home."³¹⁸ Clearly, this was a place that felt comfortable and familiar in its own alien way.

All was not quite as rosy as Hattie often made it seem. The Gonzales family happened to move to Cuba at the precise moment when the island colony initiated one of the most significant social and political events in Cuban history—The Ten Years' War. This conflict was the first full-scale war for Cuban independence from Spain. As a former Cuban filibuster and Confederate soldier, Ambrosio Jose

³¹⁶ HREG to AHSE, 10 August 1869, Box 5 Folder 97, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

³¹⁷ HREG to AHSE, 10 August 1869, Box 5 Folder 97, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

³¹⁸ HREG to AHSE, 9 July 1869, Box 5 Folder 96, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

Gonzales' experience reveals how the fates of Cuba and the United States were long intertwined. The vast majority of Cuban sugar, the island's primary cash crop, was sold in the United States, intimately tying the economies of the two countries together.³¹⁹ Cuba's status as a slaveholding society made it particularly attractive to Southerners, and many Confederate property owners took advantage of this during the war to smuggle their slaves out of the South and resettle them in Cuba.³²⁰ As the example of the Gonzales family shows, some former Confederates found succor on the island after the Civil War, with many "fleeing rebels" finding safe harbor on the island, including "high ranking generals."³²¹ Yet, this war was different from the filibuster movements that Ambrosio had taken a part in decades earlier with Narciso Lopez. The filibuster movements were directed by Cuban creoles that sought to preserve Cuba's slave society and integrate it into the United States as a slave state, however the American Civil War completely changed that dynamic. The wave of abolitionist sentiment pouring from the United States and Britain in the 1860s and the experience of the American Civil War, inspired some Cuban Creoles to take a different approach in this new bid for independence.³²² In October of 1868, Cuban planter Carlos Manuel Cespedes issued a call for independence and abolition and set an example by freeing his own slaves.³²³ The resulting conflict

³¹⁹ Gerald Horne, *Race to Revolution: Cuba and the United States During Slavery and Jim Crow* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2014), 10.

³²⁰ Horne, *Race to Revolution*, 8-9.

³²¹ Horne, *Race to Revolution*, 113.

³²² Horne, *Race to Revolution*, 115-122.

³²³ De la Cova, *A Cuban Confederate Colonel*, 283.

pitted two conflicting ideologies and sometimes three different sets of combatants against each other: those that wanted independence but to retain slavery, those that desired both independence and abolition, and the Spanish government that wanted to maintain the status quo.

With Ambrosio's less than spotless record with the Spanish authorities on the island, the Gonzales family found themselves under scrutiny from the very start. The government would not even allow them to disembark from their ship in Havana Harbor until Ambrosio personally met with the island's Captain General Dulce and gave his assurances he planned no ill will towards the Spanish government.³²⁴ Even with those assurances, the Havana authorities kept the family under "constant surveillance," a fact of which Hattie was keenly aware.³²⁵ Likely due to this knowledge, Hattie's correspondence does not make clear the extent of her husband's knowledge or involvement in the continuing plots on the island. Many of their friends and acquaintances, however, were connected with the revolt in one form or another, which often caused Hattie great concern. She remarked to her mother in February that "numbers were leaving the island" due to the conflict.³²⁶ In March, she reports that the son of their family friend, Benigno Gener, was in prison after being "taken in a schooner bringing arms from Nassau." In July she told her

³²⁴ HREG to AHSE, 12 February 1869, Box 5 Folder 94, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

³²⁵ De la Cova, *A Cuban Confederate Colonel*, 288; HREG to AHSE, 10 August 1869, Box 5 Folder 97, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

³²⁶ HREG to AHSE, 12 February 1869, Box 5 Folder 94, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

mother about friends that were forced to leave the country and about the son of a close friend, Antonio Guiterras, who was “banished and condemned to two years hard labor.”³²⁷ The schools in Matanzas that employed Ambrosio were operated and attended by some that did assume leadership roles in the conflict.³²⁸ Hattie also elusively hinted at her husband’s ties with General Thomas Jordan, former Confederate commander who was an associate of Ambrosio’s in the Confederacy, and briefly took part in the war in Cuba.³²⁹

Regardless of her husband’s involvement, the war in Cuba certainly affected Hattie’s view of their prospects on the island and tempered her hope with bitter memories of upheaval and dislocation during her own country’s civil war. The war in Cuba prevented her from completely settling into her new environment. “Were it not for this revolution, we should have long ere been comfortably settled,” she wrote to her mother in April.³³⁰ In August she complained, “If it had not been for the Civil War, teaching would be a most profitable employment.”³³¹ Somewhat paradoxically, and perhaps because she knew her correspondence was being read by Spanish officials before leaving the island, she never mentions slavery or abolition and seemed unconcerned

³²⁷ HREG to AHSE, 9 July 1869, Box 5 Folder 96, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

³²⁸ De la Cova, *A Cuban Confederate Colonel*, 289.

³²⁹ HREG to AHSE, 10 August 1869, Box 5 Folder 97, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

³³⁰ HREG to AHSE, 14 April 1869, Box 5 Folder 95, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

³³¹ HREG to AHSE, 14 August 1869, Box 5 Folder 97, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

about that particular potential outcome of the war. She seemed to actually side with the Spanish to a degree, remarking in April, “The country has been in a terrible condition, but things are much better since Gen’l Dulce and the volunteers came to an understanding.”³³²

She expressed trepidation that the war might force the family to uproot itself once again before they could completely settle into their new, more prosperous and hopeful life in Cuba. In June she wrote her mother, “Since our last revolution everything has been quiet, but no one knows when it may be necessary to quit the country. We can make a living here. Gonzie... is so much considered and teaching here is considered so highly that it is pleasant although hard work. I hope we will be able to remain here. To begin life elsewhere would be too trying.”³³³ Hattie’s language here is indicative of both her and her husband’s prime motivations for moving to Cuba—to reclaim the respect and standing they felt they rightfully deserved based on their race and class, and that they had felt slip away in the years since the American Civil War. In July Hattie told her mother, “I am quite comfortable where I am, with fine rooms and a bath always at command and do not care to move...”³³⁴ Even though she remarked in April, mere months after first arriving on the island, that, “I have seen more of civil war here than in four years at the South,” she was determined to

³³² HREG to AHSE, 14 April 1869, Box 5 Folder 95, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

³³³ HREG to AHSE, 8 June 1869, Box 5 Folder 96, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

³³⁴ HREG to AHSE, 9 July 1869, Box 5 Folder 96, *Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers #1009*.

make a life in Cuba and felt that despite the challenges of the war, their prospects there were more promising than in the United States. There is no evidence that she was considering the potential societal changes, such as emancipation, that could result from the war. It appears Hattie hoped the situation would soon pass and Cuba would return to the pre-war status quo.

The situation would not soon pass. In fact, 1869 was merely the first full year in what became a decades long struggle over Cuban independence and the fate of millions of enslaved residents of the island. But Hattie would not be around to be faced with such developments. A letter dated 3 September is the final letter she sent her mother from Cuba. On 17 September, Hattie passed away from yellow fever.³³⁵

Ambrosio was devastated by Hattie's death. Soon after, he gathered up four of his six children and returned to South Carolina, abandoning hope for a new life in his native country forever. The remaining two children, Narciso and Alfonso, followed their siblings back to South Carolina within the year. Hattie's eldest sister Emily (Emmie), who had always harbored feelings for the dapper and distinguished Cuban, assumed that Ambrosio would marry her. It was a typical practice at the time for a man to marry his sister-in-law after his wife passed. Ambrosio, however, never returned her affections and this caused a deep rift in the family. Emily could not get over being spurned and spent the next several decades spitefully undermining Ambrosio's relationship with his children.³³⁶ Ambrosio never got over Hattie's death and never remarried. In the 1880s, he ventured

³³⁵ De la Cova, *A Cuban Confederate Colonel*, 290.

³³⁶ De la Cova, *A Cuban Confederate Colonel*, 293-294, 303.

into the nascent world of late nineteenth century spiritualism in attempts to reconnect with his dearly departed wife. He attended numerous seances over the years and even wrote a book, *Heaven Revealed: A Series of Authentic Spirit Messages, from a Wife to her Husband, Proving the Sublime Nature of True Spiritualism*.³³⁷ The memory of his Southern belle haunted him for the rest of his life.

The experiences of Harriet Rutledge Elliott Gonzales vividly illustrate the dynamic intersections of gender, race, and class that so thoroughly dominated the social and political atmosphere of the Reconstruction-era South. The Gonzaleses' struggles to reclaim and maintain a sense of identity and purpose in a world so changed exemplify similar struggles of many formerly elite Southern families at the time. Their choice to ultimately abandon the South and attempt to start again in another land signifies not just the Gonzaleses' financial troubles, but also their inability to fully come to terms with the changed social landscape and its repercussions. Emancipation was the most profound and abrupt change that affected elite Southerners, as it required a complete and total reorientation of both the economic and social paradigms that previously held sway in both public and private consciousness.

On the surface, the Gonzales family's move to Cuba made sense because it was Ambrosio's homeland, but it also reflected the family's desire to return to a social paradigm that fit with their antebellum sensibilities. As much as issues of race played a large role in Hattie's correspondence while in South Carolina, her letters from Cuba are all but silent on the topic. This can be interpreted to mean that the comfort of

³³⁷ De la Cova, *A Cuban Confederate Colonel*, 347-351.

returning to a society still very much based on slavery and a strict racial and social hierarchy made the issue a moot point in Hattie's consciousness. The Cuban racial hierarchy of the time, and its implications for both gender and class, was a return to a more normative experience for Hattie, one that provided a sense of hope and stability despite the still clouded uncertainties of the future. Unfortunately, we will never know in what way the changes Cuba that was undergoing—the Ten Years War and the rising abolition movement—would have affected this dynamic as Hattie did not survive long enough to experience them. One can only imagine that had she survived, Hattie's Cuban experience could have turned into a case of *déjà vu*. Hattie would have been forced to deal with many of the same issues and problems that had already turned the world she knew upside down. The way she would have dealt with that can only be a matter of conjecture.