

THE POLITICAL CONTEXTS OF
CUBAN POPULATION CENSUSES,
1899–1981*

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Although they represent a principal source of data for demographers, population censuses have not usually been undertaken for the benefit of population analysts. In ancient times, population enumerations were usually linked to the collection of taxes or to military conscription. Although in modern censuses such motivations are not entirely absent, other important considerations have emerged, such as equitable apportionment of representation in legislative bodies, the compilation of voting lists, and the necessity of having an accurate basis for the distribution of governmental funds, programs, and social intervention efforts. Nevertheless, one basic fact has never changed: population censuses are undertaken by political entities with politico-administrative goals.

For the demographer, therefore, an awareness of the political context of any census is crucial to an understanding of why the census was taken, why it contains certain items and excludes others, the reasons for the approach and methodology utilized, and the rationale for the form used in presenting the results (or, in some cases, the unavailability of some results).¹ But the implications of an analysis of the political context of enumerations goes beyond the specific questions posed by demographers, for in any census one can find reflected the political system within which it was conducted. In discovering the why and how of a census, we gain insight into the political conditions and government that produced it. For that reason, this essay will use the term "political context," which may be regarded as broader than the phrase "politics of census taking." The latter phrase may imply simply the political uses of census results, decision making regarding the timing and content of the census, and other purposeful actions taken by the actors within the political system. The scope of the analysis presented here includes "the politics of census-

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taking," thus defined, but it seeks to be broader and to consider how censuses reflect such conditions as style of governance, the national and international power constraints, and the type of political system within which the enumeration took place.

One approach to such a study would be cross-sectional, comparing various censuses taken roughly at the same time in different societies. In such an approach, however, many of the differences, especially in terms of questionnaire content, may well be the product of cultural variations. Another approach, the one used here, is to take a longitudinal view, to select one country with a varied political history and examine how its censuses have reflected the changing political conditions.

Cuba was selected for three reasons: first, its rich array of modern censuses, with eight enumerations conducted between 1899 and 1981; second, the author's familiarity with its demographic, social, and political history; and third, its varied political statuses within that period, which have ranged from a foreign-administered territory to a rapidly modernizing periphery nation with a high degree of dependence upon and integration into the world capitalist system to a socialist state. Its checkered political development in this century, especially its turn toward socialism, is the principal reason for the great interest in Cuba shown by scholars and journalists. What is proposed here is to examine Cuba's population censuses in relation to the changing political scene since 1899 and to demonstrate how enumerations can be fully understood only in their political context. Each Cuban census, from 1899 to the latest in 1981, is included here. In approaching each census, the following dimensions were explored: the purposes of the enumeration, its timing, its content (questionnaire items), the methodology employed, and the release and presentation of the results.

The Censuses of Imperialism: 1899 and 1907

On New Year's Day of 1899, control of the island of Cuba was shifted from Spain to the United States as a result of the treaty signed in Paris two months earlier that ended the Spanish-Cuban-American War. The island remained under direct U.S. rule until 20 May 1902, when the island's administration was transferred to a newly elected Cuban government. In 1906 the United States once again assumed direct control of Cuba until 1909, when for a second time, the administration of the island was turned over to a Cuban government.

The two U.S. occupations of Cuba each resulted in a census, one in 1899 and the other in 1907. Both enumerations represent excellent examples of colonial censuses that were planned and executed entirely under the direction of the imperial power. The 1899 census is perhaps the more important of the two. Its origins and characteristics—especially the

extraordinary final published report—cannot be understood without recognizing the political position of the U.S. government with respect to Cuba in 1899.

As David Healy demonstrates, the United States acquired Cuba without having formulated a definite policy on the island's eventual political destiny.² Ostensibly, however, one underlying assumption guided U.S. policies in Cuba in 1899: Spanish rule and the Spanish-Cuban-American War had left Cuba in a dismal state in every respect, and it was up to the United States to “rescue” the island. In fact, the role of rescuer of the poor and downtrodden Cuban people had been advanced in the United States a few years earlier as one of the professed reasons for declaring war on Spain.

The Cuban people were perceived as being poor not only in terms of their economy and levels of living, but also in political terms. One of the professed justifications for direct U.S. rule in Cuba was that the Cubans, after centuries of autocratic Spanish rule, were ill-equipped for self-government and that the United States had the duty during the occupation to teach them to be responsible citizens. Only when a sufficient level of political development was reached could the Cubans be allowed to govern themselves.

It was in this context that the 1899 census was conceived by U.S. authorities. Witness the words used by President McKinley in a proclamation “to the people of Cuba” issued in August of 1899 calling for the taking of the census: “The disorganized condition of your island resulting from the war and the absence of any generally recognized authority aside from the temporary military control of the United States have made it necessary that the United States should follow the restoration of order and peaceful industry by giving its assistance and supervision to the successive steps by which you will proceed to the establishment of an effective system of self-government. As a preliminary step in the performance of this duty, I have directed that a census of the people of Cuba be taken. . . .”³

This essay will focus on two major dimensions of the 1899 census that reflect its colonial context: its broad scope, both in terms of questionnaire content and the presentation of the results; and the paternalism evident in the censal procedures.

In 1899 a census was taken by the United States in both Cuba and Puerto Rico. Washington wanted a fairly comprehensive picture of what it had obtained from Spain. Consequently, the 1899 census was not simply a population census, but a kind of socioeconomic inventory. From the outset, the enumeration was directed to cover “population, agricultural products, and educational conditions.”⁴ Accordingly, the questionnaire covered a wide variety of topics: the traditional population items (age, sex, race, nativity, marital status, educational attainment, occupation),

housing conditions, and agriculture (a special schedule was used in rural areas that included items on farm size, tenure, and products). In addition, enumerators distributed a special census form to all schools in their respective districts seeking information on programs, facilities, staff, and enrollment.

Needless to say, the report that emerged from this enumeration was broad-ranging, and it remains one of the most significant documents of the period.⁵ Beside presenting fairly detailed tabulations of the results, it contains good narratives highlighting the most significant findings. The census officials also included in the report fairly long sections—most of them cited verbatim from other sources—on the island's history, geography, natural resources, and the development of its agriculture and educational institutions. In short, it was a report intended to serve as an all-purpose guide to the new acquisition for the use of policymakers in Washington.

The claim that the United States had occupied Cuba for the purpose of rescuing it and educating its population in self-government is evident in the paternalism characterizing the process of conducting the census. This attitude is made explicit in the report's letter of transmittal to the Secretary of War by J. P. Sanger, Inspector General and Director of the Census:

It was proposed . . . that the census be taken under the supervision of the Military Governor of the island by certain Cuban officials, assisted by officers and enlisted men of the United States Army, but as the census was primarily for the benefit of the Cubans, and as the work would demonstrate in some measure their capacity to perform an important civil duty, it was decided by the Secretary of War that the offices of supervisors and enumerators should be filled by Cubans and that the field work should be performed by them, under the supervision of an experienced officer of the United States Census. . . .⁶

Because the census purportedly was taken "for the benefit of the Cubans" and was also to serve as a proving ground for their "civic maturity," Cubans were encouraged to volunteer their services without pay, and apparently a sizeable number did work as volunteers without any compensation.⁷ The census was entirely directed and managed, however, by the U.S. staff, although credit was condescendingly given in the report to the "faithful and intelligent Cubans" who discharged "civil duties never before entrusted to them."⁸

The enumeration process was the responsibility of Victor M. Olmstead, an official of the U.S. Bureau of the Census, who remained in Cuba throughout the four months required to plan and execute the fieldwork. The Cuban supervisors were primarily in charge of managing the enumerators and the regional field offices. All six Cuban supervisors were transferred to Washington with the completed census schedules "to explain any ambiguities or defects which might be discovered in the

schedules, . . . to supervise the punching of the cards . . . and to learn the entire method of handling the statistics."⁹ After three months they returned to Cuba, so that most of the tabulation process as well as the preparation of the report were completed subsequently by a team of U.S. technicians and analysts that included the well-known demographer Walter F. Willcox. The Hollerith method was used, a tabulation procedure (with its own machinery) that first had been utilized only a few years earlier in processing the results of the 1890 census of the U.S. population.¹⁰

It can therefore be said that both in its scope and in the paternalistic style apparent in its procedures, the 1899 census reflected Cuba's political status as a foreign-administered territory at the turn of the century. Furthermore, in portraying the census as an essential step in "rebuilding" efforts and as a proving ground for the Cubans' "political maturity," the interventionists turned the census itself into a symbolic political event. This fact was not lost on those Cubans who opposed the U.S. presence in the island; reports stated that in some towns enumerators were received with resistance and even protest demonstrations.¹¹

The 1907 census, which was taken during the second U.S. occupation, also reflected accurately the imperial relationship that existed between the United States and Cuba. Like its predecessor, the 1907 enumeration was initiated and directed by the interventionist government. In fact, the cast of players was virtually the same for both censuses. Olmstead, who as Assistant Director of the Census directed the fieldwork in 1899, performed the same function in 1907, but under the title of Director, with responsibility for the entire effort. He named to his staff persons with experience in the 1899 census. As before, the Americans planned and directed the fieldwork, which was carried out by Cuban supervisors, with the results subsequently tabulated and a report prepared in Washington.

Yet despite being another *censo americano*, the 1907 census differed in many respects from its 1899 predecessor. Although only eight years separate the two enumerations taken by interventionist administrations, the political situation changed significantly during the intercensal period. In contrast to the situation in 1899, the United States by 1907 had settled on a formula for its relationship with Cuba, a formula that Jorge Domínguez calls "indirect government of a conditionally sovereign state,"¹² which was basically an attenuated protectorate in the form of an attenuated republic. The Platt Amendment had been forced on the Cubans in 1902 as a precondition for an end to U.S. occupation and was included in the new Cuban constitution. It stipulated that the United States reserved the right to intervene in Cuba "for the preservation of Cuban independence, the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty. . . ."¹³

As a result of the open hostilities between the two major Cuban political parties, President Roosevelt exercised that option in 1906. A civilian interventionist administration was named, with Charles Magoon at its head. Having already settled on the formula of indirect governance through "acceptable" Cuban governments, the goal of the United States in the second occupation was to "restore order" and hold elections so as to turn direct control of the island over to an elected Cuban government. It was never perceived as a permanent occupation, nor did it have the pretensions of "rebuilding" Cuba that had characterized the earlier intervention.¹⁴

Without an appreciation of this political situation, the taking of a census in Cuba in 1907 and its salient characteristics are incomprehensible. The 1907 census's most important feature was its *raison d'être* as part of an electoral reform process, thereby linking for the first time population counts and elections, an unfortunate legacy that plagued all four subsequent Cuban censuses.

Magoon entrusted a member of his interventionist government, Colonel Enoch Crowder, with what may have been the most important task of his administration—drafting and instituting a law that would establish a presumably corruption-proof electoral system. According to Hugh Thomas, Crowder took his model from the Australian system and established permanent electoral boards in each locality as well as a national board.¹⁵ The boards' principal responsibility was to keep a roll of all those persons eligible to vote, who were defined as Cuban males twenty-one years of age or older. These lists of eligible voters would be derived from a census, which meant that before elections could be held and the U.S. occupation terminated, a census had to be taken. It also meant that in permanently establishing such a system for Cuba, the Americans were making electoral considerations an inherent part of subsequent population censuses.

Electoral considerations had a definite influence on the content and methodology of the 1907 census. The census schedule contained special items exclusively for males twenty-one and older regarding the duration of their residence in the province, municipality, and locality of enumeration. Those questions relating to voting eligibility were added to the 1899 questionnaire, and other items were dropped, most notably those dealing with the condition of dwellings. Because the political climate did not call for a socioeconomic inventory (which had been done only eight years earlier), the 1907 enumeration did not gather data on agriculture and educational institutions.

Because the census was to serve as the source of the electoral rolls, the recording of names on the schedule was of no small importance. In fact, good handwriting was the foremost criterion used in recruiting enumerators.¹⁶ The primacy of electoral considerations also caused de-

lays in the tabulation and analysis of the population data. Immediately after the census was taken, Olmstead assembled a staff in La Habana to prepare various copies of the lists of eligible voters. Each municipality received its electoral roll, already arranged in alphabetical order. Only after that long and tedious task was completed were the demographic data tabulated and analyzed.

Unlike the 1899 enumeration, the 1907 census was not surrounded by lofty pretenses such as “rebuilding” or “rescuing” the country or serving as a testing ground for political maturity. Its goal was pragmatic and specific: to facilitate an electoral process that would lead to U.S. withdrawal through the election and establishment of an “acceptable” Cuban government. By 1907, the Platt Amendment and other outcomes of the first U.S. occupation had probably soured the enthusiasm that some sectors of the Cuban population may have felt in 1899 for the role of the United States in shaping Cuba’s political destiny. Consequently, in this second census there was little possibility of relying on unpaid enumerators who were fulfilling their civic duty by participating in the census. Magoon earmarked funds for compensating the enumerators at the rate of five dollars per day.¹⁷

Electoral Fraud and Neocolonialism: The 1919 Census

None of the censuses considered here can surpass the 1919 enumeration in the explicitness of its political origins and purposes. It was also a census that perfectly mirrored the neocolonial relationship between the United States and Cuba during the period that followed the U.S. occupations of the island. The intrigues, conflicts, and rebellions that had characterized Cuban elections since the termination of the first U.S. occupation in 1902 reached an especially critical point with the elections of 1916, which returned to office Mario García Menocal, who had been president since 1913. Historians agree that the incumbent was facing a defeat and therefore altered the results.¹⁸ The opposition took to arms, no doubt playing interventionist politics by seeking a repetition of the events of 1906 when the United States occupied the island and nullified the outcome of the elections.¹⁹ This time, however, the United States was facing a war in Europe, and despite the apparent fraud involved in the election, President Wilson backed García Menocal, who was regarded in Washington as more “reliable” than the candidates of the opposition. The rebellion was crushed with U.S. help, and García Menocal served out his second term, until 1921.

During García Menocal’s administration, U.S. indirect governance of Cuba became pervasive. Cuba’s stability and allegiance during World War I were essential if the United States was to assure itself of an uninterrupted supply of sugar for its armies in Europe. In what Louis Pérez has

called the “sugar intervention,” a contingent of marines was sent to eastern Cuba to safeguard sugar estates and transportation facilities.²⁰

By 1919 there were growing concerns in Washington about García Menocal’s succession, and once again faith was placed in the establishment of an effective electoral system as the answer to the island’s political problems. In a stroke of *déjà vu*, Enoch Crowder was sent to Cuba in 1919 to undertake the same task of electoral reform that he had fulfilled more than a decade earlier. Because of García Menocal’s dependence on U.S. support, Crowder became virtually the ruler of Cuba in what turned into a caricature of neocolonial control. He fashioned an electoral law that, in at least one respect, continued the tradition of the 1907 reform: electoral rolls would be derived from a census. This outcome meant that another census had to be taken, and quickly, in time for the elections of 1920.

Just as the 1899 and 1907 censuses were clear products of direct colonial administration of the island, the 1919 census reflected the indirect neocolonial style. The Director of the Census, Angel C. Betancourt, was a Cuban. Betancourt had no previous censal experience and was not the real planner and decision maker in the census. That role was carried out by Major Harold E. Stephenson, U.S. Army, who was summoned to Cuba by Crowder as technical consultant to the census. Stephenson arrived in Cuba, opened an office, and started planning the census a full month before Betancourt was even named director.²¹ Betancourt frankly admitted in his report that he would readily approve the instructions given by the technical coordinator.²² The situation mirrored at a lower level the Crowder–García Menocal relationship.

Unlike the situation in 1899 and 1907, the results in 1919 were manually tabulated and the report was printed in Cuba, not in the United States. According to Stephenson, however, the only reason for this change was that the time constraints did not allow the shipment of schedules to Washington.²³ Although printed in Cuba, an English edition of the report was published, thereby continuing into the neocolonial era the practice followed during the two previous colonial enumerations.

The 1919 census shared with the 1907 enumeration the primacy of electoral considerations.²⁴ The population items in the schedule were reduced to the bare minimum, with relatively simple questions on age, sex, race, literacy and educational attainment, duration of residence, marital status, occupation, industry, citizenship, and nativity. There were no housing items. The tabulations and demographic analyses had to await the completion of the electoral rosters; consequently, the final report did not actually appear until 1922.

Far from fulfilling its purpose of contributing to a smooth electoral process, the 1919 census created its own political controversy. The Liberals, the opposition party, claimed that Stephenson had not conducted

the census with the necessary impartiality. Pérez notes evidence that Stephenson fully cooperated with the incumbent Conservative party. All persons appointed to key census positions, for example, were members of that party. Furthermore, only a year after the completion of the census, Stephenson retired from the army and organized a multi-million dollar sugar corporation in Cuba.²⁵

The First "Cuban" Census: 1931

The 1931 census, more than any other previous enumeration, fully exposed the negative consequences of the tradition, established in 1907, of linking population censuses to the electoral process. Predictably, this census became the center of acrimonious political controversy. The early 1930s were years of heightened political tensions. President Gerardo Machado, whose first term was due to expire in 1929, had the constitution changed so that he could remain in office without reelection for an additional six-year term.²⁶ Opposition to his dictatorship grew and Machado countered with brutal repression.

In this climate the 1931 census was taken. In accordance with the established practice, the census forms were to be used to revise the electoral rolls. Given Machado's apparent willingness to use all possible means to maintain his political control, everyone expected him to somehow manipulate the censal process so as to control fraudulently the results of any future election. Distrust became the norm, especially because no outsider was supervising or directing the enumeration of this first census to be conducted entirely by Cubans. In other words, it was entirely under the control of the Machado administration.

Aggravating the situation was the procedure by which the enumerators were instructed to issue a registration certificate to each person eligible to vote.²⁷ This directive meant that all enumerators carried with them at the time of the enumeration not only blank census forms, but blank registration certificates, which were basically tickets to the voting booth. Needless to say, the opportunities for duplicity were readily available and apparent, not just to the government, but to any individual or group with political ambitions.

In the face of the widely held expectation that the censal process would be fraudulent, the government sought to invest itself with an image of impartiality in conducting the enumeration. Machado's feared secret police were ordered to investigate charges of malfeasance in the census, and the Supreme Court announced that stiff penalties would be inflicted on those found guilty of wrongdoing.²⁸ Most of the country's press exhorted the population to participate honestly in the census and called on the leaders to act with rectitude.²⁹

The census became a major political event. During the course of

the enumeration, the director of the census held daily press conferences, reporting the progress made and the difficulties encountered. Every minor infraction and every unsubstantiated claim of wrongdoing anywhere in the country became news and appeared in the press.³⁰ Undoubtedly, the incidence and magnitude of fraud were exaggerated, especially because many opposition elements had an interest in discrediting the censal process. There were, however, numerous confirmed cases of ambitious attempts to perpetrate fraud, most of them involving conspiracies to issue false voter registration certificates.³¹ One notable case involved a fairly large area of the capital city in what was described by officials as a "highly organized scheme."³² There was also at least one attempt by a public official to influence the enumeration in a manner that would have benefitted him politically: the mayor of La Habana tried unsuccessfully to have municipal employees, particularly firemen, enumerated and registered as voters in their place of work rather than in their place of residence in order to create voting blocs that easily could be influenced and controlled.³³

The obvious primacy of electoral considerations relegated the gathering, tabulation, analysis, and publication of the demographic data to a position of secondary importance. This trend merely continued the pattern established in 1907. In 1931, however, this situation had a special impact on the availability of the results. After the electoral rolls were completed, there was apparently little motivation on the part of the government to follow through with the demographic data and publish a final report.

The census office published in 1932 a ninety-three-page bulletin that contained only the number of persons and voters in each province and *municipio*.³⁴ Some additional tabulations of the results appeared in a compendium of population and agricultural statistics published in 1939.³⁵ The census office eventually prepared a fairly comprehensive final report and bids were requested from printers.³⁶ But one was never contracted, probably because of lack of interest and funds on the part of the government. Nearly half a century would elapse before those unreleased final tabulations appeared in print. In 1978 they were finally published through the efforts of the Cuban State Committee for Statistics in a 355-page publication that, despite its shortcomings, fills a substantial gap in the history of Cuban census data.³⁷

The "Progressive" Censuses: 1943 and 1953

By the middle of the present century, Cuba was what Daniel Chirof terms one of the "most advanced peripheral societies in the world."³⁸ Immanuel Wallerstein goes further in listing Cuba as one of the few Latin American countries that possibly can be categorized as "semiperiph-

eral."³⁹ While exhibiting the characteristics of inequality and dependence that characterize peripheral societies, Cuba in the decades of the 1940s and 1950s reached relatively advanced levels of social development. The pervasiveness of foreign capital, the importance of the huge sugar sector, and Cuba's closeness and dependence on the largest consumer society in the world had negative implications for many aspects of national life, but these same factors also helped to create in Cuban society a fairly large bourgeoisie with high standards of consumption.⁴⁰ Birth and death rates were relatively low, and life expectancy, income, and consumption levels were fairly high.⁴¹ La Habana in the 1940s and 1950s was one of the Latin America's foremost metropolitan centers with a cosmopolitan lifestyle that contrasted regrettably with the underdevelopment found in rural areas. The urban bourgeoisie was convinced that it lived in a modern and progressive society. The two censuses taken during that period reflect this sense of achievement in Cuban society. They mirror the conviction of the dominant class that Cuba was a modern country with a cosmopolitan character and progressive social order.

Indeed, the 1940 Constitution was, for its time, a progressive document that represented the nation's expectations and aspirations for societal change and advancement. Unfortunately, it was never truly implemented. One of its many features was that it required, for the first time in Cuban history, that a census be taken regularly, no less often than every ten years.⁴² The purpose of the enumeration was, in the words found in Article 94, to "reflect the social and economic activities of the country." It is clear that although both the 1943 and 1953 census, like their predecessors, had electoral uses, those purposes were no longer the predominant concerns. A greater emphasis than before was placed on Cuba's joining the relatively advanced nations with regularly scheduled population censuses that would provide baseline socioeconomic data.

What is extraordinary about the 1943 census is the final published report.⁴³ It contains 1,373 pages, of which only about five hundred are devoted to presenting the population tables and an analysis of the results. The rest of the report (more than eight hundred pages) is a detailed overview of almost every aspect of Cuban life: physical geography, geology, climate, flora and fauna, history, natural resources, industries and agriculture, political-administrative organization, tourism, sports, and literary, artistic, and intellectual life. Far more than just a census report, it can be regarded as a showcase for a society (or perhaps more accurately, for a social class) that was optimistic about its progress and boastful of its achievements.⁴⁴

The 1953 census also reflected that national mood, but in a different way. It was believed that the definition of *urban* used in previous enumerations did not sufficiently reflect the truly urban character of

Cuban society at mid-century. Previous definitions of *urban* were based primarily on size-of-place criteria and had excluded the small settlements (*bateyes*) found in the large sugar mills. Those settlements were considered definitely urban in terms of their occupational characteristics (they included lawyers, engineers, doctors, and managers) and services (electricity, running water, and so on). Consequently, the unique definition of *urban* adopted in 1953 included any population nucleus of 150 or more inhabitants in which a given set of characteristics and services were found. That liberal definition, of course, served in 1953 to increase the urban population beyond what would have been the case had previous definitions been used and provided the urban bourgeoisie with an even greater basis for their conviction that they lived in an urban—and urban—society.

The report of the 1953 census was mainly limited to a presentation of the results.⁴⁵ It was the first Cuban census to include numerous housing items, a change dictated by a 1952 housing law. Because of the proposed broad scope of the schedule and the relative inexperience of many Cuban census officials, the schedule used by the U.S. Bureau of the Census in the 1950 enumeration of the population of Puerto Rico was adopted almost verbatim.⁴⁶ It was presumably well suited to Cuban needs because of its extensive sections on housing and the labor force.⁴⁷ The 1953 census was significant in that it was the last census prior to the revolution. With all its shortcomings, it remains the benchmark of Cuba's prerevolutionary social and economic conditions.

The Socialist Censuses: 1970 and 1981

Cuba's two latest censuses took place in a political, economic, and social context that differs radically from that of their predecessors. The two socialist censuses therefore share certain general characteristics that distinguish them from the enumerations that preceded them. The most prominent of those characteristics is that for the first time since 1899, electoral considerations do not play a part in the taking of a Cuban census. The 1970 and 1981 censuses ostensibly were taken in order to obtain data for use by officials in what has become a centrally planned economic system.⁴⁸ What is most interesting about the socialist censuses is that the contrast in the manner in which each was conducted clearly reflects the changes over the past two decades in the style of governance and economic decision-making practiced by the country's leadership.

The 1970 census was a product of the relatively chaotic 1960s. The swift elimination of the capitalist system, errors and inefficiencies in economic decision making, the U.S. economic embargo, and the commitment to redistributive policies were just a few of the reasons for the severe economic problems that plagued Cuba during that decade.⁴⁹ The

various economic models instituted were characterized by a certain idealism that led the leadership to sacrifice economic growth in favor of redistributive social and economic programs. The leadership relied primarily on moral incentives to motivate the population, and many social and economic programs were tackled through massive consciousness-raising and mobilization efforts, "the zeal and hard work of the leaders, the audacity of improvisation, and the enthusiasm and support of the people."⁵⁰

The fitting climax to that decade came in 1970, when the government mobilized every sector of the economy to fulfill the goal of harvesting ten million tons of sugar that year. The resulting harvest, although it set a record, fell far short of the goal, and it marked the beginning of what Carmelo Mesa-Lago calls the "shift to the Soviet Economic Reform Model."⁵¹ A "mature and pragmatic stage," the Soviet model has three corollaries: first, realistic and rational economic planning that emphasizes growth and reduction of the foreign debt; second, an end to quick-fix solutions such as the massive mobilization efforts that depended primarily on the loyalty and enthusiasm of the population; and third, a process of institutionalization of the country's political, social, and economic institutions.⁵² This model has been in effect since the early 1970s.

The 1970 census clearly reflects the ten-million-ton mentality. In the urban areas, the census was taken in a single day, and in rural areas, in three days. To accomplish such a feat, and in keeping with the style of that year's sugar harvest, the entire population and its resources were involved in the effort. Everyone had to stay home between 8:00 A.M. and 6:00 P.M. on Sunday, 6 September.⁵³ Only enumerators and persons with jobs essential to the health and safety of the population were allowed on the streets and were to carry a pass that allowed them to move between different control points established throughout the cities. All urban transit had been suspended at 11:00 P.M. the previous evening.⁵⁴ The country's transportation and communications networks, including motor transportation, telephone and telex facilities, and radio communications, were placed at the disposal of the census officials during the day of the census.⁵⁵

For several days prior to the census, television, radio, and print media featured stories and messages intended to make the population aware of the importance of cooperating with the census, the uses of enumeration. Instructions were even provided on how to answer correctly the questions that would be posed by the enumerators.⁵⁶ Workers were asked to obtain from their employers a form that would prepare them for the items on occupation and industry.⁵⁷

To accomplish the task with the swiftness required, 286,430 persons were recruited to work on the census.⁵⁸ The enumerators presumably worked as unpaid volunteers (nearly half of them were students).⁵⁹

Although supervisors received a three-day seminar to equip them for their duties, the enumerators themselves were told simply to tune into a class that was transmitted repeatedly on television during the week preceding the day of the census.⁶⁰ The day after the census was taken, *Granma*, the official newspaper of the Communist party of Cuba, proclaimed that the census day had been a "victorious" one and attributed the apparent success of the enumeration to the "enthusiastic, disciplined, and massive participation of the people."⁶¹

In contrast, the 1981 census reflects the period of institutionalized administrative procedures and rationally planned economic decision-making based on realities, rather than on idealism and enthusiasm. Instead of immobilizing the population and attempting to complete the enumeration in one day, as in 1970, the 1981 census was conducted over a ten-day period that allowed the population to move about at any time.⁶² Consequently, a smaller, but better trained, force of enumerators was utilized. The enumerators were selectively recruited among applicants seeking full-time temporary employment, given several intensive training sessions, and remunerated for their work.⁶³

Despite its utilizing only one-third as much manpower as had been employed in 1970, the 1981 census apparently was conducted with more planning and methodological sophistication than its predecessor. Various pretests were done on the questionnaire, extensive cartographic work was performed prior to the enumeration, fairly advanced software was utilized in the tabulation process, and a relatively large postcensal survey of coverage was taken.⁶⁴ Census officials indicated to the press prior to the census that although enumerators would require the use of public transportation facilities, care would be taken not to disrupt the daily activities of the population.⁶⁵ The style of this enumeration is perhaps most evident in a postcensal statement made by the director of Cuba's statistical agency. He attributed the apparent success of the field operations largely to the "systematic manner" in which the enumerators performed their tasks, "without haste, seeking optimum quality."⁶⁶

Beyond the contrasts in their styles, an important feature of the socialist censuses that should be noted here concerns problems with the availability of the results. For both censuses, the preliminary population counts for each province and municipio by sex, age, and rural-urban residence were released shortly after the enumerations were conducted. In fact, that information was published in the Cuban press within four months following the completion of each of the two censuses.⁶⁷ In the case of the 1970 census, however, a final report did not appear until 1975, and even then copies were not readily available.⁶⁸

The report is disappointing in that despite the items on race and educational attainment in the questionnaire, no data on those characteristics were presented.⁶⁹ In fact, no data on race and education from the

1970 census have ever been released. It was argued that the race item was not tabulated because it was decided after the census was taken that questions of race are not relevant in a socialist society. Whatever validity that argument may have had, however, was destroyed with the appearance of a question on race in the 1981 census questionnaire.⁷⁰ Perhaps the cross-tabulation of the figures on race and education did not show the expected elimination of racial differentials in educational attainment that has been a major goal of the revolutionary government's redistributive educational program since 1960. This explanation remains the only apparent reason for the suppression of the data on race and education.

One can only hope that the final report of the 1981 census will appear in a truly comprehensive form. The problem with the release of the results of the 1970 census demonstrate that despite vast differences in ideology and political organization and goals, Cuba's socialist government is not too dissimilar from its predecessors in its awareness of the political context and consequences of censuses.

Conclusion

When social scientists use census data, they are usually aware of only the final product of the census, the published tabulations of the results. Upon examining the political context of the Cuban population censuses taken since 1899, it becomes apparent that censuses are far more than a set of figures. Political considerations are the key to understanding such factors as the timing of the censuses, their uses, content, approach or methodology employed, and even the reasons for the difficulties in the availability of the results. Indeed, as has been shown, censuses themselves can become important political events.

Although Cuba has experienced a varied and turbulent political history, its censal experience is neither atypical nor inapplicable to developed countries with stable political institutions. One has only to look at the recent U.S. experience. The 1980 U.S. census was the center of political controversies and legal battles that could have led to changes in methodology and that actually caused delays in the release of the figures. Various municipal governments, faced with reductions in federal funds, attempted to make the Census Bureau adjust the 1980 figures to compensate for alleged undercounting. Various political groups also sought to have the bureau purposely exclude undocumented immigrants from the enumeration.

External and internal tests of validity, widely used by demographers, are necessary before any definite conclusion can be reached about the usefulness of census results. But the analysis presented here can be used to determine the directions and reasons for bias or error in the Cuban censuses. More importantly, it has been shown that censuses are

not simply produced by impartial technicians, as is frequently assumed, but are outcomes of the political process and as such, mirror the political context within which they take place. An awareness of that context is important for the numerous students of modern Cuba because these censuses constitute a major source of data on the island's socioeconomic development in the twentieth century.

NOTES

1. Recently an increased awareness has developed in the United States of the political antecedents and consequences of population censuses. This situation has resulted largely from the use of the 1980 census as the basis for the federal revenue-sharing program. For detailed discussions of the politics of the 1980 census, see the various articles on this topic that appeared in the special issue of *Society* 18 (Jan.–Feb. 1981): 15–25.
2. David F. Healy, *The United States in Cuba, 1898–1902: Generals, Politicians, and the Search for Policy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963).
3. William McKinley, quoted in "Letter of Transmittal," by J. P. Sanger in U.S. War Department, Cuban Census Office, *Report on the Census of Cuba, 1899* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1900), pp. 10–11.
4. Elihu Root, "War Department Orders Organizing the Census," in U.S. War Department, *Report on the Census of Cuba, 1899*, p. 621.
5. U.S. War Department, *Report on the Census of Cuba, 1899*.
6. Sanger, "Letter of Transmittal," p. 9.
7. U.S. War Department, *Report on the Census of Cuba, 1899*.
8. Sanger, "Letter of Transmittal," p. 9.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
10. U.S. War Department, *Report on the Census of Cuba, 1899*, p. 63.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 649, 667.
12. Jorge I. Domínguez, *Cuba: Order and Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 12.
13. "Enmienda Platt," in *Documentos para la historia de Cuba*, vol. 2, edited by Hortensia Pichardo (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1976), p. 119.
14. For background on the second U.S. occupation, see Allan Reed Millett, *The Politics of Intervention: The Military Occupation of Cuba, 1906–1909* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968); and David A. Lockmiller, *Magoon in Cuba: A History of the Second Intervention, 1906–1909* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938).
15. Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 487–88.
16. Victor H. Olmstead, "Informe particular del Director del Censo," in Oficina del Censo de los Estados Unidos, *Censo de la República de Cuba bajo la administración provisional de los Estados Unidos, 1907* (Montpelier, Vt.: Capital City Press, 1908), p. 11.
17. Charles E. Magoon, "Decreto del Gobernador Provisional," in *Censo de la República de Cuba, 1907*, p. 597.
18. Thomas, *Cuba*, p. 527; Julio LeRiverend, *La república: dependencia y revolución* (3rd ed., La Habana: Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1971), p. 118; Charles E. Chapman, *A History of the Cuban Republic* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), p. 355; and Russell H. Fitzgibbon, *Cuba and the United States* (Menesha, Wis.: George Banta, 1935), p. 156.
19. Joel James Figarola, *Cuba 1900–1928: la república dividida contra sí misma* (La Habana: Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1976), p. 249.
20. Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Intervention, Revolution, and Politics in Cuba, 1913–1921* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978), pp. 88–103. Pérez's work is undoubtedly the best single work on the García Menocal administration.
21. Harold E. Stephenson, "Informe del Consultor Técnico," in Dirección General del

- Censo, *Censo de la República de Cuba, año de 1919* (La Habana: Maza, Arroyo, y Caso, 1922), pp. 19–20.
22. Angel C. Betancourt, "Informe del Director General," in Dirección General del Censo, *Censo, año de 1919*, p. 5.
 23. Stephenson, "Informe del Consultor Técnico," p. 22.
 24. Departamento de Demografía de la Dirección de Estadísticas de Población y Censos, *Las estadísticas demográficas cubanas* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1975), pp. 42–43.
 25. Pérez, *Intervention, Revolution, and Politics*, p. 139.
 26. Thomas, *Cuba*, p. 587.
 27. "Organización y requisitos para el censo," *Diario de la Marina*, 17 September 1931, pp. 1, 8.
 28. "Delitos de falsedad y de perjurio sobre el censo serán castigados por los tribunales," *Diario de la Marina*, 26 September 1931, p. 10; and "El servicio secreto ha descubierto la trama urdida por significadas personas para falsear las labores de enumeración del censo nacional," *Diario de la Marina*, 4 October 1931, pp. 1, 22.
 29. "Editorial: el censo, tóxico o medicina," *Bohemia*, 27 September 1931, p. 23; and "Editorial: el censo electoral," *Bohemia*, 22 November 1931, p. 23.
 30. "Un enumerador del censo es acusado por irregularidades," *Diario de la Marina*, 3 October 1931, p. 10; "Se trabaja día y noche en la solución de los problemas de la confección del censo," *Diario de la Marina*, 29 September 1931, pp. 1, 10; "Información telegráfica de la isla," *Diario de la Marina*, 22 September 1931, p. 9; and "Un enumerador cometió graves delitos siendo sorprendido y preso por los jefes del censo," *Diario de la Marina*, 9 October 1931, pp. 1, 9.
 31. "Dos districts han sido anulados por la Junta del Censo," *Diario de la Marina*, 10 October 1931, pp. 1, 10; "Será anulada toda la enumeración en donde se descubra un fraude," *Diario de la Marina*, 7 October 1931, pp. 1, 10; and "Cesaron los inspectores en el censo," *Diario de la Marina*, 28 October 1931, p. 14.
 32. "Una vasta combinación para falsear el censo ha sido descubierta en los cuarenta y tres barrios de La Habana," *Diario de la Marina*, 2 October 1931, pp. 1, 14.
 33. "Los bomberos no pueden ser equiparados a los militares en la enumeración del censo," *Diario de la Marina*, 27 September 1931, p. 22.
 34. Dirección General del Censo, *Censo de 1931: estados de habitantes y electores* (La Habana: Carasa, 1932).
 35. Dirección General del Censo, *Censo de población: estadísticas industrial y agrícola de Cuba, 1931* (La Habana: Editorial Luz-Hilo, 1939).
 36. Departamento de Demografía, Comité Estatal de Estadísticas, *Memorias inéditas del censo de 1931* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1978), p. 5.
 37. *Ibid.*
 38. Daniel Chirot, *Social Change in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanich, 1977), p. 74.
 39. Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 100.
 40. Lowry Nelson, *Cuba: The Measure of a Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), p. 46.
 41. Sergio Díaz-Briquets and Lisandro Pérez, "Fertility Decline in Cuba: A Socioeconomic Interpretation," *Population and Development Review* (Sept. 1982): 515–16.
 42. *Constitución de la República de Cuba* (rpt.; Miami: Judicatura Cubana Democrática, 1963), p. 30 (Article 94). Article 94 also required the publication of a statistical yearbook.
 43. Junta Nacional del Censo, *Censo de 1943* (La Habana: P. Fernández, 1945).
 44. Perhaps another indication that the dominant class wanted to project a modern and cosmopolitan image in the 1943 census report is the fact that this is the only Cuban census in this century in which no data on consensual unions were gathered. A high incidence of such unions may have been regarded as typical of rural or "backward" societies. Ostensibly, however, the census officials argued that they excluded that category from the schedule because of their interpretation of a provision of the 1940 constitution (*ibid.*, pp. 767–69).

45. Oficina Nacional de los Censos Demográfico y Electoral, *Censos de población, viviendas y electoral, 28 de enero de 1953, informe general* (La Habana: P. Fernández, 1955).
46. Departamento de Demografía, *Las estadísticas demográficas cubanas*, p. 45.
47. Regarding the labor force, it is interesting to note that taking the census on 28 January 1953, supposedly to coincide with the centenary of the birth of José Martí, resulted in a lower employment rate than if the census had been taken around mid-year because January is one of the peak months of the sugar-harvesting season.
48. The 1970 census may have embodied less lofty purposes than the creation of a data base for economic decision making. Males seventeen to forty-five years of age were required to show the enumerators their certificate of registration in the compulsory military service (Servicio Militar Obligatorio). The enumerators were to enter the registration number in the designated space in the questionnaire ("Seis de septiembre, censo de población y viviendas," *Bohemia*, 4 September 1970, p. 60; and Departamento de Demografía, *Las estadísticas demográficas cubanas*, p. 115).
49. Carmelo Mesa-Lago, *The Economy of Socialist Cuba: A Two-Decade Appraisal* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), p. 35.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
52. *Ibid.*, pp. 27–32.
53. "Concluyó enumeración en las zonas urbanas de todo el país," *Granma*, 7 September 1970, p. 1.
54. Departamento de Demografía, *Las estadísticas demográficas cubanas*, p. 108.
55. Junta Central de Planificación, *Censo de población y viviendas, 1970* (La Habana: Editorial Orbe, 1975), p. vii.
56. "Seis de septiembre," pp. 51–65; and "Editorial: el censo de 1970, un paso firme hacia la planificación y el aprovechamiento óptimo de nuestros recursos," *Granma*, 13 August 1970, p. 1.
57. "Seis de septiembre," p. 57.
58. "Determinante la participación del pueblo en el éxito del desarrollo del censo," *Granma*, 7 September 1970, p. 1.
59. *Ibid.*
60. Junta Central de Planificación, *Censo, 1970*, p. vi.
61. "Determinante la participación del pueblo," p. 1.
62. Raúl Lazo, "Censo de población y vivienda: ¿qué se ha hecho? ¿qué falta por hacer?" *Bohemia*, 21 August 1981, p. 58; and José M. Norniella, "Census Data Collection Completed in Cuba," *Granma Weekly Review*, 27 September 1981, p. 7.
63. Raúl Lazo, "Cuántos somos y como vivimos," *Bohemia*, 10 April 1981, pp. 83–84; and "El censo: una tarea relacionada con el desarrollo del país y el bienestar de nuestro pueblo," *Granma*, 10 September 1981, p. 2.
64. Maximino Gancedo Cabrera, "Censo de población y viviendas en 1981," *Revista Estadística 2* (July 1979), pp. 57–58; Raúl Lazo, "El censo: resultados satisfactorios," *Bohemia*, 25 September 1981, p. 63; Raúl Lazo, "Censo y computación," *Bohemia*, 15 May 1981, pp. 32–33; and Lazo, "Cuántos somos y como vivimos," pp. 82–85.
65. Raúl Lazo, "A las puertas del censo," *Bohemia*, 11 September 1981, p. 42.
66. Lazo, "El censo: resultados satisfactorios," p. 61.
67. "Creating a Statistical Base for Development," *Granma Weekly Review*, 10 January 1971, pp. 8–9; "Datos preliminares del censo de población y viviendas," *Bohemia*, 8 January 1971, p. 36; "Primeros resultados del censo del 70: provincia de Pinar del Río," *Granma*, 28 January 1971, p. 5; "Primeros resultados del censo del 70: provincia de La Habana," *Granma*, 20 January 1971, p. 5; "Primeros resultados del censo del 70: provincia de Matanzas," *Granma*, 18 January 1971, p. 4; "Primeros resultados del censo del 70: provincia de Las Villas," *Granma*, 8 January 1971, p. 5; "Primeros resultados del censo del 70: provincia de Camaguey," *Granma*, 7 January 1971, p. 5; "Primeros resultados del censo del 70: provincia de Oriente," *Granma*, 6 January 1971, p. 4; and "Comunicado del Comité Estatal de Estadísticas acerca de los resultados preliminares del censo nacional de población y viviendas de 1981," *Granma*, 30 October 1981, pp. 3–5.

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68. It was not until 1980, for example, that the Library of Congress finally acquired its copy through the exchange program with the Cuban National Library.
69. Junta Central de Planificación, *Censo, 1970*; and Departamento de Demografía, *Las estadísticas demográficas cubanas*, pp. 113–14.
70. Lazo, “Cuántos somos y como vivimos,” p. 85.