



TRAFICANTES DE TABACO EN PUERTO RICO EN EL OCASO COLONIAL ESPAÑOL, 1860-1898

TOBACCO LEAF DEALERS IN PUERTO RICO IN THE TWILIGHT OF THE COLONY WITH SPAIN, 1860-1898

Juan José Baldrich*

Cómo citar este artículo/Citation: Baldrich, J. J. (2020). Traficantes de tabaco en Puerto Rico en el ocaso colonial español, 1860-1898. *XXIII Coloquio de Historia Canario-Americana* (2018), XXIII- 025. <http://coloquioscanariasamerica.casadedecolon.com/index.php/CHCA/article/view/10420>

Resumen: Este capítulo examina a los traficantes que compraban tabaco a los cosecheros para prepararlo, transportarlo y venderlo a los fabricantes. La mayoría de las investigaciones han privilegiado la agricultura y la manufactura, prestando poca atención al carácter cambiante de los intermediarios. Esta presentación examina a los traficantes de tabaco en las postrimerías del dominio colonial español en Puerto Rico, que constituye el periodo en que los exportadores canalizaron el grueso de la rama a Cuba y España desplazando a Holanda, Bremen y Hamburgo. Estudia los inicios de un tipo de comerciante especializado en el tráfico de tabaco en rama. La mayoría de los cosecheros y traficantes articularon su relación en torno a los contratos de refacción por encima de las ventas con pacto de retro o las compras directas. Así pues, la refacción ocupó un lugar central en la relación que articularon los intermediarios con los cosecheros.

Palabras clave: tabaco en rama, intermediarios, traficantes, refacción, retroventa, Puerto Rico, España, Cuba.

Abstract: This chapter examines the middlemen who bought leaf from the growers to prepare, transport, and sell it to manufacturers. Most research has privileged agriculture and manufacture, paying scant attention to the changing character of the intermediaries. This piece seeks to study leaf dealers, during the last decades of Spanish colonial rule, when export merchants channeled most leaf exports to Cuba and Spain that displaced the Netherlands, Bremen, and Hamburg. These intermediaries typically ranged from large growers, dealers, and export-merchants, to the contractors of the Spanish tobacco monopoly. It studies the beginnings of a type of merchant, who specialized in the leaf trade. Most growers and intermediaries articulated their relation around the crop lien, locally known as *refacción*, above repurchase agreements over the grower's farm (*retroventas*), and outright leaf purchases. Thus, the lien became central to the relation between the intermediaries and the growers.

Keywords: tobacco leaf, middlemen, dealers, crop lien, repurchase, Puerto Rico, Spain, Cuba.

Most research has privileged tobacco agriculture and manufacture, paying scant attention to the changing character of the intermediaries between them¹. This piece seeks to study leaf dealers, during the last decades of Spanish colonial rule, when export merchants channeled most leaf exports to Cuba and Spain. These middlemen typically ranged from large growers, dealers, and export-merchants, to the contractors of the Spanish tobacco monopoly.

While the economic arrangements to transfer tobacco leaf from the growers to the manufacturers exhibited considerable variations, growers and intermediaries privileged the crop lien, locally known as *refacción*, above repurchase agreements over the grower's farm

* Departamento de Sociología y Antropología. Universidad de Puerto Rico. Av. Universidad 9, Oficina 901. San Juan, 00925-2529. Puerto Rico. Teléfono: 787-764-0000 ext. 87695; correo electrónico: juan.baldrich.grd.soci@aya.yale.edu

¹ The author acknowledges the advice of Joaquín Miguel Villa Álvarez, Jorge L. Giovannetti, Jaime M. Pérez Rivera, and the assistance of César E. Concepción. The Department of Sociology and Anthropology and the Fondo Institucional para la Investigación of the University of Puerto Rico funded this work.

(*retroventas*) or outright leaf purchases. Thus, the lien became central to the relation around which the intermediaries articulated their relation to growers. While most nineteenth century leaf dealers and export merchants handled many types of products, the fin de siècle witnessed the beginnings of a type of merchant that specialized in the leaf trade.

UNDEER LATE SPANISH COLONIAL RULE

The grower

During the nineteenth century and extending well beyond, farmers typically did not pay merchants in cash but with the products harvested. Most tobacco leaf dealers relied on the crop lien as the major mechanism to obtain leaf. Lenders extended credit, often in kind, for growers to plant tobacco on agreed acreage, where the crop served as collateral to the loan².

Most late nineteenth-century tobacco-growers were sharecroppers, tenant farmers or smallholders who tilled the soil with their families and the occasional day laborer.³ Correspondingly, their crop liens were small where, understandably, only a few found their way to notarial records. One case was that of León Colón, a resident of Cidra, in the highlands, who contracted his leaf with Rucabado Hermanos. León pledged to prepare, plant, cultivate, and harvest one and a half *cuerdas* of tobacco in land belonging Evaristo Colón. At the signing of the deed León had already received fifteen pesos and would receive more advances until the end of the harvest. In return, he gave the partnership a lien on the crop and obliged himself to deliver the leaf to the firm, which was to sell the tobacco and return the balance, if any, between the selling price and the advances received⁴.

Although not as common as the lien, leaf dealers also financed tobacco through a repo, *retroventa*, a land sale with repurchase agreement, which transferred the property title to the lender while the grower retained the right to buy it back. Repos offered growers short-term capital to plant, cultivate, harvest, and deliver the crop to the dealer. The expected proceeds from leaf sales allowed the grower sufficient liquidity to repurchase the land. The buyback agreement offered the dealer real estate rather than the crop guarantee of the lien.

Pedro de Rivera illustrates the concept and the fluidity between the repo and the crop lien. In March 1877, upon selling fifty-four *cuerdas* in Aibonito for 1,419.90 pesos, he committed his crop to Francisco Rucabado's firm. After the liquidation of the leaf, de Rivera could execute the buyback clause any time in July for the same amount received. However, when de Rivera could not execute the repo, the leaf dealer confirmed his title over the land in 1881. De Rivera, then landless, became a tenant who financed his tobacco through liens⁵. Following León Colón, who pledged one and a half *cuerdas* in his lien, and de Rivera, who sold fifty-four, the lien's acreage and the repo's farm size tended to be significantly different.

The dealer

Besides the Rucabados, one such dealer was Manuel Pontón, an immigrant from Asturias, who owned, in 1894, a general store in the highland municipality of Comerío where he ob-

² MELÉNDEZ MUÑOZ (1963), pp. 314-316.

³ ABAD (1884), p. 93.

⁴ MORALES (1880), pp. 77-78.

⁵ MORALES (1877), pp. 153-154; MORALES (1878), pp. 189-190; MORALES (1881), pp. 857-858v.

tained tobacco through liens under his name on behalf of larger dealers⁶. In time, he became a tobacco grower in his own right⁷. Méndez y Hermanos was another partnership that secured crop liens in the municipality of San Lorenzo from Ramón Brugueras, among others, when, in 1877, they extended him 980 pesos for fourteen *cuerdas* of sugar cane and a tobacco patch. In 1892, Sucesores de Portela y Co. purchased Juan Nepomuceno Collazo's tobacco crop in Vega Baja for 200 pesos⁸.

Larger dealers generally prepared the leaf by classifying, fermenting, packing, warehousing (*depósitos de tabaco*), and delivering it for manufacture or shipment. They resold the accumulated stock in varying degrees of processing to three conceptually distinct groups that, in practice, had considerable overlaps: namely local manufacturers such as *La Ultramarina*, large merchants like Manuel Pontón who, in turn, resold considerable amounts to export merchants as Avelino Vicente and Enrique Vijande who then consigned the leaf to merchants in La Habana and after 1870 presumably to the contractors of the Spanish tobacco monopoly.

Most cigar manufacturers brought all their supplies from leaf dealers. *Las Dos Antillas*, one of the largest fin-de-siècle manufactories, bought from dealers in Juncos, Comerío, and Cayey. *La Bella Indiana*, held by Luis Casals in Ponce, bought directly in Comerío and Aibonito. Toro y Compañía's *La Internacional*, was one of the largest cigar and cigarette manufacturing operations that consistently bought tobacco in the highlands⁹.

However, some larger factories, like Ponce-based *Fin de Siglo*, owned by Colom, González, and Santini, supplemented their own production with direct purchases in Cayey and Comerío. When Heraclio Mendoza bought *La Ribera del Plata* in Cayey, from Gaudier y Agüero, the factory benefitted from leaf grown in his own plantations. Cándido Fariña's *La Integridad* also received leaf from his own farms¹⁰.

Export merchant

The complexities arising from the overseas trade led merchants to develop and refine a set of mechanisms known as the consignment system. While the crop lien was the most common mechanism that bonded the grower to the dealer, the direct purchase usually bonded the dealer and the occasional grower to the manufacturer. The consignor ordinarily dispatched the leaf on behalf of the dealer or the large grower to the consignee, who more often than not received it overseas. Upon selling the leaf at a price determined by the dealer, the consignee typically deposited the proceeds as instructed but usually returned them to the consignor who generally served as a private banker on behalf of the dealer.

Between 1870 and 1874, the main leaf export markets were in Germany, with a 41.6 percent share, and in Britain, with 24.8 percent while the Cubans and the Spanish had 17.9 percent and 11.9 percent shares respectively. During the following decades, the tobacco leaf markets suffered a profound reorientation as Spain and Cuba took over as the main markets. Suggesting the increased exports to the neighboring isle is the fact that 77 percent of the leaf shipped from San Juan was destined to Havana in 1876. During the 1894-1896 triennium, 54.0 percent of leaf exports went to Spain, 36.9 to Cuba, and a paltry 6.51 to Germany¹¹.

⁶ BLANCH (1894), p. 113; CABRERA COLLAZO (2002), p. 95.

⁷ US CONGRESS (1918), pp. 28-30.

⁸ HUERTAS GONZÁLEZ (2013), p. 49; VILLA ÁLVAREZ (2000), p. 585.

⁹ BLANCO FERNÁNDEZ (1930), p. 252; MOREL CAMPOS (1895), p. unnumbered; RIVAS (1899), p. 2.

¹⁰ «Fin de Siglo» (1900), p. 1; MENDOZA (1901); «Tabaquería *El Escudo Español*» (1892), p. 3; «La Integridad» (1877), p. 1.

¹¹ SONESSON (2000), p. 173; RIVERA RODRÍGUEZ (1998), p. 195; HITCHCOCK (1898), p. 26.

Several large exporters of sugar and coffee also consigned tobacco in a market where no single firm had a clearly dominant position. Most had no relation to tobacco beyond the export business, but at least two were significant cigar manufacturers.

In 1863, Caldas y Compañía pledged a hundredweight of coffee and 2,000 cigars to the Spanish army enforcing the annexation of the Dominican Republic since 1861¹². Somewhat later, Francisco Caldas, an immigrant from Santander, appeared paying property taxes, in San Juan, for a retail store and, unsurprisingly, a small tobacco manufactory, a *tabaquería*¹³. By 1889, Caldas y Ca. extended into the wholesale export and import of general merchandise¹⁴. A year later, José Caldas y Caldas became a board member of the Banco Español de Puerto Rico¹⁵. The partnership extended its activities to innumerable consignments of leaf during the 1890s. For instance, during January 1890, the firm shipped 331 bales weighing 22,570 kilos to a single consignee, A. González y Ca., in Havana in shipments that continued during the next few years. Once during February 1895, the partnership consigned fifty bales of leaf to Havana aboard the San Agustín and forty-four bales aboard the Buenaventura¹⁶.

Avelino Vicente González, who migrated as a youngster from his native Galicia, was a co-founder of Gabiño, Vicente y Co., known, after 1892, as A. Vicente y Co. The partnership's main line of business was the import of feed for cattle and poultry¹⁷. However, it diversified during the 1890s into real estate when it sold small plots from a large property it held in Santurce and bought farmland in Ciales¹⁸. The two Vicente firms became the leading consignors of tobacco leaf among the many Galicians engaged in the export of tropical commodities between 1888 and 1898¹⁹. For example, during May of 1892, which was an active month, the firm consigned 631 bales of leaf, weighing 35,626 kilos, to Havana aboard four different steamships²⁰.

Enrique Vijande, who emigrated from Asturias in the 1870s, established Vijande y Compañía, a firm that by 1889 had banking functions and served as a commission merchant²¹. During the 1880s and 1890s, the firm owned and operated steamships that carried cargo, passengers, and mail along the island's littoral. By 1898, he had retired to Barcelona but the firm maintained operations as Sucesores de Vijande y Ca²². The firm's connection to the tobacco trade laid in the ownership of a small San Juan factory in 1889 and a 1895 shipment of cigars to St. Thomas²³. As of 1887, the partnership held some 10,000 pesos, being probably the proceeds from leaf consigned overseas, on behalf of Francisco Rucabado who was an important tobacco merchant and grower²⁴. While the dissolution deed of Rucabado Hermanos, a major tobacco dealer and manufacturer, in 1900 identified 17,223.63 pesos in goods consigned overseas, it failed to identify their nature²⁵.

¹² SECRETARIA DEL GOBIERNO (1863), p. 1; TEJADA (2010), pp. 408-409.

¹³ LUGO AMADOR (2007), p. 634; MARTÍNEZ ORTIZ (1974), p. 78; DELMAR (1889), p. 224.

¹⁴ DELMAR (1889), p. 225.

¹⁵ MARTÍN ACEÑA y ROLDÁN DE MONTAUD (2012-2013), p. 230.

¹⁶ «Tabaco» (1890), p. 2; «Movimiento de buques» (1895b), p. 3.

¹⁷ VILLA ÁLVAREZ (2000), p. 420; LUGO AMADOR (2007), p. 71.

¹⁸ LUGO AMADOR (2007), pp. 179, 269.

¹⁹ VILLA ÁLVAREZ (2000), pp. 588-589, 599.

²⁰ «Movimiento de buques» (1892a), p. 3; (1892b), p. 3; (1892d), p. 3; (1892e), p. 3.

²¹ ANÉS ÁLVAREZ (1993), p. 83; DELMAR (1889), pp. 224-225.

²² MAGALHÁES (1898), p. 26; SANAHUJA (2015).

²³ «Movimiento de buques» (1895c), p. 3; DELMAR (1889), p. 225.

²⁴ MORALES (1887), pp. 600-601. Due to the scarcity of banks, consignors in general tended to offer also banking services. The management of the proceeds from the sale of tobacco needed a business with prestige and efficiency with access to money transfers in a foreign setting.

²⁵ MUÑOZ MORALES (1900), p. 188.

Whereas the firms reviewed dealt in tropical goods, the fin de siècle witnessed the birth of a new type of exporter that augured firms that specialized solely in one or two lines of products. Two such firms focused almost exclusively on the tobacco trade by the export of leaf they consigned on behalf of others and of the cigars they themselves manufactured.

José Portela Silva, who was born in Galicia in 1858, had become, by 1885, a partner to Portela y Lomba, who owned a large cigar manufactory named *La Ultramarina* that had just gained authorization to use of the Spanish royal seal on its products²⁶. Nearly a decade later, the firm, then known as Portela y Compañía, operated the same manufactory and had diversified into imported clothing, with a San Juan retail-store of the same name²⁷. By 1897, the La Ultramarina had grown to employ a hundred and sixty cigar makers²⁸. The partnership became an exporter, possibly of its own goods, to St. Thomas and London. It also consigned leaf in Havana when, for instance, in May of 1892 alone, Portela y Compañía shipped eighty-three bales of leaf weighing 4,716 kilos²⁹. In sharp contrast to most commission merchants, its exporting business was seemingly limited to their mainstay in the tobacco industry³⁰.

José Rodríguez Fuentes migrated from his native Galicia to Cuba where he learned the cigar making craft³¹. Upon leaving Cuba in 1869, he established a buckeye, a *chinchal*, a year later in San Juan, where, as the volume of his production increased, the shop became a factory³². During the mid 1880s, he registered *Las Dos Antillas* trademark for the manufacture of cigars, cigarettes, and cuttings, *picadura*, besides *La Favorita* trademark, which served solely as a cigar brand. The proprietor could also use the Spanish royal seal. At the fin de siècle, the factory employed about a hundred cigar makers³³. In time *Las Dos Antillas* allowed for exports to Barcelona, London, Paris, and elsewhere that Rodríguez Fuentes shipped and consigned himself³⁴. While the firm bought leaf from Manuel Pontón, Cándido Fariña, and Rucabado Hermanos for its manufacturing needs, it also consigned respectable amounts of leaf overseas on its own³⁵. On a lesser scale than the commission merchants with a strong connection to commerce, the manufacturer-consignor came into being during the waning decades of the century and, in some ways, anticipated the dealer of the twentieth.

The Spanish monopoly

During the early phases of the first Cuban war for independence (1868-1878), the scarcity and high prices commanded by Cuban leaf induced José Domenech, a tobacco contractor, to persuade the Spanish tobacco monopoly to forgo the mandatory auction in order to obtain local leaf expeditiously³⁶. Afterwards, starting in 1872, the purchases of an inexpensive leaf,

²⁶ VILLA ÁLVAREZ (2000), p. 527; INTENDENCIA GENERAL (1885).

²⁷ BLANCH (1894), p. unnumbered.

²⁸ *La Correspondencia* (1897), p. unnumbered.

²⁹ «Movimiento de buques» (1892c), p. 3; (1892f), p. 3; (1892e), p. 3.

³⁰ VILLA ÁLVAREZ (2000), pp. 596-597.

³¹ VILLA ÁLVAREZ (2000), pp. 596-597; *La cuestión tabaquera en Puerto Rico* (1885), p. 5.

³² «Las Dos Antillas» (1892), p. unnumbered; ABAD (1884), p. 98.

³³ «Parte oficial» (1888), p. 1; «Parte oficial» (1886), p. 1; *La Correspondencia* (1892), p. 2.

³⁴ INFIESTA (1895), p. 214; «Movimiento de buques» (1892f), p. 3. He also shipped coffee on a small scale.

³⁵ BLANCO FERNÁNDEZ (1930), p. 252; VILLA ÁLVAREZ (2000), p. 599.

³⁶ The Spanish monopoly tested local leaf from time to time without satisfactory results. For instance, in January and July 1853, the *estanco* bought hundreds of bales of leaf from several municipalities and, as it found all leaf in the remittance wanting, recommended the suspension of the tests. «Suspensión de envíos de tabaco de Puerto Rico» (1853).

called *boliche*, for the manufacture of cigarettes went through regular auction mechanisms that lasted up to 1898. Contractors were typically large Spanish-based merchants, such as Domenech and José Campo Pérez, who had patiently built a network of providers in Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and the United States³⁷. While local providers remain unidentified, some must have been the export merchants identified above.

José Tomás Silva Rodríguez seems to have been the only contractor who was a local resident. Silva, identified as the Marquis de Campo's local representative, most likely had served as intermediary with local leaf merchants in earlier auctions won by the Marquis³⁸. He also served as shipping agent for close to twenty-two metric tons of leaf likely destined to the Spanish monopoly, at times together with others, like Rauschenplatt y Co., in 1895³⁹. Besides the contract and shipments his commitment to the tobacco industry seems to have been limited to his participation in the small Compañía Tabacalera de Puerto Rico established years later, in 1908⁴⁰. He was more of a merchant who issued bank drafts and shipped goods to be sold on consignment from his main office in San Juan or a branch in Aguadilla⁴¹.

Table 1 presents the time span, expected leaf supply, and the names of the monopoly's contractors between 1870 and 1898. What began as an experiment to counterbalance the difficulties with Cuban leaf supplies, had more than a fourfold increase to become a regular staple. Over the twenty-one years with complete data, shown in Table 1, the monopoly contracted purchases for 19,139 of the 55,536 metric tons that Puerto Rico exported, which amounted to 34.46 percent of all exports⁴².

Table 1. Contracts of the Spanish tobacco monopoly for Puerto Rican *boliche*, 1870-1898

Contract period	Metric tons	Contractor
1870-71	463	J. Domenech
1872-73	696	J. Campo
1874-75	500	J. Campo
1875-78	1,800	J. Cabrero
1877-80	3,500	B. Fraile
1881-82	1,500	B. Fraile
1882-84	3,000	F. Carreras
1885-87	4,500	P.R. Castellano
1887-89	2,180	M. Campo

For the substantial benefits that Puerto Rican tobacco interests obtained from armed conflict in Cuba, refer to BALDRICH (2006), pp. 470-473; CORTES DE ESPAÑA (1871), pp. 1-2.

³⁷ HERNÁNDEZ (2006), pp. 353, 360-362.

³⁸ TEIXIDOR DE OTTO y HERNÁNDEZ SORIANO (2000), p. 72; SÁNCHEZ Y BASADRE (1886), p. 19.

³⁹ «Movimiento de buques» (1895a), p. 3. Silva also appeared with an occasional shipment to Havana like six bales weighing 576 kilos in 1896. See «Movimiento de buques» (1896), p. 3.

⁴⁰ COMPAÑÍA TABACALERA DE PUERTO RICO (1908).

⁴¹ SANTIAGO DE CURET (1989), p. 119. While he was actively involved in the establishment of the Banco Español de Puerto Rico in the 1880s, the syndicate that he represented failed to secure the government mandated-competition to lead the institution. Refer to MARTÍN ACEÑA & ROLDÁN DE MONTAUD (2012-2013), pp. 226-227.

⁴² Leaf exports data come from COLÓN (1930), p. 289. Colón presents leaf exports in pounds, here presumed to be *libras castellanas*, the most common pound system in Spain and the Canary Islands. A *libra castellana* was equivalent to 456 grams according to QUET (1858), p. 12. George Latimer, who served as acting British consul during the 1880s pointed out, that, at times, the contractors failed to supply the agreed tonnage. Refer to DÁVILA COX (1996), p. 88.

1889-1890	-----	---
1890-	1,000	J. T. Silva
1892-1893	-----	M. G. Longoria
1893-1898	-----	M. G. Longoria

The data up to 1889 comes from HERNÁNDEZ (2006), pp. 360-362. That for the 1890s comes from COMÍN & MARTÍN ACEÑA (1999), pp. 182-183.

The very end of the Spanish regime anticipated some major changes in the markets for local tobacco leaf. Early in 1898, before the explosion of the Maine battleship, the Cuban government responded, to decades old grievances from tobacco growers, by levying a high tariff on imported Puerto Rican leaf, which effectively cutoff supplies⁴³.

Leaf shipments to the United States before 1898 were negligible with some years amounting to no exports at all⁴⁴. Levi, Blumenstiel and Co. was one of the few firms engaged in this meager commerce. Founded in 1892 and specializing in Cuban leaf, the firm had an office and warehouse in the heart of Manhattan's tobacco district⁴⁵. Coming upon by accident and after evaluating several *pacas* of Puerto Rican tobacco in a Havana warehouse, Alexander Blumenstiel, a partner, traveled to Puerto Rico where he bought some twenty-five *pacas* directly in the tobacco growing districts of the central highlands. Satisfied with the leaf but worried by the trade disruptions caused by the war in Cuba, the firm contracted, in 1897, the Miller, Bull and Knowlton steamship company to deliver cash to Latimer y Fernández, who also served as agents for the shipping firm⁴⁶. Félix Pardo, a tobacco wholesaler, received the payments and doubled as their local representative⁴⁷. Noticeably, the firm did not engage any established tobacco exporters and dealers most likely because they did not serve US ports but relied on Latimer y Fernández who also shipped sugar for the US market⁴⁸.

AFTER THE US INVASION

Within a few years of the invasion, cigar manufactures increased notably and leaf growing mushroomed in an expansion that provoked a profound rupture leading to a complete transformation of the export market. After having lost the Cuban market just before the Maine explosion, the war itself led to the permanent loss of the Spanish market, leaving an unsettling interregnum before the articulation of leaf exports into the US cigar market. The dealers and merchants that had previously managed exports gave way to newcomers. Gone were the likes of Campo, Longoria, and Silva as providers to the Spanish monopoly, and Caldas, Rodríguez Fuentes, and Vicente as leaf consignors, principally to Havana. Only José Portela survived the invasion as a tobacco exporter.

On 9 September 1898, some men connected to Levi, Blumenstiel & Co. incorporated The American West Indies Trading Company (AWITCO) that, unsurprisingly, became one of the earliest US firms engaged in the tobacco business after the invasion. Due to their prewar business experience, it preceded, by a year, the Porto Rican-American Tobacco Company, the

⁴³ For the decades long intermittent conflict between Cuban and Puerto Rican leaf growers, which led to the high 1898 tariff, refer to BALDRICH (2006), pp. 472, 480-481.

⁴⁴ HITCHCOCK (1898), p. 26.

⁴⁵ AWITCO (1902), p. 21. «Tobacco partners disagree» (1908), p. 10.

⁴⁶ LEVI (1921), p. 15. MAGALHÃES (1898), pp. 26-27; «Hurrying from Puerto Rico» (1898), p. 1; BLANCH (1894), p. N.

⁴⁷ BLANCH (1894), p. N; LEVI (1921), p. 15; DELMAR (1889), p. 224.

⁴⁸ GARCÍA MUÑIZ (2010), p. 41; LEE (1963), p. 57.

first-local subsidiary of the Tobacco Trust. AWITCO's charter covered most aspects of the tobacco industry, ranging from agriculture to manufacturing⁴⁹. Between February 1899 and April 1900, the firm shipped 1,585 bales, 851 packages of tobacco, and one package of cigars to become the largest leaf exporter with a formidable 43.7 percent market share⁵⁰.

CONCLUSION

The changing character of tobacco dealers, stemmers, and merchants offer remarkable continuities and ruptures from the last decades of Spanish colonial rule to the immediate aftermath of the 1898 invasion. As continuities go, the lien on the growers' tobacco crop remained the powerful link that tied growers to the middlemen.

This piece has documented the heterogeneity of the intermediaries during the late Spanish colonial period. Typically merchants obtained leaf through liens on the growers' crops. If the merchant ran a small business, he would sell his accumulated leaf to a larger dealer who would, in turn, consign it overseas to Havana or to the Spanish monopoly. Save for few exceptions, leaf consignatories were exporters and importers of general merchandise including the only local merchant to win the auction and the monopoly's contract.

José Rodríguez Fuentes and José Portela anticipated the specialized leaf dealer that became dominant after the invasion. This type of middlemen were to substitute the general-purpose merchants of the nineteenth century.

For a leaf that closely resembled that from Cuba, it is remarkable that few US leaf dealers had made it to the local trade before the invasion. After 1898, US merchants, like Levi Blumenstiel expanded its presence, while others cascaded into the island afterwards.

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⁴⁹ BALDRICH (2015), pp. 34-56; AWITCO (1898).

⁵⁰ Computed from US CONGRESS (1900), p. 589.

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