

“Citizens of a Free People”: Popular Liberalism and Race in Nineteenth-Century Southwestern Colombia

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All that belong to the Liberal Party in the Cauca are people of the *pueblo bajo* (as they are generally called) and blacks,” observes an 1859 letter written by Juan Aparicio, a local political operative who had undertaken the unenviable task of recruiting these same “lower classes” to support the powerful caudillo Tomás Mosquera’s new National Party. Aparicio tried to explain his failure in this assignment, arguing that “this class of people will not listen to anyone that is not of their party.”¹ How had the local Liberal Party—controlled at the national level by wealthy white men—become associated with blacks and the poor in the Cauca region of southwestern Colombia? Or, more to the point, how did Afro-Colombians and other lower-class people transform elite political organizations into “their party”?

In the Cauca, Afro-Colombians actively negotiated, bargained, and came to identify with the Liberal Party, seeing it as a means to enter the nation’s public, political life and improve their social and material condition. This alliance would last for roughly three decades, from the late 1840s until the late 1870s.

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1. Juan N. Aparicio to Tomás C. de Mosquera, Buga, 3 Apr. 1859, Archivo Central del Cauca, Popayán (hereafter cited as ACC), Sala Mosquera (hereafter cited as SM), doc. 36,015. All translations are mine. I have not corrected the nineteenth-century Spanish orthography in titles and names. While what we now call Colombia had several designations in the nineteenth century, for simplicity’s sake I use the current moniker, except in quotations.

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During this time, both popular liberals and party leaders continually negotiated the meanings and terms of this association. This political bargaining arose most powerfully and memorably over the institution of slavery but soon included questions of land, rights, and citizenship. Many of the political transformations and civil wars of this period hinged on the social dynamics engendered by Afro-Colombians' embrace of popular liberalism, a phenomenon that would significantly democratize Colombian republicanism. Eventually, the fates of Afro-Colombians and the Liberal Party became so closely intertwined that, especially for Conservatives, liberalism and blackness became synonymous.

The Afro-Caucanos' story occurred in both a postcolonial and—as their efforts bore fruit—a postemancipation environment. Perhaps even more directly than Rebecca Scott's pioneering work revealed for Cuba, in Colombia slaves and freed communities played an important role in abolition.² This grand effort was intricately linked with Afro-Colombians' pursuit of full membership in the nation via the medium of popular liberalism.³ People of African descent succeeded in making liberalism their own very early in the century and, for a time, remarkably thoroughly. Ada Ferrer notes the uniqueness of the multiracial armies in Cuba's wars for independence. Similar armies emerged in Colombia almost half a century earlier, and, although they were not as fully integrated as Cuba's, they played an equally profound role in Colombia's national development.⁴ Along with their compatriots engaged in similar struggles across Latin America, Afro-Colombians were part of a pan-Atlantic movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to contest the meanings of liberalism and republicanism.⁵ Liberalism, republicanism, and democracy were not only created in the salons and statehouses of London, Paris, and Philadelphia; they were also given life in the streets and surrounding countrysides of Cap François, Havana, and Cali.

The alliance that developed between the Cauca's elite and subaltern liber-

2. Rebecca J. Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860–1899* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1985).

3. While the popular liberalism of indigenous and mestizo communities has received significant study of late, less attention has been paid to the efforts of blacks and mulattos. See especially Florencia E. Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Post-Colonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1995); and Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent, eds., *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1994).

4. Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868–1898* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1999), 3.

5. For Afro-Latin Americans, see George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800–2000* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, forthcoming).

als involved three dimensions: first, bargaining over the social, economic, and political structures of the region; second, the weight of Afro-Caucanos' military and political support in the region's elections and civil wars (which made the Liberal Party unbeatable when it was not internally divided); and third, the confluence of Liberals' conception of citizenship with Afro-Colombians' appropriation of that identity. While a full accounting of this story would begin with the wars of independence, the association of the Cauca's Afro-Colombians and liberalism crystallized in the early 1850s with the emergence of the Liberal Party and the final struggle to abolish the lingering stain of slavery.

Everyday Forms of Party Formation

During the turbulent years of 1850 and 1851, the Afro-Colombians of Cartago (a city in the northern Cauca) gathered at the local Democratic Society—a new, liberal political club—to await the arrival of mail from the capital, anticipating the news that Congress had finally abolished slavery.⁶ By the summer of 1851, two years after the installation of Liberal president José Hilario López, the Liberal Party seemed ready to fulfill their promises and end the ownership of human bodies in Colombia. The Cartaganos, a mixture of slaves and free, waited to see if the words that continually circulated since the Liberals' victory—liberty, equality, republic, democracy—would mean anything for them.

The Cauca had long been under conservative control, and large haciendas dominated the landscape of the river valley and southern highlands, broken only by Indian *resguardos* (protected communal landholdings) in the south and the unsettled Quindío hills to the north.⁷ Afro-Colombians lived along the coast, where gold mining continued to be of import, and in the central valley, working on haciendas and in mines. In the early 1850s, one local geographer estimated that blacks and mulattos constituted 60.4 percent of the region's population, while the 1851 census reported 34.8 percent.⁸ A foreign

6. Ariete (Cali), 3 Aug. 1850.

7. Germán Colmenares, *Cali: Terratenientes, mineros y comerciantes, siglo XVIII* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1997); Germán Colmenares, *Historia económica y social de Colombia*, vol. 2, *Popayán, una sociedad esclavista, 1680–1800* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1997); José Escorcía, *Sociedad y economía en el Valle del Cauca*, vol. 3, *Desarrollo político, social y económico, 1800–1854* (Bogotá: Biblioteca Banco Popular, 1983); and Alonso Valencia Llano, *Estado soberano del Cauca: Federalismo y regeneración* (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1988).

8. For the local geographer, see T. C. Mosquera, *Memoria sobre la geografía, física y política de la Nueva Granada* (New York: Imprenta de S. W. Benedict, 1852), 96; for

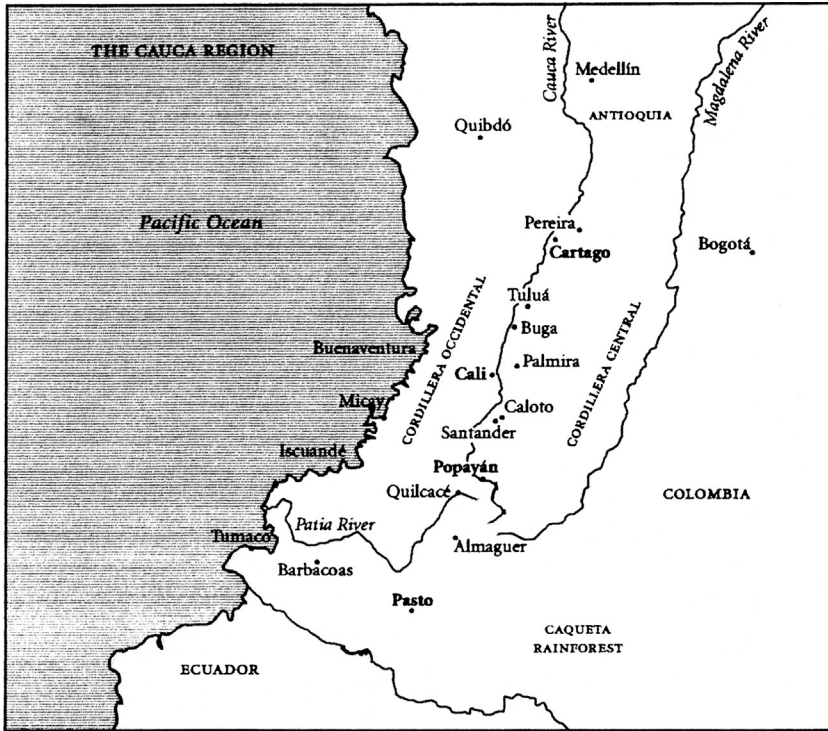


Figure 1. Map of the Cauca region.

observer thought the Cauca was five-sixths black or mulatto.⁹ While today people of African descent are often thought of as concentrated in the coastal region, the Cauca Valley was also a center of slaveholding and hosted a large free black and mulatto population.¹⁰ By 1850–51 there were 10,621 slaves and over 7,614 children of slaves (who, while nominally free, had to live and serve

the 1851 census, see Frank Safford and Marco Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), 261.

9. James M. Eder to Secretary of State William H. Seward, Buenaventura, 24 Oct. 1868, in *Dispatches from United States Consuls in Buenaventura, Colombia: 1867–1885* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives, 1948).

10. Jaime Jaramillo Uribe, “Esclavos y señores en la sociedad colombiana del siglo XVIII,” in *Ensayos sobre historia social colombiana* (Bogotá: Univ. Nacional de Colombia, 1968), 10–13; Peter Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1993).

their parents' masters until the age of 18 and then had to work for low pay until age 25).¹¹ Indeed, the Cauca, where a majority of the nation's enslaved toiled, remained the center of slavery in Colombia.¹² Conservative hacendados not only owned most of the region's slaves but also controlled much of the land and commerce as well. Almost all arable land was held in large haciendas, and the remainder was cultivated by mestizo smallholders. Slaves and freedmen thus had little access to land, with the exception of the common lands (*ejidos*) around some cities such as Cali.¹³ The hacendado class sought to complete its economic dominance by securing *aguardiente* (cane liquor) and tobacco monopolies, thus eliminating outside income sources for tenants and sharecroppers.

While Afro-Colombians faced many problems, and even if most people of African descent were not slaves, the destruction of the slave system nevertheless defined popular liberals' goals, actions, and discourse. Although slavery was in decline following independence due to the manumission of many slaves who had fought in the wars, the prohibition of the slave trade by the new national state, and the 1821 law of free birth, the institution was still important, both socially and economically. Afro-Colombians, slave and free, had been struggling since the colonial era to destroy slavery and to secure some economic and political independence, but with limited success.¹⁴ During the War of the Supremes (1839–42), José María Obando (who had been a royalist for much of the wars of independence but would later become a Liberal leader) offered

11. Miguel Urrutia M. and Mario Arrubla, eds., *Compendio de estadísticas históricas de Colombia* (Bogotá: Univ. Nacional de Colombia, 1970), table 8; for children, see Archivo General de la Nación, Bogotá (hereafter cited as AGN), Sección República (hereafter cited as SR), Fondo Manumisión, tomo 1, p. 342, 354, 431, 437; AGN, SR, Fondo Gobernaciones Varias (hereafter cited as FGV), tomo 216, p. 494–500.

12. Jorge Castellanos, *La abolición de la esclavitud en Popayán, 1832–1852* (Cali: Univ. del Valle, 1980), 86.

13. Comisión Corográfica, "Descripción de la provincia de la Buenaventura," [early 1850s], Biblioteca Nacional, Bogotá, Fondo Manuscritos (hereafter cited as BN, FM), libro 397, p. 11, 16; J. N. Nuñez Conto to José H. López, Cali, 26 Jan. 1850, AGN, Sección Academia Colombiana de Historia (hereafter cited as SACH), Fondo José Hilario López (hereafter cited as FJHL), caja 2, carpeta 1, p. 70.

14. For struggles immediately after the wars of independence, see Francisco Zuluaga Ramírez, *Guerrilla y sociedad en el Patía: Una relación entre clientelismo político y la insurgencia social* (Cali: Univ. del Valle, 1993); Marixa Lasso, "Race and Republicanism in the Age of Revolution, Cartagena, 1795–1831" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Florida, 2002); Aline Helg, "The Limits of Equality: Free People of Colour and Slaves during the First Independence of Cartagena, Colombia, 1810–15," *Slavery and Abolition* 20 (Aug. 1999): 1–30.

slaves their freedom if they joined his forces.¹⁵ Obando was defeated, and conservatives regained control of the Cauca; yet the eagerness of some blacks and mulattos to challenge traditional power relations would not be forgotten.

By the late 1840s, middle-class and elite Liberals took renewed notice of their Afro-Colombian neighbors' anxieties and desires. Elite Liberals in the Cauca were desperate for allies in their struggle against the Conservatives who had traditionally dominated the region's economy and politics (and were most of the largest slaveholders). Although the Liberals did count on the support of some powerful families, most of their ranks were made up of a few priests, shopkeepers, bureaucrats, lawyers, intellectuals, and smaller landowners.¹⁶ While Liberals and Conservatives shared a similar economic agenda (except concerning slavery and monopolies), they differed sharply on the role of the church and conceptions of citizenship.¹⁷ In the face of Conservative power, Liberals began to recruit subaltern allies to shore up their precarious situation in the Cauca, with an eye to both the ballot box and the battlefield. Thus, when Manuel María Alaix, a priest affiliated with the Liberal Party, urged President López to abolish slavery, he did not stress humanitarian or economic concerns but rather a political motivation: "The slaves that lose their chains bring to society gratitude for the government that has lifted the yoke off them. . . . The complete extinction of slavery is the magnum opus to which we must consecrate all of our efforts: 27,000 men that become citizens weigh something in the electoral balance."¹⁸

Liberals sought to mobilize the region's plebeians through three broad initiatives: public ceremonies (especially ceremonies of manumission), the national guard, and Democratic Societies. In the colonial period, the church, now allied with Conservatives, had organized most important public events; Liberals

15. See Escorcía, *Sociedad y economía*, 82–84; Castellanos, *La abolición*, 62; Rebecca Earle, "The War of the Supremes: Border Conflict, Religious Crusade, or Simply Politics by Other Means?" in *Rumours of Wars: Civil Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Latin America*, ed. Rebecca Earle (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2000), 119–34; and Fernán E. González González, *Para leer la política: Ensayos de historia política colombiana* (Bogotá: Cinep, 1997), 2:83–161.

16. Escorcía, *Sociedad y economía*, 111–16; J. León Helguera, "Antecedentes sociales de la revolución de 1851 en el sur de Colombia (1848–1849)," *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura* 5 (1970): 61.

17. Marco Palacios, *El café en Colombia, 1850–1970: Una historia económica, social y política*, 2nd ed. (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1983), 29.

18. M. M. Alaix to José H. López, Popayán, 26 Nov. 1850, AGN, SACH, FJHL, caja 4, carpeta 19, p. 1683.

sought to open up public space and turn the traditional power of public ceremonies to their advantage. On the one-year anniversary of López's presidential victory, Cauca's elite Liberals organized grand festivities that included artillery salutes, music, parades, religious ceremonies, and speeches. Plebeians also participated, especially if they were members of the national guard. The Liberal celebrations thus afforded subalterns a very public role in the social life of the city. Liberals took advantage of their audience, and the centerpiece of these ceremonies left no doubt about the Liberal program concerning the pueblo. In Cali and Buga, the festivals concluded with ceremonies of manumission, during which presumably Liberal masters freed their slaves.¹⁹

Although undoubtedly Afro-Colombians were not particularly impressed by the freeing of one or two slaves while the majority remained in bondage, the ceremonies did begin to reinforce the association between emancipation and the Liberal Party. As the *Juntas de Manumisión* (the institutions that oversaw slavery) gained more funds, they freed more slaves, often in a grand ceremony to ensure that Afro-Colombians knew who was responsible for their emancipation. One such spectacle in Cali began with speeches in the Democratic Society and culminated in the central plaza with an emancipation ceremony for 46 slaves. After music and cannon fire, three chosen slaves, each bearing a standard with "liberty," "equality," and "fraternity" emblazoned upon it, came forward to a table where the Junta de Manumisión presented them with certificates of freedom. As each new freedman left the table, Liberal women placed a garland of flowers on his or her head.²⁰ A similar public ceremony marked the

19. José Joaquín Carvajal to José Hilario López, Buga, 17 Mar. 1850, AGN, SACH, FJHL, caja 2, carpeta 3, p. 212; see also Annick Lempérière, "¿Nación moderna o república baroca? México, 1823–1857," in *Imaginar la nación*, ed. François-Xavier Guerra and Mónica Quijada (Münster: Lit, 1994); Margarita R. Pacheco G., *La fiesta liberal en Cali* (Cali: Ediciones Univ. del Valle, 1992), 106–11. For a description of another public ceremony, see Ramón Mercado, "Programa para el recibimiento del Benemérito Jeneral Lopez en esta Ciudad á su llegada á ella y al paso del Cauca" [1851], Archivo Histórico Municipal de Cali, Archivo del Concejo Municipal (hereafter cited as AHMC), tomo 114, p. 743.

20. Ramón Mercado, Narciso Riascos, Manuel Antonio Vernaza et al., "Programa Solemnidad del 2 de febrero de 1851 por la manumisión de 46 esclavos," AHMC, tomo 114, p. 478. The juntas had existed since the 1820s but had managed to free very few slaves over the subsequent decades. Harold A. Bierck Jr., "The Struggle for Abolition in Gran Colombia," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 33 (Aug. 1953): 377, 379–85. Marixa Lasso notes that in the 1820s, manumission ceremonies were designed to inculcate a sense of Colombian citizenship; I argue that by the 1850s, Liberals hoped to foster a sense of citizenship as well as fealty to the party. Marixa

manumission of 32 slaves in Popayán in October 1850. Afterwards, the *libertos* marched arm in arm with Liberal officials, shouting “vivas” to the government, while Conservatives looked on with disdain.²¹ Popayán, the center of the old colonial mining aristocracy and a stronghold of Conservatives and the church, was considered one of the most traditional cities in Colombia. Yet in this bastion of power, built with lucre from mines worked by slaves, whites marched alongside blacks through the town.

Liberals also utilized the national guard to disseminate their program. The trainees did not simply learn military lessons but also received, in the words of Liberal governor Ramón Mercado, “doctrinal exercises.”²² Many Afro-Colombians took advantage of this opportunity to gain some small amount of power (trainees often kept their weapons). After emancipation, Conservatives accused Liberals of “indiscriminately” signing up all freedmen into the militia.²³ The national guard was doubly important to Liberals as a means of political mobilization: first, it served as a conduit of political education, but more important, it acted as a way of organizing their supporters in the eventuality that politics extended to the battlefield. The national guard was also linked to the most important of Liberal initiatives, the Democratic Societies. Indeed, in order to join Cali’s Democratic Society, one also had to be a member of the guard.

These Democratic Societies provided the social space where elite and popular liberals began to form an alliance and share a common, public discourse. The clubs emerged from the 1848 elections, as Liberals adopted a more aggressive campaign style. Adherents of Liberal candidate José Hilario López spoke out about what he would do while in office: both generalities, such as progress

Lasso, “The Harmony of War: Official Discourses, Race War Rumors, and Grievances” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, Chicago, 2003).

21. Manuel José Castrillón to José Hilario López, Popayán, 22 Oct. 1850, AGN, SACH, FJHL, caja 4, carpeta 16, p. 1391; Manuel José Castrillón to Secretary of Foreign Relations, Popayán, 30 Oct. 1850, AGN, SR, Fondo Manumisión, tomo 1, p. 434.

22. Ramón Mercado, *Memorias sobre los acontecimientos del sur, especialmente en la provincia de Buenaventura, durante la administración del 7 de Marzo de 1849* (Cali: Centro de Estudios Históricos y Sociales “Santiago de Cali,” 1996 [1853]), xliii. Conservatives harshly criticized Mercado for politicizing the guard. *El Hombre* (Cali), 10 July 1852.

23. Ramón M. Orejuela to Tomás C. de Mosquera, Hacienda Rosalía, 3 Feb. 1853, ACC, SM, doc. 28,960.

and equality, and specifics, such as protecting access to the ejidos. An observer noted that López's adherents claimed their candidate would "break the chains with which the oligarchy has oppressed the pueblo."²⁴ This rhetoric could be interpreted in many ways by many people, but such language would have been of particular interest to slaves.

During the 1848 elections, Cali's Liberals founded a society to work for López's victory. Afterward, the young Liberals expanded the club's purpose, with an eye to creating a new society out of the colonial past that independence had not fully vanquished. To build this new Colombia they would first need to build new citizens, in order to break the powerful hold centuries of colonial repression had on the minds of the lower classes. They would teach Cali's poor about their program: about liberalism, republicanism, and democracy. They would make citizens of the masses.²⁵

They christened their club the Democratic Society of Cali (after a similar political club founded by artisans in Bogotá) and opened wide its doors, inviting one and all—by which, of course, they meant men. Perhaps to their surprise, and certainly to the surprise of outside observers, plebeians decided to attend. However, unlike in Bogotá, it was not just Cali's artisans but also the lower classes in general and workers from nearby haciendas who responded.²⁶ Ramón Mercado (a fiery orator and Cali's appointed governor) noted that the

24. Manuel Joaquín Bosch, *Reseña histórica de los principales acontecimientos políticos de la ciudad de Cali, desde el año de 1848 hasta el de 1855 inclusive* (Cali: Centro de Estudios Históricos y Sociales "Santiago de Cali," 1996 [1856]), 13–14.

25. Liberals were attempting to create a new political culture, as described by Lynn Hunt for revolutionary France; Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1984). See also Eduardo Posada-Carbó, "New Granada and the European Revolutions of 1848," in *The European Revolutions of 1848 and the Americas*, ed. Guy P. C. Thomson (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2002), 217–40.

26. This is an important distinction, since unlike Bogotá's more studied societies, Cali's was not mostly made up of artisans, as the size of the society alone demonstrates. At times it counted over one thousand members; Cali had nowhere near so many artisans. In the early 1850s, Cali Cantón counted only 19,277 people, of which only 1,160 were men "suitable to bear arms." Comisión Corográfica, "Descripción de la provincia de la Buenaventura," [early 1850s], BN, FM, tomo 397, p. 16. For membership numbers of the Democratic Society see *El Sentimiento Democrático* (Cali), 29 Nov. and 6 Dec. 1849. For the Bogotá clubs, see David Sowell, *The Early Colombian Labor Movement: Artisans and Politics in Bogotá, 1832–1919* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1992); and Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín, *Curso y discurso del movimiento plebeyo, 1849–1854* (Bogotá: Instituto de Estudios Políticos y Relaciones Internacionales; El Ancora, 1995).

Liberal Party was “composed almost exclusively of the scorned masses.”²⁷ Conservatives delighted in noting that the club and the party, if not a majority Afro-Colombian, certainly counted many blacks and mulattos as members.²⁸ Years later, another Conservative asserted that “blacks . . . are those that make up the democráticas [Democratic Societies] of Buga, Palmira, and Cali.”²⁹

The Liberals began a program of political education for the club’s members. Orators expounded on the problems of the day, and the literate read newspapers aloud.³⁰ Every week, middle-class and elite Liberals held courses on the meaning of the constitution, the nature of democracy, the laws concerning elections, and the rights and duties of citizens.³¹ Soon, lower- and middle-class members also rose to speak, exposing elite Liberals to popular concerns.³²

While Cali’s Democratic Society was the most active and powerful of the political clubs, Liberals began to found new associations throughout the Cauca, but especially in the valley. By 1851, Liberals had founded clubs in the valley towns of Buga, Candelaria, Cartago (with over 350 members), Cerrito, Florida, Guacarí, Palmira, Roldanillo, San Pedro (with over 160 members), and Toro.³³ Florida, Guacarí, and San Pedro were mere hamlets of fewer than three thou-

27. Mercado, *Memorias*, xxxi. Conservatives agreed with Mercado, describing the Democratic Society’s members as from the “most abject, ignorant, and miserable class”; *Ariete*, 23 Mar. 1850.

28. Julio Arboleda, “El Misóforo, Número Noveno—Popayán 27 de noviembre de 1850,” in *Prosa de Julio Arboleda: Jurídica, política, heterodoxa y literaria* (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1984), 347–348; *Ariete*, 3 Aug. 1850.

29. Manuel José González to Mariano Ospina, Cali, 21 Dec. 1859, BN, FM, tomo 210, p. 127.

30. *El Sentimiento Democrático*, 31 May 1849.

31. *El Sentimiento Democrático*, 3 May, 14 June, and 21 June 1849.

32. Bosch, *Reseña histórica*, 27, 48–51; M. E. Pedrosa, *Alcance a la reseña histórica* (Cali: Imprenta de Velasco, 1857), 5.

33. Ramón Martínez L. to José H. López, Buga, 24 Feb. 1850, AGN, SACH, FJHL, caja 2, carpeta 3, p. 189; Carlos Gómez to Secretary of Government (national), Buga, 15 Apr. 1851, AGN, SR, FGV, tomo 216, p. 481; Manuel Tor[rente] (page ripped) to José Hilario López, Cartago, 27 Mar. 1857, AGN, SACH, FJHL, caja 5, carpeta 6, p. 419; Carlos Gómez to Secretary of Government (national), Buga, 19 Apr. 1851, AGN, SR, FGV, tomo 216, p. 489; Carlos Gómez to Secretary of Government (national), Buga, 20 Apr. 1851, AGN, SR, FGV, tomo 216, p. 491; La Sociedad Democrática (over 160 names) to President of the Republic, San Pedro, 21 Mar. 1852, Archivo del Congreso, Bogotá (hereafter AC), 1852, Cámara, Proyectos de Ley Negados I, p. 47; and La Sociedad Democrática of Roldanillo to President of the Republic, Roldanillo, 30 Dec. 1853, AC, 1854, Cámara, Informes de Comisiones V, p. 68.

sand people, demonstrating that Liberals did not only seek alliance with the urban poor.³⁴ In the southern highlands, clubs held meetings in Popayán, Puracé, and Pasto.³⁵

The Democratic Societies also provided elites and plebeians with a public space in which to build a shared discourse out of popular and elite ideas concerning republicanism, democracy, and rights. Afro-Colombians had made important gains in the independence wars and subsequent civil conflicts, but Conservative intransigence had prevented them from claiming a place in the Cauca's political and public life. The Democratic Societies united, under a shared language of republicanism, Afro-Colombians desperate for change with Liberals searching for allies. However, these discursive and imaginative developments only provided the basic terrain upon which elite and popular Liberals negotiated their alliance. The main reason for the Liberals' success was their willingness to negotiate with their popular allies. Many of the concerns of elite Liberals—abolishing slavery, freeing industry from monopolies, and ending old forms of deference—coincided with those of the valley's poor.

In club meetings, Liberals made promises of what their administration would do and listened to members' concerns. Governor Mercado wrote to the president to report on the progress he had made in strengthening the Liberal Party and to assure him that the masses were still under control. He urged López to push Congress to pass several key reforms, stressing the need to abolish slavery, increase the importance of the national guard, end monopolies (especially over *aguardiente*), make the judiciary more fair, “strengthen the principle of equality,” and “procure land and industry for the poor classes.”³⁶ Mercado summed up the Liberal program to win over the popular liberal masses of the central valley, especially Afro-Colombians: *aguardiente*, land, emancipation, and social equality. Subsequently, national and provincial governments

34. The actual villages were even smaller, as less than three thousand people lived in the villages proper and in the immediately surrounding areas; Felipe Pérez, *Geografía física i política de los Estados Unidos de Colombia*, vol. 1 (Bogotá: Imprenta de la Nación, 1862), 381, 388.

35. Manuel María Ayala, President of the Democratic Society to the Provincial Governor, Popayán, 5 Mar. 1850, ACC, Archivo Muerto (hereafter cited as AM), paquete 49, leg. 76; José María Balcázar, President of the Liberal Society, to the Provincial Governor, Puracé, 3 June 1851, ACC, AM, paquete 51, leg. 67; Vicente Cárdenas to Sergio Arboleda, Pasto, 1 Nov. 1850, ACC, Fondo Arboleda (hereafter cited as FA), sig. 1505. Artisans did found their own liberal society in Popayán.

36. Ramón Mercado to José Hilario López, Cali, 25 Jan. 1851, AGN, SACH, FJHL, caja 5, carpeta 2, p. 142.

began to pass legislation concerning slavery, monopolies, taxes, and the role of the poor in society and politics in general.

The Democratic Societies did not just discuss these problems but also acted to secure political change. From the time of its founding, members of Cali's Democratic Society heatedly debated the aguardiente monopoly, which either forbade the poor from producing liquor or taxed them for that privilege.³⁷ Many of the valley's residents, especially poor women, engaged in small-scale aguardiente production and sale; liquor production was of great economic import to landless Afro-Colombians.³⁸ Five hundred of the club's members signed a petition demanding an end to the monopoly system. They complained not only that the tax hurt "the poor part of the nation" most but also that the violent methods used to enforce it—hired goons who burst into poor women's homes looking for clandestine stills—violated their "most sacred rights." The signatories suggested that new taxes should apply to "citizens in proportion to their fortune."³⁹ The club also called for full citizenship for its members (most of whom, landless or illiterate, were not legal citizens under the 1843 constitution) and pushed for progressive taxation. If petitions failed, plebeians violently resisted the monopolists by sacking warehouses or boycotting licensed stores.⁴⁰ Urged on by popular agitation, many of the coastal and valley provinces began to eliminate the tax, and the national government followed by terminating the hated tobacco monopoly.⁴¹ Along similar lines, Liberals ended many of the harshest statutes concerning vagrancy, which had forced freedmen to work for their old masters.⁴² The pueblo's desire to control

37. Ramón Bermudes and 13 partners to Senators and Representatives (national), Cali, 15 Apr. 1853, AC, 1853, Senado, Informes de Comisiones VI, p. 169.

38. The club particularly complained about how the liquor monopoly hurt "our women"; *El Sentimiento Democrático*, 12 July 1849.

39. Residents of Cali (over 500 names) to President and Members of the Provincial Legislature, Cali, 17 Sept. 1849, in *El Sentimiento Democrático*, 27 Sept. 1849. They wrote a similar petition in 1850; Sociedad Democrática de Cali (over 165 names) to Citizen Senators and Representatives (national), Cali, 9 Feb. 1850, AC, 1850, Senado, Peticiones IX, p. 13.

40. Bautista Feijoo, Jefe Político to Provincial Governor, Caloto, 6 May 1849, ACC, AM, paquete 47, leg. 84.

41. David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1993), 104–5; José Hilario López, *Mensaje del Presidente de la Nueva Granada al Congreso Constitucional de 1852* (Bogotá: Imprenta del Neo-Granadino, 1852), 1.

42. *Ordenanzas expedidas por la Cámara Provincial del Cauca en sus sesiones ordinarias de 1852* (n.p., n.d.), 12.

their own production and livelihoods coincided with the Liberals' goal of "freedom of industry."⁴³

Although these actions were important, the land question was even more significant to Cauca's poor subalterns. Their concerns centered on the common lands of Cali, which hacendados had begun to fence in and claim as their own private property. Although Cali's Democratic Society was generally supportive, progress on the question of these ejidos was slow.⁴⁴ By 1852, in spite of an agreement to resolve the problem, the measurement of Cali's ejidos had still not been completed, due to problems with the surveying.⁴⁵ An official warned that the city should do whatever necessary to resolve "such a hazardous question and thus avoid its becoming the apple of discord that will produce immense problems in the future and engender eternal hatreds."⁴⁶ Liberals knew that the ejidos were a problem, yet their ideological program of individual economic liberty had little to say about such an issue. Indeed, Liberals (especially at the national level) generally viewed ejidos as premodern communal landholdings, like Indians' resguardos, and sought to eliminate them.⁴⁷ Yet the topic obsessed popular liberals and was apparently under much discussion in the clubs. A Conservative noted that there was much talk among the "plebes" of "the possibility of taking over lands from the current property holders."⁴⁸ The liberal newspaper *El Pensamiento Popular* suggested that any practice that increased inequality was unjust, but anything that aspired "to divide between all men with more equality the common inheritance is divine."⁴⁹ Such language raised the hopes of popular lib-

43. *El Sentimiento Democrático*, 13 Sept. 1849.

44. *El Sentimiento Democrático*, 30 Aug. 1849.

45. "Diligencia relacionada con la convocatoria hecha por el Gobernador a algunos propietarios de terrenos, para arreglar el asunto de ejidos," Cali, 28 Mar. 1852, AHMC, tomo 119, p. 348 (much of this document is severely damaged); Omar Díaz Aparicio, *Los ejidos: Desde Alfonso el Sabio en Castilla hasta nuestros días en Cali* (Cali: Imprenta Departamental del Valle, 1992), 58; Gustavo Espinosa Jaramillo, *La saga de los ejidos: Crónica legal—siglos XIII al XX* (Cali: Univ. Santiago de Cali, 1997), 232–36.

46. Juan A. García to Members of the Cabildo, Cali, 4 Jan. 1852, AHMC, tomo 56, p. 278.

47. Luis Fernando López Garavito, *Historia de la hacienda y el tesoro en Colombia, 1821–1900* (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1992), 98.

48. Vicente [Arboleda] to Tomás C. de Mosquera, Popayán, 9 Jan. 1850, ACC, SM, doc. 27,357; see also *El Sentimiento Democrático*, 13 Sept., 30 Sept., and 29 Nov. 1849; Juan Aparicio to Tomás C. de Mosquera, Buga, 20 Dec. 1852, ACC, SM, doc. 28,643.

49. *El Pensamiento Popular* (Cali), 22 July 1852.

erals, but Liberal leaders had little chance of satisfying subaltern desires, even if that had been their goal. Land would always be the most contentious issue between elite and popular liberals, eventually rupturing the alliance between them. Yet in the early 1850s, in spite of this policy's complete variance with the Liberal philosophy of individual landholding, many of the valley's Liberals supported the continued existence of the commons. Popular concerns had forced them to adapt their philosophy in order to satisfy their lower-class allies.

Of course, before 1852, the most pressing concern of Afro-Colombians was not land but slavery. As final emancipation stalled in Congress during 1850 and early 1851, it was also the issue which gave elite Liberals the most concern, since it was the centerpiece of their program, both ideologically and as a means of securing alliances with the Afro-Colombians. Congress's failure to abolish human bondage and the increasing militancy of the valley's masses worried Liberals with ties to subaltern allies and those sympathetic to the slaves' plight. These men, such as Governor Mercado, fretted over their position as interlocutors with the pueblo. They had made certain promises, and the people seemed inclined to hold them to their word. Perhaps more importantly, many of the valley's subalterns were taking the matter into their own hands, violently attacking Conservatives and their property. Mercado and his friends needed something to reassure the masses that progress was being made and that the leaders had not betrayed their followers.

Mercado knew that the valley's residents were particularly anxious about abolition, as they had now been waiting three long years for the Liberal government to act.⁵⁰ Officials did their best to reassure Afro-Colombians. The popular José María Obando, the rebel leader in the earlier War of the Supremes that had developed some antislavery aspects, spoke in Buga during that town's anniversary celebration of the Liberals' ascent to power. A Conservative newspaper mocked the plebeian welcome, noting that "at the entrance to the city a great number of blacks and vagrants" awaited him. The paper sneered that "a loathsome and despicable black woman named la Maravilla" hugged him upon his arrival and further insinuated that la Maravilla entered Obando's lodging that night. Obando promised the assembly that he was working so that the current Congress would finally abolish slavery.⁵¹ President López himself urged Congress to act in March 1851, noting that slaves "craved the liberty so many times sensed in the republican atmosphere."⁵²

50. Mercado, *Memorias*, xxxi.

51. *El Clamor Nacional* (Popayán), 22 Mar. 1851.

52. José Hilario López, "Mensaje del Presidente de la Nueva Granada al Congreso Constitucional de 1851," Bogotá, 1 Mar. 1851, AC, 1851, Cámara, *Memorias de los Secretarios del Despacho Ejecutivo* IV, 97.

The Liberal program was conscious and premeditated, and the party's plan to ally with the lower classes was not simply the whim of a few middle-class radicals. Although Liberals hoped to unite a substantial section of the poor behind them, they arrogantly viewed Indians as too barbarous and religious for an alliance, and many poor mestizos had close clientalist ties to Conservatives.⁵³ Afro-Colombians, however, already disdained Conservatives, as most (but certainly not all) of the great slaveowners were affiliated with that party. Thus, while Liberals attracted many poor white and mestizo adherents, Afro-Colombians especially embraced and championed popular liberalism. As Alaix's desire to secure 27,000 loyal voters revealed, Liberals thought if they could take credit for ending slavery, they could secure a large number of allies for future electoral or military struggles.

Afro-Colombians did not just passively respond to such entreaties but rather made the Democratic Societies their own and pressured Liberals to act. Elite Liberals could not fully control the political space they had opened. Their popular allies were not content to wait for legislative changes but, rather, seized the initiative to act on their own. They not only encouraged Liberal leaders to enact legal abolition but also challenged social and political subordination to the old master class and pushed for land redistribution and citizenship rights. Conservatives bitterly commented on the decline of respect showed to them by their social inferiors, complaining that plebeians openly insulted them in Cali's streets.⁵⁴ Crowds regularly marched through Cali and other towns at night, shouting "vivas" to Liberals and insulting Conservatives.⁵⁵

Popular liberals' bold aims soon grew beyond insults and shouts. With Liberals now in control of much of the state, popular supporters struck back against the Conservative land- and slaveholding class in an eruption of popular violence known as the *zurriago* or *perrero*. The *zurriago* began with the destruction of fences on Cali's ejidos, in which as many as one thousand men and women may have participated.⁵⁶ Soon the movement spread to include attacks

53. James Sanders, "Belonging to the Great Granadan Family: Partisan Struggle and the Construction of Indigenous Identity and Politics in Southwestern Colombia, 1849–1890," in *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*, ed. Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2003), 56–86.

54. J. A. Mallarino to Tomás C. de Mosquera, Cali, 7 Dec. 1850, ACC, SM, doc. 27,613; *La Opinión* (Cali), 1 Dec. 1848; Manuel [Luna] to Sergio Arboleda, Popayán, 18 Jan. 1854, ACC, FA, sig. 1518.

55. *Ariete*, 27 Apr. 1850.

56. Mercado, *Memorias*, lviii; *El Clamor Nacional*, 8 Feb. 1851.

on Conservatives and their property throughout the valley. Bands of men, often assumed to be slaves or ex-slaves, burned haciendas, tore down fences, and assaulted prominent Conservatives and their families, turning upon their former masters the hated symbol of slavery: the whip.⁵⁷ The hacendado Ramón Orejuela bitterly cried, “We are in the epoch of terror, and our throats are threatened with our slaves’ knives.”⁵⁸

What is surprising about the zurriago is not Conservatives’ horror or their pronouncements that a race war was nigh, but rather the Liberal response. Of course, many Liberals denied having any link with the *perreristas*, referring to their actions as simply a problem of crime that had no connection with liberalism.⁵⁹ Others, however, defended the *perreristas*, framing their attacks as just retribution for centuries of Conservatives’ abuses under slavery.⁶⁰ Of course, Liberals did seek to rein in the excesses of the zurriago, but they generally did this not by cracking down on the instigators but rather by seeking to redress many of their concerns. Bargaining did not just involve laws or policy but also accepting extralegal actions of allies who could not be completely controlled.

Conservatives feared not just the zurriago but also the Liberals’ unseemly politicking with the lower classes.⁶¹ In Popayán, Conservatives bemoaned how Liberals worked “to pervert the people of the pueblo” by showing concern and attempting to mollify the masses.⁶² Referring to the Democratic Societies, Julio Arboleda wrote to his relative, ex-president Tomás Mosquera, expressing his bitterness about the new situation—“the spirit of the mob”—in which, in his mind,

57. José Joaquín Carvajal to José Hilario López, Buga, 8 Nov. 1849, AGN, SACH, FJHL, caja 1bis, carpeta 11, p. 551; Bosch, *Reseña histórica*, 35; Jefe Político of Cali to the Cali Parish Alcalde, Cali, 17 Dec. 1850, AHMC, tomo 138, p. 185; some miserable people to Tomás C. de Mosquera, Cali, 9 Aug. 1851, ACC, SM, doc. 28,252; Pacheco, *La fiesta liberal en Cali*, 141–61.

58. Ramón M. Orejuela to Tomás C. de Mosquera, Hacienda Rosalía, 1 Aug. 1851, ACC, SM, doc. 28,148.

59. La Sociedad Democrática de Cali, *Mentir con descaro* (Cali: Imprenta de Velasco, 1851), 1; Antonio Matéus, “Informe que da el ciudadano Antonio Matéus á la jefatura política, sobre la correría que se le ordenó hacer por ella á las parroquias de Florida, Candelaria i sitio del Belo,” Palmira, 30 Mar. 1851, AGN, SR, FGV, tomo 216, p. 484; Mercado, *Memorias*, lv–lvii, lxxvii.

60. *Observaciones para servir a la historia de la administración del 7 de marzo . . .* (Bogotá: Imprenta del Neo-Granadino, 1851), 1; R. Mercado to Secretary of Government (national), Cali, 24 Jan. 1851, AGN, SR, FGV, tomo 165, p. 799.

61. *El Ciudadano* (Popayán), 3 June and 17 June 1848.

62. Vicente Cárdenas to T. C. de Mosquera, Popayán, 10 Jan. 1849, ACC, SM, doc. 26,470; *El Clamor Nacional*, 19 Apr. 1851; *Ariete*, 10 Aug. 1850.

the two of them would never participate.⁶³ He acknowledged Liberal success but ridiculed popular liberals as “barbarians,” “criminals,” and “blacks that run around armed through the streets of Cali.”⁶⁴ The cleric Alaix defended the Liberals’ plebeian allies, while issuing a prescient warning to Conservatives about their increasingly open plans to test Liberals in armed struggle. Responding to Arboleda’s slurs, Alaix wrote, “Those manumitted blacks, those ignorant men, are the best national guards that the Republic counts as members, because they will not flee on the day of danger.”⁶⁵ The following year would prove Alaix correct.

Wars and Elections

With abolition apparently nigh and popular liberals’ insolence and attacks intolerable, Conservatives revolted. They had high hopes, given the elite support they enjoyed throughout the region and their dominance of Caucaño politics and society since independence. However, they were sorely disappointed. The reaction of the valley’s plebeians was amazing, even to the most dedicated Liberals.⁶⁶ Popular liberals rallied to their party’s standard with a zeal that shocked most observers in the valley.

Liberals made sure that their popular allies knew the Conservative rebels’ designs: namely, to roll back all the gains of the past few years. The newspaper of Cali’s Democratic Society claimed that Conservative rebels wanted to eliminate plebeians from politics and ensure that tobacco and aguardiente remained monopolies. They added that all the rebels were slaveholders.⁶⁷ Provincial governor J. N. Montero noted that “the blacks knew that the revolution had, in part, the object of impeding their liberty, and they let it be known that they were ready at any moment to go and fight for their freedom and that of their children.”⁶⁸ He added that blacks along the coast offered

63. Julio Arboleda to T. C. de Mosquera, Popayán, 7 Jan. 1849, ACC, SM, doc. 26,383.

64. Arboleda, “El Misóforo,” 347–48, 358.

65. M. M. Alaix, *No sin desconfianza en mis propias fuerzas me propongo refutar la carta que el señor Julio Arboleda ha publicado en el número 9.º de “El Misóforo”* [no title listed, this is first line of the text] (Popayán: no press listed, 1850), 54.

66. Mercado, *Memorias*, xcv.

67. *Boletín Democrático* (Cali), 12 July 1851. President López made similar claims in a speech around the same time, citing all the achievements of his reign, including abolition. José Hilario López, *Proclama. El Presidente de la República a sus conciudadanos* (Bogotá: Imprenta del Neo-Granadino, 1851); *El Pueblo* (Popayán), 1 Sept. 1850.

68. J. N. Montero to Secretary of Government (national), Barbaçoas, 10 May 1852, AGN, SR, FGV, tomo 179, p. 243.

money and supplies to support the troops fighting the Conservatives in Pasto and Obando Provinces.⁶⁹

Liberal volunteers quickly assembled as rumors of the revolt spread. When the call went out to defend the government, the response was quick: two thousand men assembled in Cali, six hundred in Palmira, five hundred in Santander, and two hundred in Celandia.⁷⁰ The areas where Afro-Colombians lived—areas where the zurriago had raged and where Liberals' promises regarding the ending of slavery, monopolies, and traditional power relations held the most appeal—provided the most volunteers. Mercado noted that the “Democratic Societies serve as the base for the organization of the national guards.”⁷¹ Liberal armies easily defeated the rebels and then sent soldiers north to put down the revolt in the neighboring region of Antioquia.⁷² Even Conservatives had to acknowledge the Liberals' success at securing popular support; one diarist noted that the government could rely “on the proletarian classes that it has perverted.”⁷³

Congress finally passed the law that would end slavery on 1 January 1852 (the children of slaves were released from their masters' control on 17 April 1852), which sealed the bargain between their party and Afro-Colombians.⁷⁴ Liberals did not risk subtlety when they informed the freedpeople to whom they owed thanks for their liberty. At a ceremony in Almaguer, a local official noted that “there could not be a true Republic where slavery exists.” He went on to ask the crowd, “Who is it that made you equal before the law? The government, the democratic government of Nueva Granada.”⁷⁵ In Barbacoas, thousands gathered for a ceremony of mass emancipation. Governor Montero told those assembled that they owed their respect to the “citizen general José Hilario López who had fought so tenaciously and with such dedication to

69. *Ibid.*; J. N. Montero to Secretary of Foreign Relations, Barbacoas, 7 Jan. 1852, AGN, SR, FGV, tomo 179, p. 171.

70. *El Hurón* (Popayán), 1 May 1851; Mercado, *Memorias*, lxxi; Manuel A. Tello to Provincial Governor, Quilichao, 27 Apr. 1851, ACC, AM, paquete 50, leg. 50.

71. Mercado, *Memorias*, lxxiii; see also Carlos Gómez to Secretary of Government (national), Buga, 20 Apr. 1851, AGN, SR, FGV, tomo 216, p. 491.

72. *Boletín Democrático*, 18 July 1851; Mercado, *Memorias*, lxxxvi–ix; Bosch, *Reseña histórica*, 43–44.

73. Anonymous, “Diario de la guerra de 1851,” ACC, FA, sig. 988.

74. López, *Proclama*, 1; J. N. Montero to Secretary of Foreign Relations, Barbacoas, 22 June 1852, AGN, SR, FGV, tomo 179, p. 159.

75. Vicente Camilo Fontal to Co-Citizens, Almaguer, 1 Jan. 1852, ACC, AM, paquete 53, leg. 77.

assure for them their liberty and to return to them their rights as free men.” Montero continued, “A prolonged shout, as if with one voice, propelled through the air by a gathering of around three thousand souls, proved very well how deeply the sentiment of gratitude has been established in all hearts and how one finds everyone disposed to the defense and sustenance of the government under whose regime they obtained the long-dreamed-of good of liberty.” The ceremony ended with “vivas” to liberty, the president, and the governor.⁷⁶

Afro-Colombians did acknowledge the role of the Liberals in emancipation. Some ex-slaves and their relatives wrote to President López to ask for a pardon for Montero when he was tried for abuses of office during his term. They noted how Montero had supported them and, when they were still slaves, used the law to protect them when he could—to the point of poisoning his relations with “our masters.” They claimed that he always supported the “poor and helpless in defense of their rights.” However, they opened their letter with a powerful appeal to López (and to Liberals in general): “You have worked arduously, and due to your efforts the most degraded part of society, that today represents itself to you, has obtained the possession of liberty that we now enjoy. Your name, now sacred for us, will pass into posterity blessed and pronounced by the tender lips of our children as the benefactor of their parents.”⁷⁷ Later, even Conservatives would acknowledge that many Caucanos fought in the 1851 war to ensure slavery would end.⁷⁸ Indeed, perhaps one way to view Afro-Colombians’ participation in the zurriago and the 1851 civil war is as a successful slave revolt. Although we may not be able to recover their true mindset, it is evident that the popular project to end slavery existed within the framework of the negotiated alliance between elite and popular liberals.⁷⁹

76. J. N. Montero to Secretary of Foreign Relations, Barbacoas, 7 Jan. 1852, AGN, SR, FGV, tomo 179, p. 171.

77. The undersigned, in the majority ex-slaves and residents of the cantón [over five hundred names, all but a few signed for by others] to Citizen President of the Republic, Barbacoas, 6 Nov. 1852, AGN, SR, FGV, tomo 179, p. 341.

78. *El Cauca* (Cali), 19 Nov. 1857; José H. López, “Mensaje del Presidente de la Nueva Granada al Congreso Constitucional de 1852,” Bogotá, 1 Mar. 1852, AC, 1852, Cámara, Correspondencia Oficial II, p. 132.

79. There is an important tension in subaltern studies between finding better ways to access subaltern histories and the recognition of the limits of such scholarship. This question seems most concerned with “private” subaltern consciousness. However, I offer that it is of equal historical import what subalterns actually said and did in the public sphere. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

This bond between popular and elite liberalism, forged in the struggle for abolition, would endure until the 1870s. Popular liberals also pushed for suffrage and legal recognition of their citizenship rights, although they had already asserted their de facto standing as citizens.⁸⁰ Liberals removed property and literacy restrictions on male suffrage in 1853, hoping (as expressed by the priest Alaix) to capitalize on their alliance with the popular classes. Afro-Caucanos regularly exercised their right to vote (which was striking when compared with many parts of the Atlantic World at this time) in the coming decades.⁸¹ Popular liberals also assembled on election days to protect their comrades from intimidation and fraud, to taunt Conservatives, to cheer their candidates, and generally to enjoy the holiday.⁸² Conservatives claimed that blacks and mulattos voted multiple times, since the elections officers could not tell them apart; one Conservative ruefully commented that his party lost an election due to “1,600 black votes.”⁸³

However, although unrestricted adult male suffrage benefited Liberals in the long run, in the short run the party experienced a severe crisis. They began to suffer electoral defeats due to their unpopularity among many segments of the lower classes, especially smallholders and Indians. A new, confusing civil war in 1854 cost them their hold on national and regional power. Some scholars imply that liberalism lost its (short-lived) popular focus after 1854, when an unusual military coup by a group of Liberals against their own government in Bogotá divided the party. One wing sided with the Conservatives, who retook national power. Supposedly, these Liberals supported the Conservative reaction out of fear of popular radicalism.⁸⁴ Certainly, in the Cauca, Conservative

80. Over two hundred residents of Cali to Members of the Electoral Junta, Cali, 14 May 1848, AHMC, tomo 101, p. 681; We the undersigned, residents of Cali to President and Members of the Town Council, Cali, 1 Dec. 1851, AHMC, tomo 113, p. 496.

81. José M. Correa to Tomás C. de Mosquera, Roldanillo, 9 Apr. 1859, ACC, SM, doc. 36,291; Pedro José Piedrahíta to T. C. de Mosquera, Cali, 26 Feb. 1859, ACC, SM, doc. 36,921; José Tello to Provincial Governor, Almaguer, 11 Oct. 1853, ACC, AM, paquete 55, leg. 94; Tomás M. Mosquera to Tomás C. de Mosquera, Buenosaires, 17 Feb. 1859, ACC, SM, doc. 36,666; *El Demócrata: Organo del Partido Liberal Independiente* (Palmira), 13 Mar. 1879.

82. Rafael Prado Concha to Sergio Arboleda, Palmira, 5 Nov. 1871, ACC, FA, sig. 1523; *Los Principios* (Cali), 12 Nov. 1875.

83. Pedro José Piedrahíta to T. C. de Mosquera, Cali, 12 Mar. 1859, ACC, SM, doc. 36,922.

84. This may well have been the case in Bogotá, but the implicit suggestion in various works is that a similar explanation holds for all of Colombia. Pacheco, *La*

armies took advantage of this situational alliance with Liberals opposed to the coup in order to reassert their social mastery over the region. They engaged in a vicious slaughter to exact revenge for the zurriago and their defeat in 1851 and tried to restore the pre-1848 exclusion of Afro-Colombians from public politics. A Conservative army took control of the valley, brutally persecuting and killing hundreds of popular liberals, especially the Afro-Colombians seen as responsible for the zurriago.⁸⁵ As one Conservative wrote to Sergio Arboleda, “I do not regret the disorder in the Cauca, because it is only thus that this poor country can be cleaned so that it will be inhabitable in the future.”⁸⁶ Unlike in early-twentieth-century Cuba, Conservatives did not compete with Liberals for black and mulatto support. Rather, they violently sought to restrict Afro-Colombians from public life.⁸⁷

But there is little evidence that most elite Liberals in the Cauca were reacting against popular participation in politics. On the whole, most Caucaño Liberals seemed confused and ill informed about events in distant Bogotá. Many supported the elected Liberal government against the coup, even if that meant aligning with Conservatives. Others supported the coup, especially after Conservatives rose up against it. Popular liberals, on the whole, were as confused as their elite allies, unsure of what side to support (although when a Conservative army moved on Cali, many Afro-Colombians mobilized to defend the city, which Conservatives used to justify their persecutions).⁸⁸ When many Liberals realized that Conservatives had used the revolt to retake control of local politics and attack popular liberals, they angrily expressed regret and frustration with the outcome of the war.⁸⁹ Elite liberals tried their best to restrict

fiesta liberal en Cali, 170–91; Fabio Zambrano, “Algunas formas de sociabilidad en la Nueva Granada, 1780–1860” (unpublished ms.), 164–74; Gutiérrez Sanín, *Curso y discurso*; Hans-Joachim König, *En el camino hacia la nación: Nacionalismo en el proceso de formación del estado y de la nación de la Nueva Granada, 1750 a 1856* (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1994), 493–502; Safford and Palacios, *Colombia*, 208–15.

85. José M. Cañadas to José Hilario López, Cali, 25 Sept. 1854, AGN, SACH, FJHL, caja 9, carpeta 7, p. 172; Rafael Guzmán to José Hilario López, Pasto, 22 Oct. 1854, AGN, SACH, FJHL, caja 9, carpeta 8, p. 260; Safford and Palacios, *Colombia*, 212–14.

86. Vicente Cárdenas to Sergio Arboleda, Pasto, 31 Aug. 1854, ACC, FA, sig. 1505.

87. Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2001), 60–66.

88. José J. Lemos to Provincial Governor, Silvia, 30 May 1854, ACC, AM, paquete 75, leg. 84.

89. José de Obaldía to José Hilario López, Ibagué, 18 Oct. 1854, AGN, SACH, FJHL, caja 9, carpeta 8, p. 249; *La Unión* (Popayán), 7 Feb. 1864.

Conservatives' depredations, but with their party divided, there was little they could do. Conservatives, however, soon found themselves on the defensive once again. Afro-Colombian rebels roamed the countryside, preventing a return to the order that Conservatives sought. Popular liberalism was not forgotten on the haciendas, where Conservatives, even with resort to judicial authority and extrajudicial violence, found it almost impossible to control the ex-slave labor force.⁹⁰

The cruelest blow to Conservative pretensions came from one of their own—ex-president Tomás Mosquera, now head of the state government. The ambitious Mosquera wished to place himself back in the presidential office controlled by Conservative Mariano Ospina. He sought to gather regional support for his efforts in the Cauca, but most Conservatives did not look kindly at a revolt against their own party. Mosquera, however, was not deterred. He bolted from the Conservatives, creating his new “National Party,” and began to court the Cauca’s popular classes, including popular liberals (although his early efforts, as expressed by Juan Aparicio’s lament, were unsuccessful). Mosquera made these overtures by removing harsh vagrancy laws, put in place after 1854 by triumphant Conservatives, and promised to secure Cali’s ejidos for use by the poor.⁹¹ In Buga, Cali, and Palmira, popular liberalism arose anew, and Conservatives worried that the “democráticas” had returned. Although it seems the clubs were not officially reestablished under that moniker, meetings were taking place in Cali, Palmira, Buga, and Popayán, and old connections were being reformed.⁹² Conservatives fretted that Liberals had formed “latent democráticas organized with the title republican juntas” in all the towns of any size in the Cauca.⁹³ In Cartago, Conservatives had organized a society to work

90. Hacendados endlessly complained about the lack of discipline of their labor force. See Sergio Arboleda, “Observaciones á la cuenta formada por los Sres. Rafael y Daniel Arboleda,” Bogotá, 30 Aug. 1878, ACC, FA, sig. 15, p. 1; Sergio Arboleda, “Instrucciones al Señor Trinidad Gómez para el manejo de la hacienda Quintero,” Japio, 4 Sept. 1857, ACC, FA, sig. 140, p. 7.

91. T. C. de Mosquera to President of the Senate, Popayán, 2 Sept. 1859, ACC, AM, paquete 74, leg. 56; *Gaceta del Cauca* (Popayán), 6 Sept. 1859; T. C. de Mosquera, “Mensaje del Gobernador del Estado a la Lejislatura de 1859,” Popayán, 11 Aug. 1859, ACC, AM, paquete 74, leg. 48.

92. Pedro Antonio Martínez Cuellar to Mariano Ospina, Buga, 27 June 1859, BN, FM, libro 210, p. 32; José V. López to Mariano Ospina, Cali, 3 June 1859, BN, FM, libro 210, p. 132.

93. José M. Chicaíza to Mariano Ospina, Pasto, 7 June 1859, BN, FM, libro 322, p. 374.

in the recent elections; Liberals responded with their own club, which one Conservative claimed was made up almost entirely of “blacks” to whom the Liberals had distributed weapons.⁹⁴ By July 1859, the Democratic Society in Cali had officially reorganized.⁹⁵ Thus, the loss in the 1854 war was not a fundamental break in Caucaño Liberals’ relation to the lower classes but, rather, a temporary (if bloody) setback. Liberals, now led by Mosquera, were ready to bargain with their popular allies again.

While Mosquera schemed and studied the chances of a revolt against Ospina, he received an extraordinary petition from Cali. Over 750 men signed or made their mark, asking that Mosquera assign Cali’s provincial governorship to a young professor named David Peña. Peña was a Liberal firebrand who was well known for his oratory, immensely popular with Cali’s lower classes, and most likely a mulatto. Peña, the petition argued, would enjoy great support and be able to carry out “the ideas of progress and of social welfare,” which was probably understood as dealing with taxes and land distribution. The petitioners made an offer to Mosquera: “We will accompany him [Peña] in danger, and when you, Citizen Governor, need the residents of Cali province, you will find more than two thousand soldiers resolved to sacrifice themselves in defense of the State.”⁹⁶ Mosquera named Peña the current governor’s designated substitute and moved himself further into the Liberal fold and a curious alliance with the popular classes, who had promised to provide him troops in his planned rebellion.

Mosquera entered into revolt in 1860, and as they had in 1851, Afro-Colombians flocked to the Liberal banner, led by the recomposed Democratic Societies.⁹⁷ The 1860–63 war was long and bloody, much different from the previous two civil wars. But at least at the beginning, Afro-Colombians were eager participants. Conservatives complained that Liberals enticed troops to join their ranks by promising to allow looting of Conservative haciendas and farms—a rich possibility given popular liberals’ desire to break the haciendas’

94. J. M. Bustamante to Mariano Ospina, Cartago, 15 Sept. 1859, BN, FM, libro 210, p. 97.

95. David Peña, President of the Democratic Society to State Governor, Cali, 19 July 1859, ACC, SM, doc. 36,899.

96. Residents of Cali Province [over 750 names, many signed for by others] to Governor of the State, Cali, 30 July 1859, ACC, AM, paquete 71, leg. 15.

97. “Diario Histórico del Ejército Unido de Antioquia y Cauca,” ACC, FA, sig. 63, p. 235; Manuel José González to Sergio Arboleda, Cali, 11 Mar. 1862, ACC, FA, sig. 437, p. 1; Daniel Mosquera to Provincial Governor, Tambo, 18 Aug. 1861, ACC, AM, paquete 82, leg. 27.

control over land. During the war, Federalists (Liberals) expropriated the mammoth haciendas of the Conservative Arboledas, Japio and Quintero. Sergio Arboleda claimed that some Liberals planned “to distribute them by lots between the members of the army that had served in certain campaigns.”⁹⁸ Perhaps it is needless to say that this massive and radical land redistribution program was not carried out, but at least some Liberals had proposed it.

Their victory in the 1860–63 civil war heralded almost two decades of Liberal rule in the Cauca, during which the party relied on its lower-class allies for electoral and military support.⁹⁹ Conservatives tried to revolt again in 1865 but were handily defeated. An even more prolonged and sanguinary war erupted in 1876, but once again the Democratic Societies rose to defend the Liberal Party from Conservative rebellion.¹⁰⁰ Liberals remained in control not just on the battlefield but also at the ballot box. Liberals dominated local elections, sometimes through fraud, but also with the support of many Afro-Colombians on election day.¹⁰¹ Conservatives complained that with “universal suffrage” the intelligent and propertied classes were losing to the “democratic masses.”¹⁰²

98. *El Espectador: Dios, Religión i Libertad* (Pasto), 10 Apr. 1862; rough draft of a letter to the national congress, [Sergio Arboleda], [mid-1860s?], ACC, FA, sig. 180, p. 4.

99. While the alliance between popular and elite liberals was strong in the central valley, it withered along the coast. Partly this was due to the lack of a committed Liberal leadership; after the popular governor J. N. Montero left, no other leader emerged to mobilize Afro-Colombians. The remaining Liberals were too tied to the old mine-owning class and too much concerned with securing labor and maintaining order to negotiate with Afro-Colombians. Unlike in the Cauca Valley, Afro-Colombians did not need these Liberals; they had abundant land in the rain forests and felt little pressure from the powerful, be it for taxes, labor, or deference. Elite Liberals, also concerned with disciplining a now radically independent labor force, feared or detested their black neighbors. At least on the coast, racism and racial fears broke down the alliance that would endure inland. Governor of Atrato Province to Secretary of the Treasury, Quibdó, 1 Mar. 1859, ACC, AM, paquete 73, leg. 39; *Gaceta Oficial del Cauca* (Popayán), 27 Apr. 1867; *El Atratense* (Quibdó), 9 Sept. and 26 Oct. 1880. See also Claudia Leal, “Natural Treasures and Racial Tensions: The Pacific Lowlands of Colombia at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century, 1880–1930” (paper presented at the meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, Dallas, 2003).

100. In Cali, eight hundred men from the Democratic Society quickly volunteered. Rafael [Arboleda] to T. C. de Mosquera, Popayán, 14 June 1876, ACC, SM, doc. 56,924.

101. *El Pensamiento Popular*, 1 July 1852; José Tello to Provincial Governor, Almaguer, 11 Oct. 1853, ACC, AM, paquete 55, leg. 94.

Consternated Conservatives blamed their failures on the votes of “manumitted blacks” led by “one or two somewhat civilized mulattos.”¹⁰³ When the new 1863 national constitution gave the states the responsibility of defining suffrage rights, the Cauca’s Liberals retained unrestricted male suffrage.¹⁰⁴

Popular liberals’ political participation went beyond the duties of soldiering and voting. Afro-Colombians’ repertoire of politics during this period was extensive and innovative.¹⁰⁵ They did not just cast ballots but also engaged in electioneering; afterward, they sat in the galleries of local and state legislatures to remind legislators of their debt to the popular electorate. They participated in boycotts and strikes, and at times they physically attacked their enemies or their enemies’ property. They petitioned government officials, asking for certain policies or favors or simply expressing their approval. They marched in demonstrations. In short, Afro-Caucanos continually and constantly made their presence felt in the region’s political life.¹⁰⁶

During this time (as Nancy Appelbaum has shown), the Cauca became notorious throughout Colombia as a place of disorder and near anarchy, with impudent workers and armed and dangerous soldiers.¹⁰⁷ During the 1860–63 civil war, black Caucaño army officer Manuel María Victoria began to organize Afro-Panamanians into a Democratic Society; his superiors quickly returned him to the Cauca.¹⁰⁸ In 1865, the Panamá state government refused to allow Caucaño troops to return home by way of the isthmus, presumably for fear that

102. Pedro José Piedrahíta to T. C. de Mosquera, Cali, 12 Mar. 1859, ACC, SM, doc. 36,922.

103. Pedro José Piedrahíta to T. C. de Mosquera, Cali, 26 Feb. 1859, ACC, SM, doc. 36,921.

104. *Constitución política del Estado Soberano de Cauca, espedita el 16 de septiembre de 1863* (Bogotá: Imprenta de la Nación, 1865).

105. The Afro-Caucanos’ political repertoire matched new nineteenth-century repertoires in European social movements; Charles Tilly, “Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758–1834,” *Social Science History* 17 (Summer 1993), 253–80.

106. For voting, petitions, boycotts, violence, and demonstrations, see previously cited material. For the strike, see below. For sitting in the galleries, see C. Conto to Aquileo Parra, Popayán, 7 Aug. 1877, Biblioteca Luis Angel Arango, Bogotá, Sala de Manuscritos, ms. 295; Bosch, *Reseña histórica*, 50.

107. Nancy Appelbaum, “Whitening the Region: Caucaño Mediation and ‘Antioqueño Colonization’ in Nineteenth-Century Colombia,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 79 (Nov. 1999): 636–45.

108. Gustavo Arboleda, *Diccionario biográfico y genealógico del antiguo Departamento del Cauca* (Bogotá: Biblioteca Horizontes, 1962 [1910]), 474.

they would politically contaminate the local populace.¹⁰⁹ The success of popular claimsmaking in the Cauca, especially by blacks and mulattos, frightened elites in the rest of Colombia and Conservatives in the Cauca. Afro-Colombians were so important to Liberals that Conservatives portrayed the party as predominantly “black.” A Conservative, describing Liberal troops in the 1860–63 civil war, wrote, “[T]he greatest part of that army is made up of blacks, zambos, and mulattos, assassins and thieves of the Cauca Valley.”¹¹⁰ I would hypothesize that not all of the “blacks” that made up popular liberals were people of African descent. Popular liberalism became encoded black, at least for Conservatives, and anyone, especially the mestizo poor, who associated with popular liberalism also became, to some extent, “black.” Liberal armies had many mestizos and whites too, but—like popular liberalism—they became “black,” due to the heavy Afro-Colombian participation in the ranks. This identification could even extend to middle-class leaders like David Peña, who was probably mulatto and possibly white. In a sense it does not matter, as many thought of him as black due to his popularity among Afro-Colombians.¹¹¹

Afro-Caucanos’ extensive, multifaceted political repertoire and their bargaining with the Liberal Party do not seem to fit easily with the caudillo or patron-client models of nineteenth-century politics. Popular liberals did not ally with the Liberal Party because of any one charismatic leader or “culture hero.” Nor was the union “held together by the bond of patron and client”; indeed, in the Cauca tenants often opposed their hacendados.¹¹² Popular liberals sided with

109. Benjamín Núñez to Secretary of Government, Cali, 6 Dec. 1865, ACC, AM, paquete 65, leg. 67.

110. “Diario Histórico del Ejército Unido de Antioquia y Cauca,” ACC, FA, sig. 63,235; see also *El Espectador*, 2 Oct. [1862].

111. In a private letter to Tomás Mosquera, Peña was described as a “belonging to the African race, a mulatto *claro*.” Pedro José Piedrahíta to T. C. de Mosquera, Cali, 14 May 1859, ACC, SM, doc. 36,933. The liberal governor Ramón Mercado, probably white, has also been described as a mulatto. See Escorcia, *Sociedad y economía*, 89. Conservatives at times described all Liberals as acting like “blacks”; see Alfonso [Arboleda] to Sergio Arboleda, Popayán, 20 Aug. 1879, ACC, FA, sig. 447, p. 59.

112. “Culture hero” from John Charles Chasteen, *Heroes on Horseback: The Life and Times of the Last Gaucho Caudillos* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1995), 4. Patron-client quotation from John Lynch, *Caudillos in Spanish America, 1800–1850* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 4–5. See also Hugh M. Hamill, ed., *Caudillos: Dictators in Spanish America* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1992). For a very nuanced presentation of caudillismo that stresses patron-client bonds, material motivations, emotional ties, but also party identification, see Ariel de la Fuente, *Children of Facundo: Caudillo and Gaucho Insurgency during the Argentine State-Formation*

elite Liberals because they saw in that alliance their best chance to further their political, economic, and social ambitions. Popular liberals allied not with individuals (as in the caudillo or patron-client model) but with the party and its ideas, and this alliance was merely mediated, and not embodied, by leaders such as David Peña. Liberal leaders could not just command support, and popular liberals did not blindly offer their services or only march to war as cannon fodder.¹¹³ While John Lynch notes that caudillos relied on “personal influence and timely intimidation,” Cauca Liberals had to negotiate for military and electoral support, offering concessions on slavery, land, monopolies, suffrage rights, and, most important, citizenship.¹¹⁴ Republican bargaining not only helps us understand popular motivations but also pushes the social and political history of subaltern groups into the narrative of Colombian political history.

Bolstered by their popular allies, Liberals dominated the Cauca, and due to their influence in civil wars, national politics. As long as they were not internally divided, popular and elite liberals were unbeatable. Caucaño armies, largely made up of popular liberals (many, if not most, Afro-Colombians), had a power that Conservatives simply could not match. Conservatives courted their own popular allies, but, for a variety of reasons, these popular conservatives were

Process (La Rioja, 1853–1870) (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2000). Caudillismo may well be the best explanatory guide for certain times and places, but it seems of less utility for understanding nineteenth-century Colombia. For example, Charles Walker notes the limited political campaigning in the Peruvian countryside in his study of caudillismo, compared to the intense political life I found in rural Colombia. Charles F. Walker, *Smoldering Ashes: Cuzco and the Creation of Republican Peru, 1780–1840* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1999). While the caudillo model has been superseded by some scholars working on urban history, it is more accepted for rural areas. See Sowell, *The Early Colombian Labor Movement*. While the caudillo model may limit too severely subaltern agency, focusing on resistance alone may ignore the vast majority of popular political participation. For resistance in the Cauca, see Michael T. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1980).

113. For views that emphasize clientelism, see Alvaro Tirado Mejía, *Aspectos sociales de las guerras civiles en Colombia* (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1976), 37–38; Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia*, 94; Orlando Fals Borda, *Historia doble de la costa*, vol. 2 (Bogotá: Carlos Valencia, 1981), 62b–76b, 191. For opinions closer to my own, see Malcolm Deas, “Poverty, Civil War, and Politics: Ricardo Gaitán Obeso and his Magdalena River Campaign in Colombia, 1885,” *Nova Americana* 2 (1979): 263–303; and Rebecca Earle, ed., *Rumours of Wars: Civil Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2000).

114. Lynch, *Caudillos*, 4.

not as committed to or involved in the Conservative Party at this time. When Conservatives tried to revolt, as they had in 1851, they would suffer defeat at the hands of (in the words of Cali's Democratic Society) "thousands of liberal citizens armed in defense of the endangered Patria."¹¹⁵

The Meanings of Citizenship

What did popular liberals understand "liberal citizens" to mean? Elite Liberals saw citizenship as a new universal identity that would supercede other relations in society, an identity they could use to shape the lower classes into disciplined, orderly workers under elite leadership.¹¹⁶ However, liberal citizenship appealed to popular groups, and especially Afro-Colombians, for distinct reasons. It provided Afro-Colombians with a new public and political identity that they lacked in the aftermath of the "social death" of slavery. Liberal citizenship in the Cauca demanded no special identity, history, or property (indeed, it demanded these past identities be left behind) beyond a willingness to support the Liberal cause. This definition alienated other segments of the popular classes, including Indians and Antioqueño mestizo migrants, who were devoted to their traditional customs, identities, and properties. It greatly appealed, however, to Afro-Colombians. Conservatives asserted that "blacks" were "ignorant men" who only plotted rebellion and did not "merit the title of true Granadans."¹¹⁷ They derided blacks as "an ignorant and bestial race."¹¹⁸ Yet, as Alaix noted, popular liberals reacted to this racism and exclusion by embracing the notion of citizenship.

Liberals' vision of society encouraged Afro-Colombians' role in politics. While Liberals denigrated Indians, they rarely publicly (and for many not even privately) spoke of race.¹¹⁹ Certainly, Liberals had not yet felt the full force of

115. *Boletín Democrático*, 18 July 1851.

116. Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999). For Colombian liberalism generally, see Jaime Jaramillo Uribe, *El pensamiento colombiano en el siglo XIX* (Bogotá: Temis, 1964); Gerardo Molina, *Las ideas liberales en Colombia*, vol. 1, 1849–1914 (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1988).

117. Francisco González to Provincial Governor, Santander, 20 Mar. 1855, ACC, AM, paquete 60, leg. 60.

118. José V. López to Mariano Ospina, Cali, 21 May 1859, BN, FM, libro 210, p. 129.

119. Some Liberals claimed that races did not (or should not) really exist, all people were basically the same, and society should forget about divisions based on "ridiculous accidents." *El Montañés* (Barbacoas), 15 Feb. 1876.

scientific racism coming from the North Atlantic, and their reliance on the identity of citizen enabled some Liberals to elide the problem of race. No doubt many Liberals were racist, but they viewed racial problems as rooted in culture, a problem of the discipline of the racially mixed lower classes that would be solved through education and discipline: schools, ceremonies, the national guard, jails, and the Democratic Societies.¹²⁰ I cannot fully explore Caucaño liberalism's racial imaginary in this article, but I suggest that—at least before the 1870s—Liberals had no problem recruiting blacks and mulattos into their party and, at least regarding slavery, fought tenaciously to improve their compatriots' lives. While scholars can trawl through liberal writings to find examples of racism or contempt for the lower classes, what is surprising is how much Cauca Liberals relied on their lower-class allies, including them in the public community of the nation not only in discourse but also, surprisingly, in practice (although in a subordinate role). The discourses and practices of liberalism and republicanism thus allowed Afro-Colombians an entrée into the public, political realm.¹²¹

Afro-Colombians eagerly seized on the new public identity of “citizen” to replace their old identity as slaves. Former slaves of the San Julián hacienda noted that “since we ceased to depend on the man that they called our master, and we entered, due to the majesty of the law, into the category of free men,” the leaders of the town of Caloto continued to harass them, assigning them unfair duties and taxes. The Afro-Caucanos declared that Caloto's parochial government “wanted to convert us into slaves again, of a worse nature than what we were before.”¹²² Similarly, José Tomás del Carmen complained that his eight-year-old daughter had been forced into domestic service for another family, violating his “rights” and returning him to a “worse condition than when we were slaves.”¹²³

120. *La Unión*, 7 Feb. 1864.

121. These discourses of republicanism and liberalism acted in the Cauca much the way “myths” of racial democracy and republicanism acted in Cuba to provide possibilities for the mobilization of Afro-Cubans. See Alejandro de la Fuente, “Myths of Racial Democracy: Cuba, 1900–1912,” *Latin American Research Review* 34, no. 3 (1999): 39–73.

122. Inhabitants of the San Julián Hacienda [over 25 names, all but a few signed for by another] to Governor of the Province, San Julián, 15 Oct. 1853, ACC, AM, paquete 55, leg. 92. References to slavery appeared in numerous petitions and letters from this period.

123. José Tomás del Carmen [written by another] to Governor, Popayán, 16 Mar. 1855, ACC, AM, paquete 60, leg. 60.

Obviously, Afro-Colombians sought to prevent their return to slavery, perhaps the overarching goal of their discourse and politics. They abhorred not only legal slavery but also servile conditions similar to slavery (after all, most Afro-Caucanos had never been slaves): a lack of control over their lives, the arbitrary power of the master, and the absence of liberty and equality. A Conservative official noted, when he described former slaves' attitudes to a new tax, that they are convinced "they are oppressed, that they are tyrannized, and that through these means [the taxes] we want to return them to slavery, which is the magic word that they employ in these situations."¹²⁴ For Afro-Caucanos, slavery was indeed a "magic word," evoking the nightmare against which they constructed their vision of popular liberalism.

In the identity of the citizen Afro-Colombians found a corrective to counter their old positions as slaves. From the coastal village of San Juan, ex-slaves wrote to thank the national Congress: "[D]ue to the philanthropy of the citizens that compose the Honorable House and Senate, we enjoy the precious possession of liberty, so long usurped, and with it all the other rights and prerogatives of citizens."¹²⁵ The residents of the San Julián hacienda not only noted that they were "free men" who should not be treated as slaves but also asserted their new status in the opening line as "inhabitants of the San Julián hacienda to which once we belonged as slaves, before you in the use of our rights as citizens."¹²⁶ The petitioners contrasted their former condition with their new identity as not just citizens, but citizens with rights.

The idea that citizenship protected against the abuses of slavery did not disappear easily. The Afro-Colombian boatmen of the river Dagua, who ferried passengers and goods from the Pacific Coast to the central valley, claimed their place as citizens in a labor strike in 1878: "We should be treated like citizens of a Republic and not like the slaves of a sultan."¹²⁷ A quarter of a century

124. Bautista Feijoo, Jefe Político of Torres Cantón to Governor of the Province, Caloto, 8 Apr. 1854, ACC, AM, paquete 75, leg. 84. Years later, a liberal observer noted how a severe famine in the valley had forced those desperate for food to beg by saying "the hated word, *my master*"; *La Voz del Pueblo: Organo de la Sociedad Democrática* (Cali), 3 Oct. 1878.

125. Residents of San Juan [24 names, all signed with an X] to Citizen Senators and Representatives (national), no place or date on letter, but 1852, AC, 1852, Senado, Proyectos Negados II, p. 19.

126. Inhabitants of the San Julián Hacienda (over 25 names, all but a few signed for by another) to Governor of the Province, San Julián, 15 Oct. 1853, ACC, AM, paquete 55, leg. 92.

127. The *bogas* of the Dagua River (over 115 names, all but 7 signed for by others) to Citizen President of the State, Cali, 15 May 1878, ACC, AM, paquete 144, leg. 64.

after emancipation, Afro-Caucanos still knew the power of the metaphor of slavery. For them, citizenship meant never returning to that degraded position. Afro-Colombians' rights and liberty had long been denied, but the new identity of the citizen guaranteed their place in the social body.

How did popular liberals think they earned citizenship? For elite Liberals, rational thought was the determinant for citizenship. For Conservatives, it depended on history and social location. For Afro-Colombians, the key to citizenship lay in the defense of the political community (be it the entire nation or the Liberal Party) against the efforts of bad citizens to undermine and harm it. That is, service to the party earned one the title of citizen. Former slaves and tenants in Quilcacé reminded state officials of what the nation owed them for their past support, recalling "the services the village made to the cause of the federation [in the 1860–63 war] and due to the bloody sufferings that it endured because of its adherence to that cause."¹²⁸ By the 1860s, the cause of federalism was more or less synonymous with liberalism in the Cauca. The Quilcasereños, like many Afro-Caucanos, fought in the 1860–63 civil war and now called upon the Liberal state to protect them in a land dispute.

In 1878 local conservatives in Caldas municipality accused former liberal soldiers from areas including Quilcacé and the Afro-Caucano-dominated area of Patía of banditry. The accused wrote to the Liberal state president to remind him of their past loyalty: "You know, Citizen President, what are the causes that motivate the said charges [of banditry], since one of them is [our] having sustained in the civil war of '76 and '77 the dignity of the Government, of the Cauca, and of the rule of the Constitution of the Republic."¹²⁹ Not only had these popular liberals not received any reward for their sacrifices for the Liberal cause, but they now also faced punishment as a result of their fealty. This must have seemed the cruelest of treacheries—to be hounded by the same Conservatives they had defeated in war.

The Dagua boatmen cited their partisanship in the 1876–77 civil war as well. "In our profession we have lent great services to the liberal cause, and more than a few times we have set aside the punting poles and oars in order to take up the gun . . . , serving in every way possible the liberal cause, the cause of

128. Residents of Quilcacé Aldea (over 80 names) to Municipal Vocales, Quilcacé, 14 Feb. 1864, ACC, AM, paquete 88, leg. 54.

129. Pioquinto Diago, for himself and in the name of his friends (nine others, written by someone else as the petitioners were illiterate) to Citizen President of the Sovereign State of Cauca, Popayán, 7 Feb. 1878, ACC, AM, paquete 144, leg. 64.

our sympathies.”¹³⁰ Even though the Conservatives had threatened them during the war, ordering them to ferry supplies up the river, the boatmen had refused. Afro-Colombians had little to offer the Liberal Party in terms of wealth and social influence—all they had was their willingness to support the party with their votes or with their blood. Therefore, the armed citizen became the political actor of popular liberalism.¹³¹

Afro-Caucanos did not just accept the definition of citizenship posited by Liberals; they appropriated and reframed the concept. Of course, before 1853 most Afro-Colombians did not meet the property and literacy requirements for full legal citizenship. This did not stop them, however, from seizing the mantle of citizen anyway. They joined the Democratic Societies, participated in political rallies and demonstrations, and took up arms in the national guard. They even participated in elections. If before 1853 the state forbade them from voting, they nevertheless could arrive on election day, wait in the plaza, cheer their compatriots, and with their presence make it known that they would respond forcefully to any fraud. They seized their rights by knocking down the fences of haciendas that blocked their access to land and by punishing those Conservatives whom they saw as attempting to destroy the citizen body. They themselves became judges of who was a citizen and who was not.¹³² The “other” against which Afro-Caucanos constructed their citizenship was both slavery (which citizenship countered) and all the forces that sought to rob them of citizenship and its prerogatives. Most powerfully, the slave master personified this “other,” but so too did the aristocrat, the powerful, the hacendado, the Conservative, or simply the rich.¹³³

130. The bogas of the Dagua River (over 115 names, all but 7 signed for by others) to Citizen President of the State, Cali, 15 May 1878, ACC, AM, paquete 144, leg. 64.

131. The focus on military service and voting had the effect of excluding women—who often participated in direct political action—from full membership in popular liberalism and nation formation. For the importance of military service, see Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 37–42; Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1991), 23.

132. Mercado acknowledged this when he referred to the people who knocked down fences in Cali’s ejidos as “citizens.” R. Mercado to Secretary of Government, Cali, 24 Jan. 1851, AGN, SR, FGV, tomo 165, p. 799.

133. Anonymous, *Observaciones para servir a la historia*, 1; *El Pensamiento Popular*, 22 July 1852; Jorge J. Hoyos to Mariano Ospina, Buenaventura, 25 Mar. 1859, BN, FM, libro 189, p. 363; *Ariete*, 19 Jan. 1850; Residents of Tumaco (over 45 names) to Citizen President of the Union, Tumaco, 30 Aug. 1878, Archivo del Instituto Colombiano de la Reforma Agraria, Bogotá, Bienes Nacionales (hereafter cited as

However, Afro-Colombians' redefinition of citizenship involved much more than appropriating control over who could be citizens and why. Popular liberals also imagined citizenship's rights and meanings distinctly. Most importantly, they invested citizenship with much more powerful notions of liberty and equality than their elite allies recognized. Afro-Colombians defined citizenship as not just the absence of legal slavery but also the absence of the economic and social subordination slavery entailed. Conservatives were aghast at Afro-Colombians' claim to citizenship and refusal to accept older forms of deference. However, even more worrisome was popular liberals' insistence that citizenship carried with it rights to economic equality—specifically, the right to the land. Land had been one of the central concerns of the *zurriago*, and land questions—either protection of commons or possible redistribution—had motivated popular liberals in various civil wars.

By the late 1860s, popular liberals more vociferously expounded a radical discourse concerning land rights. In 1868 the Palmira Democratic Society petitioned the national government on behalf of their poor constituents. Local hacendados had forbidden them to gather firewood and were trying to force them to pay rents on marginal land bordering the haciendas. The Democratic Society claimed that those marginal lands did not belong to the hacendados and that the poor had a “natural right” to exploit such lands. The petitioners noted that the nation was in a “glorious era of natural equality . . . with the fall and overturning of all those tyrannies of which the weak have been victims, here as everywhere; [land] is the exclusive benefit of a few, who present themselves as powerful, and usurp everything and exploit the weak, from their essential individual rights to the free gifts that God has apportioned, with munificent profusion in favor of all of his children.”¹³⁴ The use of the land was a natural right given by God to the poor, a right that perhaps overrode questions of legal title. The Palmira Democratic Society did not rely on natural rights or appeals to religion alone to justify their claims. The Society reminded the president that “the poor class” had made “the very valuable contribution of their blood in order to defend our institutions, public order, and national indepen-

INCORA), tomo 14, p. 947; Manuel María [Mosquera] to Tomás [Cipriano Mosquera], Popayán, 15 May 1877, ACC, SM, doc. 57,555; Gutiérrez Sanín, *Curso y discurso*.

134. The undersigned Colombian citizens and active members of the Sovereign State of Cauca and the Democratic Society of Palmira (over 65 names) to Citizen President of the United States of Colombia, Palmira, 21 June 1868, INCORA, tomo 7, p. 492.

dence and integrity.” They continued, “These individuals have, at the very least, an unquestionable right to be protected by a liberal government.”¹³⁵

The 1876–77 civil war, which produced the largest battles in the Cauca since independence, encouraged popular liberals to push their visions further. The blood they had sacrificed to the Liberal cause, saving their party from almost certain defeat, demanded payment, and land—as with abolition during the 1851 war—was the reward for which they clamored.¹³⁶ Cali’s Democratic Society sent a petition to the state president demanding remuneration for all the services Cali’s poor had lent to the Liberal cause in the past war, citing their many battles in the long campaign. First they asked for back pay, rations, and pensions for the widows and orphans of their fallen comrades. Then they came to their most pointed demand: an end to land rents. They proposed that anyone could settle and farm any land in Cauca as long as it did not “gravely harm another.” They also asked that all forests be open to the poor to gather firewood as needed. They acknowledged that their petition might seem extraordinary, but cautioned, “How can one think it just that those who have come every time to defend this soil that saw them born, against the repeated and unjust invasions from Antioquia [a Conservative bastion], invasions aided by those who call themselves owners of the greater part of the Cauca’s land, live without a home?”¹³⁷

Of course, claimsmaking for land was not only economic, as landholding was intricately linked with questions of deference (owed to the landlord) and representation (the economic independence needed for the status as free citizens in many eyes). Here elite Liberal conceptions of citizenship departed from the Afro-Caucanos’ popular liberalism. As far as elites were concerned, the citizenship question had already been addressed successfully; however, popular liberals knew that their status was not secure until they had economic equality. The soldiers closed their petition with passion, asserting, “[L]and cannot be occupied to such an extent that the other members of the community are deprived of the means of subsistence or are obligated to be the slaves of those feudal lords who do not admit into their supposed properties any but those individuals who implicitly sell their personal independence, that is to say, their

135. Ibid.; for a similar argument, see *El Pensamiento Popular*, 22 July 1852.

136. Carlos Holguín to Sergio Arboleda, Manizales, 30 Jan. 1877, ACC, FA, sig. 1515; Belisario Zamorano, *Bosquejo biográfico del General David Peña* (Cali: Imprenta de Eustaquio Palacios, 1878), 16.

137. The undersigned members of the Democratic Society (over 180 names, many with very rough handwriting or signed for by others) to Citizen President of the State, Cali, 1 June 1877, ACC, AM, paquete 137, leg. 7.

conscience and liberty, in order to be the peons and tributaries of an individual and to cease to be citizens of a free people.”¹³⁸ David Peña wrote the proposed law, first calling for a five-year moratorium on all rents and, more radically, allowing those without land to claim up to three hectares of any land that was not fenced or cultivated by another. The law also demanded that the poor have access to any unfenced forests to take wood as they needed.¹³⁹

After much consternation (for elite Liberals knew the petitioners had saved the party in the war), they rejected the land claims as too expensive and illegal.¹⁴⁰ Elite Liberals thought they were simply rejecting an economic claim. For popular liberals, however, this rejection of the land law struck at the whole apparatus of social bargaining, since owning land affected not just their economic livelihoods but also their social and political status as a free people. One goal of this essay has been to show how popular liberals’ bargaining in the Cauca opened possibilities for vibrant popular political action. However, I also would like to stress the limits of this negotiation. Social bargaining between elite and popular liberals involved four broad categories of rights: judicial, social, representative, and economic. By the 1870s, Liberals had made great progress on judicial issues: abolishing the death penalty, limiting imprisonment to sixteen years, and implementing jury trials. Likewise, much had been done with social issues. Liberals proudly declared the aristocracy vanquished (even if true equality had never been achieved), and Afro-Colombians participated alongside mestizo and white liberals in many aspects of public life, be it in the Democratic Societies, the national guard, demonstrations, or public ceremonies. In the representative realm, all male adults could vote, many did, and some were even elected to local office. Middle-class Liberals with close ties to Afro-Colombians (and even some Afro-Colombians themselves) served in higher offices, although generally this access was quite limited. Even in the economic realm, popular liberals had won much—the ending of monopolies on aguardiente and tobacco, support (if not outright victory) in their struggles for the ejidos, payment for military service, and, most importantly, the abolition of slavery (which also involved social, judicial, and representative issues). But elite

138. *Ibid.*

139. David Peña, “Proyecto de Lei por lo cual se fomenta la agricultura en el Estado,” Popayán, 9 Aug. 1877, ACC, AM, paquete 137, leg. 30.

140. *Registro Oficial (Organo del Gobierno del Cauca)* (Popayán), 30 June 1877; B. González to Julián Trujillo, Popayán, 2 Aug. 1877, AGN, Sección Colecciones, Fondo Enrique Ortega Ricaurte, Serie Generales y Civiles, caja 94, carpeta 346, doc. 18,565; Report of Ramón Cerón, Popayán, 14 Aug. 1877, ACC, AM, paquete 137, leg. 30.

Liberals were not willing or able to satisfy the most central of popular liberals' economic concerns: land redistribution. Here the class rift between the ideologies of elite liberalism and popular liberalism was too deep. The citizenship question had been closed for elite Liberals with unrestricted adult male suffrage, but for Afro-Colombians that was only an important opening in their struggle to truly be "citizens of a free people."

The failure of elite Liberals to respond to popular demands for land strained the Afro-Caucano relationship with the Liberal Party. By the late 1870s, the Cauca's political scene had changed significantly. The disorder of the 1876–77 civil war and the continual claimsmaking of popular liberals caused many Liberals to reconsider the wisdom of the political alliance they had forged in the 1850s. A faction calling themselves Independents split off from the party; they hoped, among other things, to restrict popular political participation. When in 1879 the Independents, with Conservative allies, rose up in a coup against the state government, Liberals tried to marshal the Democratic Societies to save them one last time, but with the land bill defeated, they had much less success rallying Afro-Caucanos than before. The Independents took control of the state, prefiguring the national process known as the Regeneration, which replaced Colombia's liberal and federalist 1863 constitution with the harshly conservative and centrist 1886 constitution (which would remain basically intact over the next one hundred years). The new regime persecuted the Democratic Societies, reduced the frequency of elections, instituted tough anticrime legislation, and restricted national suffrage to property owners. A coalition of Conservatives, Independents, and some popular groups succeeded in reining in the public, political space available to plebeians in general and popular liberals in particular.¹⁴¹

However, Liberals' retreat from popular engagement should not overshadow Afro-Caucanos' adeptness at reframing the discourse of liberalism to suit their needs, nor their ability to negotiate with Liberal Party leaders for some recognition by the state and nation. I would argue that, in general, nineteenth-

141. For an excellent general overview of this process (and Cauca history in general), see Valencia Llano, *Estado soberano del Cauca*, 226–282; see also Marco Palacios, *Entre la legitimidad y la violencia: Colombia, 1875–1994* (Bogotá: Grupo Editorial Norma, 1995), 15–71; Vicente Cárdenas to Sergio Arboleda, Quito, 2 Sept. 1878, ACC, FA, sig. 1506. Of course, Liberals' eventual rejection of their popular allies was not unique to Colombia. See Mallon, *Peasant and Nation*; Guy P. C. Thomson with David G. LaFrance, *Patriotism, Politics, and Popular Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Mexico: Juan Francisco Lucas and the Puebla Sierra* (Wilmington, Del.: SR Books, 1999).

century politics can only be understood in relation to the interaction between elites and subalterns in wars, elections, and daily life. Colombian popular liberals' political strength ensured that politics was not only a contest between factions of elite gentlemen whose clients followed them mindlessly but also a space that subalterns could appropriate and reframe, even given their limited means. While popular liberals pursued their own specific social and economic goals, their politics more generally affected the course and depth of Colombian democracy. Afro-Caucanos made significant progress in transforming post-emancipation society and politics in Colombia, especially compared to the United States or Brazil. Although late in the century some Conservatives and Liberals did manage to restrict the very open and democratic political culture of mid-nineteenth-century Colombia and to exclude many popular liberals from politics, the bond between Liberals and Afro-Colombians was not broken—only weakened.¹⁴² Indeed, the association of Afro-Colombians and Liberals would continue through future civil wars up to the present day, although Afro-Caucanos would never again play such a dominant role in the nation's politics. In the nineteenth century—if less so through much of the twentieth—common people, and especially people of African descent, were able to seize the opportunity to make the still-undefined nation their own.

142. For twentieth-century relations, see W. John Green, *Gaitanismo, Left Liberalism, and Popular Mobilization in Columbia* (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2003).