"Ni chicha ni limonada": Depictions of the Mulatto Woman in Cuban Tobacco Art

Feliza Medrano

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/laii_research

Recommended Citation
https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/laii_research/57
Research Paper Series No. 34 May 1999

"Ni chicha ni limonada"
Depictions of the Mulatto Woman in Cuban Tobacco Art

Feliza Medrano

© 1999 by Feliza Medrano
The Latin American and Iberian Institute (LAI) at the University of New Mexico (UNM) is one of the nation's leading foreign language and area studies centers. The LAII is a federally designated Comprehensive National Resource Center for Latin American Language and Area Studies, and UNM is believed to offer more Latin American degree programs and courses than any other university in the country. More than 150 UNM faculty specializing in Latin American research and teaching are members of the Faculty Concilium on Latin America and are the primary constituency of the LAII.

The LAII's Research Paper Series and Occasional Paper Series provide refereed forums for the timely dissemination of research on Latin American topics. Authors also gain the benefits of comment and criticism from the larger research community if they intend to later submit their work to other publications.
CONTENTS

"Ni chicha ni limonada": Depictions of the Mulatto Woman in Cuban Tobacco Art .................. 1

Works Consulted ...................................................................................................................... 18

Image Sources ......................................................................................................................... 20

Images ....................................................................................................................................... 21
“Ni chicha ni limonada”
Depictions of the Mulatto Woman in Cuban Tobacco Art

Feliza Medrano
Department of Art and Art History
University of New Mexico

---

1 I would like to acknowledge the following people for their time and assistance in the preparation of this essay: Dr. Holly Barnet, Dr. Kim López, Suzanne Schadl, Dr. Tey Marianna Nunn, Dr. Narciso Menocal, Dr. Vera M. Kutzinski, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Cuba, Fundación Antonio Núñez Jiménez de la Naturaleza y el Hombre, Jimmy C. Diecker, Dr. Juan F. Medrano, Ana Maria Molina, Tomás Perla, Teresa Eckmann, Cindy Church, Laura Addison, and the other members of the LAII Publications Committee.
During the mid-nineteenth century, a traveler from the United States by the name of Samuel Hazard sojourned in Cuba. His visit coincided not only with the island’s tobacco and sugar booms, but also with the initial stages of the Ten Years’ War (1868-1878). Hazard’s published journal entitled *Cuba with Pen and Pencil* (1871) chronicles late colonial Cuba’s urban and rural society with an honest, astute, yet relentlessly foreign eye. In addition to his descriptions of people and places, many chapters of Hazard’s journal provide detailed accounts of cigar and cigarette production and consumption in Cuba. For Hazard, who would have been more familiar with the snuff and chewing tobacco used by men in the United States at the time, cigars and especially cigarettes were quite a novelty as the following excerpt from his journal illustrates: “Wherever one goes in Cuba, the cigarette meets him at every turn, more so even than the cigar; for, in the cars, between the acts in the opera house, in the mouths of pretty women, between the courses of the dinner... one finds the delicate, fragrant, paper cigar.” Like Hazard, I am also fascinated by the consumption and marketing of the cigarette in Cuba’s tobacco industry. However, given the historical gap and my second-hand knowledge of Cuban traditions, I am forced to approach the study of nineteenth-century Cuban culture in the same manner used by Samuel Hazard: as an outsider. This is why I have selected cigarette packages, known as *marquillas*, as my paradigm and visual aid in the following study of nineteenth-century Cuban race and gender relations.

Cuba’s *Biblioteca Nacional José Martí* houses a collection of nearly 4,000 *marquillas* that have survived in part because of their popular appeal as collectors’ items during the nineteenth century. While innumerable research possibilities are imbedded in this collection of colorful cigarette wrappers, I am personally intrigued by the fact that three cigarette manufacturers, *La Charanga de Villergas*, *Para Usted* and *La Honradez*, all dedicated a narrative *marquilla* series to the *mulata*, or mulatto woman. Interestingly, all three

---

2 The Ten Years’ War can be characterized as a decade of strife between the Spanish Crown and Cuban nationalists that resulted in increased autonomy for the island and efforts towards the abolition of slavery. Slavery, however, was not officially abolished in Cuba until 1886 and Cuba did not gain independence from Spain until 1898. For a detailed historical interpretation see Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba, Between Reform and Revolution* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).


4 The prolific Cuban scholar, Fernando Ortiz, is credited with first acknowledging the artistic and documentary value of *marquillas* in 1940. See Antonio Núñez Jiménez, *Marquillas y cigarreras cubanas* (Madrid: Tabapress, 1989), 32, 35.

manufacturers portray the *mulata* as a lascivious young woman who can manipulate her sexuality in order to rise in society, but who is nevertheless destined to a life of tragedy and poverty (figs. 1-21). In the subsequent pages, I have attempted to uncover the reasons behind the fascination of cigarette manufacturers and consumers with the *mulata*. In order to understand how the *marquillas* represent the *mulata*'s tragic fate and identify some of the social motives behind this specific theme, I have needed assistance in deciphering the *mulata* images which would have appeared quite common and intelligible to Cubans in the nineteenth century, but appear so mysterious and foreign to me today. Therefore, I have relied on Samuel Hazard’s documents, as well as on the Cuban novelist Cirilo Villaverde and the Basque painter Víctor Patricio de Landaluze as my cultural “translators.” Furthermore, I have used ecclesiastical and testimonial records, and health and marriage statistics found in Cuba’s national archives to discern the nature of race and gender relations in nineteenth-century Cuba.

Cuba’s superb tobacco from the Vuelta Abajo region gained worldwide acclaim as a consequence of the tobacco boom that the island experienced after Ferdinand VII’s royal decree on June 23, 1817 abolished the state monopoly on tobacco, sugar and coffee. By liberalizing trade, the Spanish crown hoped to maintain the loyalty and support of its Cuban subjects, but Cuba’s economic prosperity ironically resulted in a desire for more autonomy and the rise of anti-colonial sentiments. The subsequent growth and industrialization of the tobacco industry after 1817 consolidated most *vegas*, or tobacco plantations, under the ownership of wealthy Creoles and the majority of factories for the manufacture of cigars and cigarettes under the control of recent Iberian immigrants in Havana. Both cigars and cigarettes were exported to markets in Europe, the United States and South America and in 1836, three hundred and six cigar and cigarette manufacturers with a workforce of 2,152 workers (55% white Creoles and Iberians, 67.5% black Cubans).
17% free Afro-Cubans, 28% Afro-Cuban slaves) were legally registered in Havana.\textsuperscript{10} This number drastically increased to 498 manufacturers with a workforce of 17,687 workers by 1862.\textsuperscript{11}

Although Havana had benefited from a lithographic press since 1822, it was primarily employed for the printing of music sheets.\textsuperscript{12} Cigar and cigarette manufacturers did not appropriate this artistic medium in the packaging and promotion of their product until chromolithography arrived on the island in 1861.\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, we can roughly date the Biblioteca Nacional’s collection of chromolithographed marquillas from 1861 to the 1890s when U.S. tobacco tariffs and British investments began to debilitate Cuba’s tobacco industry.\textsuperscript{14} Soon after chromolithography was introduced in Cuba, cigar and cigarette manufacturers acquired state-of-the-art printing machinery and began producing their own colorful marquillas on the factory premises. During his visit to the La Honradez manufacturing plant, Samuel Hazard noted that,

On the second floor is a complete printing-office, in every branch of typography and lithography, constantly engaged upon work of the factory, printing their circulars, labels, views of the factory, wrappers, and millions of the beautifully colored and tastefully designed papers that enclose the cigarettes in packages of twenty-five.\textsuperscript{15}

Hazard’s observations of the printing room are visually depicted in a marquilla series titled \textit{Una visita a la fábrica La Honradez} (\textit{A Visit to the La Honradez Factory}) (fig. 22). Given the superior quality of the colorful lithographs printed onto these 12 x 8.5cm pieces of paper, it

\textsuperscript{10} This data does not take the many small, family-owned cigar and cigarette manufacturing businesses known as \textit{chincales} into account, nor does it account for the numerous armed guards and prisoners who rolled cigars and cigarettes for extra cash on a part-time basis. See Menocal, 4.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{12} Juan de Mata Tejada established Cuba’s first lithographic press in Havana in 1822; three years before the first lithographic press arrived in the United States and four years before Spain acquired its first lithographic press. See Zóila Lapique Becali, Juana Zurbarán and Guillermo Sánchez, “La primera imprenta litográfica en Cuba,” \textit{Revista de la Biblioteca Nacional José Martí} 12: 3 (sept.-dic. 1970), 36-37.

\textsuperscript{13} In chromolithography, a greasy crayon or pen is used to draw an image on a block of limestone. The block is then dampened with water and oil-based ink (which is repelled by the wet areas and adheres to the greasy areas of the stone) is subsequently applied to its surface. A separate printing stone is required for each color that the lithographer wishes to stamp onto a given sheet of paper. See Menocal, 7.

\textsuperscript{14} On the decline of the tobacco industry see Rivero Muñiz. Although a photomechanical process substituted the lithographic printing of cigar labels in the United States during the 1920s, the information necessary to discern whether lithography suffered a similar fate in Cuba was unavailable for the present study.

\textsuperscript{15} Hazard, 147.
seems natural that a factory such as La Honradez would have wanted to publicize its artistic endeavors just as much as its tobacco products.

Tobacco’s associations with oral self-indulgence, leisure, and social habit were accentuated by the grandeur and colorful beauty of its packaging. The images accompanying nineteenth-century Cuban tobacco products, however, functioned as more than mere marketing tools. These depictions also communicated important social and cultural messages to smokers both in Cuba and around the world. The labels on Cuban cigar boxes for example, differed greatly from the images printed onto Cuban cigarette packages. Since the majority of Cuban cigars were exported to the elite classes abroad, the labels on each cigar box were of an allegorical or nationalistic nature that emphasized the high quality and authenticity of this costly tobacco product (figs. 23, 24). This contrasts with the marquilla renderings that focused little attention on the manufacturing logo and dedicated most of their advertising space to the printed colorful narratives depicting a wide range of social themes. Cigarette manufacturers competed against each other for the local market by releasing marquillas in groups or series that appealed to Cuban smokers of varying social classes. As Samuel Hazard noted in 1870, “nearly all if not quite all ladies in Cuba smoke cigarettes; if not habitually, then at least [un] poquito.” Therefore, cigarette manufacturers catered to both male and female consumers in their marquilla narratives. Depictions such as the tapestry design (fig. 25) illustrates one manufacturer’s interest in exploring “feminine” themes, while the orientalizing harem series (fig. 26) was made with the visual pleasure of male smokers in mind. Such was the competition among cigarette manufacturers, that in 1870 the format of cigarette packages was legally standardized in Cuba. In order to prevent more than one company from using the same brand, the new law forced all manufacturers to submit a sample of the logo, title and colors they intended to print on their marquilla. The ordinance did not restrict the content of the colorful narratives which dominated most of the marquilla’s surface, but it reserved the right to ban a manufacturer’s logo if it seemed religiously, nationally or morally offensive.

The emergence of Afro-Cubans in Cuban art coincides with the increased popularity of the lithographic medium and the arrival of foreign traveler/reporter artists on the island during

16 Menocal, 37.
17 Hazard, 155.
19 Ibid.
the nineteenth century. Cuba's *Academia de San Alejandro* had been training Cuban artists since its inauguration in 1818, but academic painters such as José Arburu Morell (1864-1889) showed little interest in depicting the Afro-Cuban population co-existing in Cuba at that time (fig. 27). Unlike the *Academia* painters, European traveler/reporter artists shared an interest in documenting the "exotic" life and landscape of the tropics and showed a preference for the more commercial and less costly lithographic medium (which was becoming an invaluable asset in the cigar and cigarette manufacturing industry). While Hipólito Garnerey (1787-1858), Federico Mialhe (1810-1881), and Eduardo Laplante (1818-?) are some of the earliest foreign lithographers who integrated Afro-Cubans into their depictions of Cuban society and landscape, the Basque artist, Víctor Patricio de Landaluze (1828-1889) is credited with the development of the Afro-Cuban "type" in nineteenth-century Cuban art.

Landaluze was a political cartoonist, painter and lithographer with a strong interest in depicting Afro-Cubans from an Iberian colonialist's perspective. The inset eyes, over-exaggerated lips, protruding jaw and happy smile that Landaluze uses to depict Afro-Cubans in his oil paintings, make these figures appear caricature-like and frivolous. Landaluze not only mocks the physiognomy of Afro-Cubans, but he constructs a narrative that ridicules their behavior as well. *En la ausencia* (During the Time of Absence) (fig. 28) shows a black servant posing with her employer's hat in front of a mirror while *José Francisco* (fig. 29) depicts an Afro-Cuban male servant kissing the marble bust of an "unattainable" white woman. The type of ridicule employed by Landaluze is known in Cuba as *choteo*. One becomes the victim of *choteo* by behaving in ways that do not correspond to one's place in society and *choteo* is the insulting price one pays for being caught. Marquilla depictions of Afro-Cubans also include effective elements of *choteo* in their design. Along the border of the 1866 calendar series produced by *La Honradez* (fig. 32), a thick-lipped and feather-clad Afro-Cuban male chases after a similar figure.

---

20 Paintings by artists trained in the *Academia* also avoided depicting Cuba's changing political climate of the 1860s and 1870s. Neither Peoli nor Collazo, who fought in the independence wars chose to render them on canvas. See Adelaida de Juan, *Pintura cubana, temas y variaciones* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1980), 32.

21 Juan, "El negro en la pintura...", 14.

22 The drummer in the *Charanga de Villergas*'s cigarette pack insignia and border appears to be a portrait of the artist Landaluze. Given that he co-founded *La Charanga* (the first Cuban journal of social caricature) in 1857 with Juan Martínez Villergas, Landaluze could have possibly collaborated in the design of the *marquillas* manufactured by the *Charanga de Villergas* as well. See Vera Kutzinski, *Sugar's Secrets. Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1993), 69.

23 Menocal, 11-12.
carrying a bottle. Since the second figure was unable to steal the bottle without getting caught, and now appears about to stumble and fall, he deserves to be ridiculed rather than pitied according to the practice of *choteo.*

These depictions, like many other racist portrayals produced by various slave societies, are imbedded in the complex and rigid system of class division necessary for the subjugation of black slaves. Colonialism in the Spanish Americas was modeled after the Spanish “purity of blood” concept. Rather than differentiate between old and new Christians, however, “purity of blood” in Cuba was used to divide the African slave population from the free, European populace. Social Darwinism, positivism and geographical determinism were popular theories used by white Cubans in the nineteenth century to effectively subjugate the Afro-Cuban population. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the system was beginning to break down and abolitionist movements and generations of interracial mixing began to threaten the established racial hierarchy in Cuba. While the artists responsible for designing the marquillas remain unknown to us, the proprietors of the cigarette manufacturing plants were predominantly Iberian immigrants. Given the *marquilla* series produced by *La Honradez* which consisted of 40 images honoring the volunteer Iberian soldiers who fought against colonial dissidents in the 1860s (fig. 33), we can assume that this particular manufacturer sided with Landaluze, and most likely disapproved of and felt threatened by the breakdown of slavery and the colonial system. By caricaturizing Afro-Cubans and depicting them as playful, carefree individuals, both Landaluze and the *marquilla* manufacturers visually contest the abolitionist and independence movements that developed in Cuba after the mid-nineteenth century.

While the Afro-Cuban renderings in the *marquillas* and by Landaluze are quite analogous, Landaluze’s depiction of the *mulata* is quite different from the *mulata* depictions on *marquillas.* Unlike his satirical depictions of male and female Afro-Cubans, Landaluze’s mulatto women are very delicately rendered and elegantly dressed dark-skinned females with dominant Anglicized facial features. The paintings entitled *Calesero cortejando a una cocinera* (*Carriage

---

24 Menocal, 12, 36.

25 In order to be considered a “pure” Christian in seventeenth century Spain, residents had to prove the absence of Jewish, Moorish, Indian or African blood in their lineage. See Verena Martínez-Alier, *Marriage, Class and Colour in Nineteenth-century Cuba: a study of racial attitudes and sexual values in a slave society* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 76.

26 The 1864 *Consejo de Administración* deemed Chinese and Indigenous peoples to be of the same the legal status as whites in Cuba. Economically, however, Chinese and Indigenous laborers belonged to the working class strata. See Martínez-Alier, *Marriage, Class ....*, 75, 77, 81.
Driver Courting a Cook) (fig. 30) and Escena galante (Courtly Scene) (fig. 31) depict the mulatto woman’s response to the advances of an Afro-Cuban carriage driver. The gentle character of this courtship is very different from the implied sexual nature of the mulata’s liaisons seen in the Historia de la mulata (History of the Mulatto Woman) series by the manufacturer Para Usted (figs.1-6). In this marquilla series, facial markings rather than exaggerated physical characteristics are used to illustrate the African or “tribal” heritage of the mulata’s mother (figs. 1-3). Instead of the black carriage driver who courts the mulata in Landaluze’s depiction, two white dandies are seen courting the mulata who appears to be considerably younger than her suitors (fig. 4). In a subsequent scene, the grown mulatto woman strolls through the park in her lavish and colorful dress. She ignores the black man seated on a nearby bench, but responds to the greetings of the two white dandies to her left (fig. 5). The caption reads “nuevo sistema de anuncios para buscar colocación” (a new means of soliciting work) and sarcastically implies the use of her sexuality to acquire a job. The Afro-Cuban man in the park does not appear to be jealous or angry for being ignored. Rather, he appears to be laughing at the mulata who according to the rules of Cuban choteo deserves to be ridiculed for buying into the gallantries of the white men who correspond to a higher social class and probably have a sexual but not marital interest in her. The subsequent image, however, shows her success in acquiring a wealthy white suitor who appears to have given her a beautiful necklace (fig. 6). The caption which reads, “el palomo y la gabilana” (the male dove and female hawk), implies the innocence of the young man and characterizes the mulata as a “predatory” individual.

Landaluze’s sentimental approach to the mulata excludes the interracial narrative and sexual appeal which characterize the mulata depicted on cigarette packages, but Cuban romantic literature from the mid-nineteenth century provides a written parallel for the mulata’s story seen in the marquillas. During the 1820s, white women from the upper levels of society began to appear as the protagonists of many romantic Cuban novels. Their presence in literature coincided with a social attempt to strengthen the role of mothers as the principal educators of their children. Cuban women of color were often characterized as subservient domestic servants who only

---

27 This narrative consisted of ten mulata depictions, but only six were available for observation. See Juan, “El negro en la pintura...,” 15.
28 Note the connection between tropical fruit and bare breasts of the women in figures 1 and 3. See Kutzinski, 74.
dared to dream about revolt or freedom. It was not until two decades later that Afro-Cuban women became literary protagonists in romantic novels by Cirilo Villaverde such as *El Guajiro* (1842), *La Peineta Calada* (1843), and *Cecilia Valdés* (1839/1882).

Villaverde’s novel, *Cecilia Valdés*, critically examines the ills of Cuba’s social, moral and political climate from 1812-1831, and also immortalizes the sensual and free mulatto woman who defies colonialism’s rigid racial hierarchy. This novel, recounting the tragic story of a young girl named Cecilia, is almost identical to the fifteen-frame series entitled *Vida y muerte de la mulata* (Life and Death of the Mulatto Woman) produced by the cigarette manufacturer *La Charanga de Villergas* (figs. 7-21). The first two scenes of the series (figs. 7, 8) depict a white businessman courting an Afro-Cuban woman and her subsequent pregnancy. Though Villaverde portrays Cecilia as a *parda* (the illegitimate offspring of a mulatto mother and a landowning Iberian father named Don Cándido Gamboa), both Cecilia and the young *mulata* seen in fig. 9, are believed to bear signs of their sexuality at a young age. Figure 9 shows the young *mulata* gesturing towards a white boy on the street with a caption that reads “promete óptimos frutos” (promises to bear optimum fruits), while Cirilo Villaverde similarly describes the youthful Cecilia as a fiery, sensual figure: “She possessed virginal qualities that only the greatest of painters could successfully render... Her arched brows emphasized her black, almond-shaped eyes filled with energy and fire. Her mouth was small and her lips were thick, indicating more voluptuousness than a sternness of character.”

In the absence of her own mother who is mentally unstable and has been confined to a sanatorium, Cecilia is raised by her grandmother who repeatedly reminds her of her potential for attaining a more elevated social status: “…you are almost white and you may aspire to marry a white man... remember that a poor white is worth infinitely more than a rich negro.” In accordance with her grandmother’s advice, Cecilia rejects her mulatto suitor José Dolores Pimienta and becomes enamoured of the wealthy Creole dandy, Leonardo Gamboa. The nature

---

30 A *parda/o* can be defined as a person whose brown or tan skin color indicates a racially mixed black/white background. See Stephens, 197-99.
31 This and all other subsequent English translations of *Cecilia Valdés* are my own. “Era su tipo el de las virgenes de los más célebres pintores... sus cejas describían un arco y daban mayor sombra a los ojos negros y rasgados, los cuales eran todo movilidad y fuego. La boca la tenía chica y los labios llenos, indicando más voluptuosidad que firmeza de carácter.” Cirilo Villaverde, *Cecilia Valdés* (Caracas: Ayacucho, 1981), 16.
32 “...eres casi blanca y puedes aspirar a casarte con un blanco... y has de saber que blanco, aunque pobre, sirve para marido; negro o mulato, ni el buey de oro.” Villaverde, 25.
of an interracial relationship such as Cecilia and Leonardo’s is illustrated in figure 10 of the marquilla series where a well-dressed white gentleman is seen courting the young mulata with promises of happiness in exchange for sexual favors. The subsequent figure in the series (fig. 11) depicts the young mulata running away from her humble surroundings with a caption that reads, “una retirada a tiempo” (one who has left in time). This particular caption commends her decision to become a concubine and is reinforced by the subsequent image depicting the half-nude mulata in her new surroundings (fig. 12). Villaverde’s rendition of the mulata narrative is more complex, but nevertheless very similar to the one seen in the marquillas. Unaware of the fact that Cecilia and Leonardo share the same father, our young literary heroine also runs away from home to become Leonardo’s concubine. She is able to rationalize her loss of honor in this liaison because “despite the illicit nature of her relationship, Cecilia believed and aspired to ascend out of the humble sphere that she had been born into, if not for herself, then for her children. Marriage to a mulatto would signify a social descent not only in her eyes, but also according to her equals.”

Even though the sexual allure of the mulata has facilitated her ascent in society and allows her to partake in dances and other festivities with members of the white elite (figs. 14, 16), her success is short-lived. Once her beauty and her white lover have abandoned her, she must resort to walking the streets with a liquor bottle and cigarette in hand (fig. 18). With ragged clothing and unkempt hair, the destitute mulata’s “descent” in society is emphasized by the fact that she is seen responding to the advances of a black suitor on the street. Since the mulata was attempting to become a member of the elite white class which she had not been born into, her failure to rise above her given social standing and the fact that she was deceived by her white suitor can be perceived as examples of choteo. The events leading up to Cecilia’s tragic fate are more melodramatic, but nevertheless similar to those seen in the marquillas. Once Cecilia and Leonardo discover the incestuous nature of their relationship, Leonardo abandons Cecilia and arranges to marry Isabel Illinchet, a Creole of his social standing. Crazed with jealousy, Cecilia asks her mulatto suitor, José Dolores Pimienta, to kill Isabel at the altar. José Dolores, however, is more resentful of Leonardo’s rosy complexion that allows him to lure and mistreat mulatto women and instead of harming Isabel, ends up killing Leonardo with a stab in the heart. Upon

33 “A la sombra del blanco, por ilícita que fuese su unión, creía y esperaba Cecilia ascender siempre, salir de la humilde esfera en que había nacido, si no ella, sus hijos. Casada con un mulato, descendería en su propia estimación y en la de sus iguales.” Villaverde, 78.
learning of Leonardo’s death, Cecilia begins to lose her mind and subsequently joins her mother in the sanatorium. Cecilia’s tragic fate mimics the fate of the mulata in the marquilla series who is taken off the streets by an armed guard and also placed in a sanatorium (figs. 19, 20). Both the novel and the marquillas promote the determinist contention that racial mixing can lead to degeneration, insanity and even death. The final marquilla scene (fig. 21) depicts a black buggy where the dead mulata is presumed to lie. The caption which reads, “Fin de todo placer” (the end of all pleasure) acquires an even greater moralizing tone when one notices the veiled white maiden (most likely on her way to church) standing next to the funeral cart of the licentious mulata.

Although the similarities between the characters in Villaverde’s Cecilia Valdés and the marquilla series produced by the Charanga de Villergas could be deemed coincidental or derivative of each other, legal records and testimonies from the mid-nineteenth century provide a different explanation. With the aid of health and marital statistics as well as ecclesiastical records to reconstruct the nature of race and gender relations in nineteenth-century Cuba, it becomes apparent that the sexual stigma that Villaverde and the marquilla manufacturers attached to the mulata was not an isolated, fictitious phenomenon, but rather an existing condition in Cuban society. Though racial and class endogamy and the principles of female honor, virtue and virginity were strongly encouraged by the government to maintain Cuba’s racial hierarchy during the colonial era, interracial relationships between white men and Afro-Cuban women were inevitable given the shortage of white women on the island. While most white women adhered to the practice of endogamy, many Afro-Cuban women did not. The protagonist in Cirilo Villaverde’s novel, Cecilia Valdés, vividly illustrates how women of color, in pursuit of the “white ideal,” sought social advancement for themselves and their children by acquiescing to sexual relations with a white male outside the bonds of socially sanctioned matrimony. In colonial Cuba, those with African physiognomies, which were associated with slavery, figured at the bottom of the island’s racial hierarchy, while lighter skin color, which indicated further removal from slavery, signified an increased social worth. In Villaverde’s novel, Cecilia

34 Kutzinski, 66.
35 Cuba’s national census shows that the ratio of adult white men to adult white women was 127:100 in 1846 and 150:100 in 1862. See Martinez-Alier, Marriage, Class..., 57.
36 Martinez-Alier, Marriage, Class..., 64.
37 Martinez-Alier, Marriage, Class..., 81.
38 Martinez-Alier, Marriage, Class..., 94.
poignantly illustrates this rationale when she comments that, “...yes, I like the whites better than the pardos. I would blush with shame if I married and had a saltoatrás [throwback] for a son.” Similarly, the mulata in figure 5 ignores the black man seated on the nearby park bench. Only in her drunken, destitute state does she begin paying attention to an Afro-Cuban man on the street as figure 18 illustrates.

Records from Cuba’s national archives documenting the reasons for marital dissent between 1813-1866 illustrate the way in which Cuban relationships and marriage were affected by the imposed racial ideologies. Parental disapproval of a marital union was generally based on racial differences between the betrothed. Typical is the case of a son who objects to the second marriage between his father, a free moreno, and an older “morena...slave and therefore of inferior quality.” Another case involves a white father and parda mother who disapprove of their son’s desire to marry a girl whose parents are both pardos since her blood is “darker” than that of her suitor even though she is “of such light shade that she looks white.” These testimonies illustrate the severity with which not only whites, but also people of color in colonial Cuba were conditioned to think in terms of a racial hierarchy.

Even though the church recognized interracial marriages, marital unions were subject to parental consent. Therefore the practice of concubinage between a white (married or single) male and a woman of color became quite common despite the dishonor that the female suffered as a result of the arrangement. In these cases, a white male was subject to dishonor only if he chose to marry his dark-skinned mistress. The double standard that allowed white men to sexually profit from the black female population without legal repercussions is well illustrated in the testimony by a Catholic priest explaining why a white man will not marry his girlfriend who is a morena. The priest explains that the white man “has never thought of marriage, and although he does have an affair with her [the morena], this affair has neither been nor can it be sufficient reason to marry her on account of the immense class distance...” This testimony further

39 “...sí me gustan más los blancos que los pardos. Se me caería la cara de vergüenza si me casara y tuviera un hijo saltoatrás.” Villaverde, 223.
40 Though the law requiring parental consent to marriages between whites had been in place for some time, it did not apply to people of color in Cuba until 1806. See Martinez-Alier, Marriage, Class..., 93.
41 Ibid. A morena/o can be defined as a person of mixed black/white race whose skin color ranges from white or light brown to very black. See Stephens, 160-62.
42 Ibid.
43 Martinez-Alier, Marriage, Class..., 63.
44 Martinez-Alier, Marriage, Class..., 118.
45 Ibid.
clarifies why the aspirations of mixed-blood women (such as Cecilia Valdés) to rise in society by satisfying the sexual needs of a white man were all in vain. While one cannot deny that white males victimized this group of women, women of color appear also to have been victims of a social system that hegemonically encouraged them to pursue the “white ideal.” Men of color, such as Cecilia’s mulato suitor José Dolores Pimienta, similarly became victims of the imposed racial hierarchy that deemed their dark skin color undesirable to all women.

It is important to note that the practice of concubinage, which usually implied a lengthy, romance-based, illegitimate relationship with a single male, existed alongside the much less committal practice of prostitution involving numerous male partners. The various marquillas addressing the theme of prostitution help us understand the distinct methods of protocol used by female prostitutes of varying races. Both the Charanga de Villergas and Para Usted series depict the mulata’s mother receiving monetary compensation for her sexual services to the white merchant (fig. 7) and white sailor (figs. 2, 3) respectively. The negotiations occur in an open and informal environment which contrasts with Samuel Hazard’s statement that in Cuba, “the authorities permit no street walkers such as disgrace our [U.S.] cities; and yet, in some portions of fine streets, like Havana, Teniente Rey, and others, these women are allowed to “ply their vocation” from the windows of the houses...” Hazard does not mention (and as an outsider was probably unaware of) the more “unofficial” sexual arrangements that casually occurred on the streets of Havana. His description, however, coincides well with the marquilla depiction by Para Usted which shows a white woman peeking from her window to speak to a well-dressed gentleman (fig. 34). While the prostitute in figure 34 is depicted similarly to the two white ladies accompanied by their black attendant in figure 35, the former’s caption reading “blanco de segunda (tren comun)” (second-rate white) contrasts with the caption of the latter figure which categorizes the two women as first-rate whites “blanco de primera (refino).” In this case, the caption uses the words refino (refined) and tren común (common train) to classify women according to different grades of sugar refinement and becomes essential in identifying “improper” and “proper” ladies. The difference between the two might not have been

---

46 Hazard, 199.
47 Kutzinski, 48.
immediately discernible since the majority of legally registered prostitutes in Havana during the
mid-nineteenth century were of a lighter complexion.48

Even though the marquilla depictions imply the mulata’s use of her sexual appeal to
solicit the attention of white males (figs. 5, 6, 13-15), the marquilla manufacturers do not
associate the mulata with the practice of prostitution as observed in figures 2, 3, 7, and 34. The
small scale of the depictions makes it difficult to identify the red and yellow items being used by
the white dandies to gain the attention of the young mulata in the Para Usted series (fig. 4), but
these items look suspiciously similar to the colored objects inside the glass jars belonging to the
general store in the background. Rather than money, the mulata in both marquilla series is
rewarded with jewelry (fig. 6), promises of happiness (fig. 10) and a life of affluence in the
company of the white elite (figs. 14, 16). The musicians from the Charanga de Villergas factory
logo also emphasize the carefree and festive mood of the celebrations that the mulata attends.

According to the marquillas the mulata and her mother both meet their suitors on the
street, but an 1863 report discussing various methods to control the spread of venereal disease
implies that most of these illicit arrangements took place in a domestic environment. According
to the report, these affairs occurred because:

The young men who are not yet of age or still live under the tutelage of others and who
still keep some respect for public opinion yield only occasionally to an opportunity or
temptation without going out to look for it, and try to hide their weakness and prefer to
resort to less known and more discrete women.49

The “more discrete” women mentioned in the passage were most likely women of color since:

...this class engages in domestic occupations [and] is in frequent and at times very close
contact with the higher classes; its women enjoy as such, the greatest freedom and as a
result of their condition, neither observe scrupulous principles of morality... If we go on
from the slave population, both African and mestizo, to the free coloureds, we will find
another numerous and equally uncontrollable group of prostitutes... who are no better as
regards their moral qualities.50

48 The 1869 census of brothels in Havana recorded the existence of 264 white prostitutes, 19 pardas and 27 blacks.
See Martinez-Alier, Marriage, Class..., 182.
49 Martinez-Alier, Marriage, Class..., 115.
50 Ibid.
Neither the *mulata* in the *marquillas* nor Cecilia Valdés worked as domestic servants, but the fact that many free women of mixed blood could avoid manual labor by pursuing concubinage with a white male made them more of a threat to the racial hierarchy that linked a high social standing with the luxury of not needing to work. Located in an urban environment and already being a product of racial mixing, the free *mulata's* eagerness to raise her status and partake in the affluent lifestyle of the lighter-skinned people around her becomes more comprehensible.

While the specific origins of the stereotypically lascivious *mulata* are difficult to pinpoint, an 1878 study by Eduardo Ezponda entitled *La mulata. Estudio fisiológico, social y jurídico*, illustrates that the common maxim, "*No hay tamarindo dulce ni mulata señorita* (there is no such thing as a sweet tamarind fruit nor a virgin mulatto woman), was already being intellectualized during the colonial era. In his study Ezponda notes that:

Since her relationships are of the assiduous nature, [the *mulata*] knows nothing other than the material aspects of existence... The *mulata's* destiny does not coincide with marriage and therefore she marries only on rare occasions in our country... Naive, libertine and servantile, she easily succumbs to the first flatteries directed at her, either in the home, in the dance halls of Guanabacoa, or the Louvre ballrooms, and she successively gives into two and even more [sexual relations] until her beauty wilts away (my translation).

Like Ezponda, the *marquillas* also emphasize the fact that the *mulata* is alluring, uninhibited, but definitely not passive or powerless. The caption which refers to her male suitor as a dove and to her as a hawk in the *Para Usted* series (fig. 6) implies that she is conscious of her sexuality and the way in which it can be manipulated to attain gifts such as the necklace that she appears to have recently received from her suitor. Ezponda also mentions the racially mixed ballrooms, or *cunas*, frequented by white men like Leonardo Gamboa and women of color like Cecilia Valdés in Villaverde's novel. The *Para Usted* series depicting scenes of everyday life in Havana illustrates one of these typical ballroom scenarios where a masked *mulata* and her white suitor are seen dancing together (fig. 36). The caption that reads "*aquí se vende gato por liebre*" (cats are passed off and sold as rabbits here) acknowledges the *mulata's* efforts to emphasize her light

---

51 Ibid. Ezponda also also wrote *Doña Laura de Contreras* (1882), a story that attributes the *mulata's* immoral behavior to her mixed blood origins. See Kutzinsky, 66.

52 *Siendo un objeto de solicitudes asidusas, [la mulata] no conoce de la existencia sino la parte material... La mulata se casa en nuestro país raras ocasiones, pues no varía su destino con el matrimonio... Ingenua, libertina, sierva, sucumbe fácilmente a las primeras insinuaciones aduladoras que le dirigen, ya en el hogar doméstico, ya en las cunas de Guanabacoa, ya en los salones del Louvre, y sucumbe sucesivamente a dos, a tres y a más, interin no se marchiten sus atractivos. Juan, “El negro en la pintura...,” 15-16.
complexion and pass herself off as a “pure blood” white despite her African heritage. The use of the expression also implies the “inferior quality” of the mulata and illustrates another indirect means of maintaining the racial hierarchy.

The depictions in the marquilla series appear to be one of the many cultural tools used in Cuban nineteenth-century society to promote the stereotype of the “dangerously” sensual mulatto woman with a potential for upward social mobility. This stereotype not only reflects Cuba’s colonial attitudes towards race and gender, but it also exemplifies the sexual desires shared by a portion of Cuban males. It is important to note that the majority of primary resources compiled to create this essay are of masculine origin and therefore can be assumed to be biased toward the maintenance of a patriarchal system. While the depictions of Afro-Cubans by Victor Patricio de Landaluze and the marquilla manufacturers can be attributed to their political interest in visually upholding colonial Cuba’s system of racial divisions, the motives behind the sensual images of the mulata seem to be more pleasure-driven. Even though her wantonness is acknowledged, however, the mulata depicted in the marquillas is neither associated with pornography like the women in the harem series (fig. 26), nor is she linked with legal or informal practices of prostitution (figs. 2, 3, 7, 34). Her elegant dress (although it reveals much more cleavage) associates her with the pair of “first-rate whites” in figure 35, but the captions and her uncouth demeanor which provokes her to casually adjust her stockings in public (fig. 15), clearly separate the mulata from members of the light-skinned elite class and the conservatively dressed Dutch girl on the Para Usted factory logo seen in figures 1-6. In addition, the “predatory” mulata alluded to in the caption to figure 6, is one who consciously pursues her white lovers.

The complex nature of the mulata may have been why she became such a popular subject in the realm of marquilla production. The mulata depicted by La Charanga de Villergas and Para Usted, is sensual, disinterested in adhering to the conventional practices of marriage within her own class, and a victim of the racial society which encourages her to pursue the white ideal and live by the common maxim “mejor querida de un blanco que mujer de un negro” (rather mistress of a white man than wife of a black man). Together, these qualities make her both a “forbidden” and a desirable sexual symbol for tobacco manufacturers and other men of the white elite class. On the other hand, the mulata’s futile efforts to rise above her given social standing,

---

53 The focus on race and gender in the marquilla depictions can also be interpreted as an attempt to mask the more critical socioeconomic changes taking place in Cuba at this time. See Kutzinsky, 80.
54 Juan Martinez-Alier and Verena Martinez-Alier, Cuba: economía y sociedad (Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 1972), 53.
make her a target of *choteo* which members of *all* social and racial backgrounds in Cuba would have considered humorous. The *mulata* thus appears to have been a very marketable image with a wide popular appeal since men of the white elite class could look at the depictions and indulge in their interracial fantasies, while other members of society could look at the images and mock the *mulata's* tragic story while smoking their cigarettes.

The *mulata* represented on nineteenth-century Cuban cigarette labels is a complex personality who defies any type of simplistic definition. This is because she is neither white nor black, she is an object of desire and at the same time the subject of ridicule, and her sexual appeal can be the source of envy, but her tragic fate compels one to pity her at the same time. Her ambiguous character is quite cleverly summed up in the *marquilla* caption by *La Honradez* where an Afro-Cuban male uses the common idiom “*Ni chicha ni limonada*” (Neither Fish nor Fowl) (fig. 37) to describe her. It is clear that the *mulata’s* ambiguous characterization was not coincidental since the ecclesiastical, marital, testimonial, and health records from Cuba’s national archive illustrate the calculated laws and ideological restrictions that the Spanish crown employed to maintain sex and gender categories in colonial Cuba.

The *mulata* represented in the *marquillas* appears to be somewhat libertine and able to transcend some of colonialism’s racial and social barriers, but the principles of honor which she betrays by becoming a concubine, and the inherent instability and insanity attributed to her, prevent her from becoming a genuinely subversive force in Cuba’s racial hierarchy. Though the *marquilla* manufacturers mask many of her characteristics with elements of *choteo*, the *mulata* cigarette label images are symbolic of the precarious relationship between race, gender, sexuality and power in colonial Cuba. Like other Afro-Cubans during the colonial era, the *mulata’s* freedom and social mobility were controlled by numerous legal, social and ideological tools imposed by the white elite. The existence of these disciplinary mechanisms in something as ordinary as a cigarette package illustrates the widespread and highly specialized nature of white hegemony on the island during this time.
Works Consulted


Image Sources


Fig. 27-31. Pintura Española y Cubana y litografías y grabados cubanos del siglo XIX colección Museo de La Habana. La Habana: Ministerio de Cultura, 1983. Reprinted with the permission of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Cuba.
Figs. 1-6 Para Usted, History of the Mulatto Woman / Historia de la mulata
Figs. 7-12 La Charanga de Villergas, *Life and Death of the Mulatto Woman / Vida y muerte de la mulata*
Figs. 13-18 La Charanga de Villergas, *Life and Death of the Mulatto Woman / Vida y muerte de la mulata*
Figs. 19-21 La Charanga de Villergas, Life and Death of the Mulatto Woman / Vida y muerte de la mulata

Fig. 22 La Honradez, A Visit to the La Honradez Factory / Una visita a la fábrica La Honradez
Fig. 23 Heraldic Lion with the Cuban Coat of Arms / León con el escudo de Cuba

Fig. 24 Allegory Holding the Sword of Justice and Offering Cigars / Alegoria con la espada de la justicia ofreciendo habanos.

Fig. 25 La Honradez, Tapestry Design / Dibujo de tapicería
Fig. 26 La Honradez, Interior of a Harem / Interior del serrallo

Fig. 27 José Arburu Morell, In the Garden / En el jardín, 1888.
Fig. 28 Victor Patricio de Landaluze, after 1850, *During the Time of Absence / En la ausencia*

Fig. 29 Víctor Patricio de Landaluze, after 1850, *José Francisco*

Fig. 30 Victor Patricio de Landaluze, after 1850, *Carriage Driver Courting a Cook / Calesero cortejando a una cocinera*

Fig. 31 Víctor Patricio de Landaluze, after 1850, *Courty Scene / Escena galante*
Fig. 32 La Honradez, Calendar for March 1866 / Almanaque para marzo de 1866

Fig. 33 La Honradez, Cuba's Spanish Volunteer Soldiers / Voluntarios Españoles de Cuba

Fig. 34 Para Usted, Second-rate White (common train) / blanco de segunda (tren común)

Fig. 35 Para Usted, First-rate White (refined) / blanco de primera (refino)
Fig. 36 Para Usted, *Cats are Passed off and Sold as Rabbits Here / Aquí se vende gato por liebre*

Fig. 37 La Honradez, *Life of the Mulatto Woman (Neither Fish nor Fowl) / Vida de la mulata (Ni chicha ni limoná)*
UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO  
LATIN AMERICAN AND IBERIAN INSTITUTE  
RESEARCH PAPER SERIES


OCCASIONAL PAPER SERIES


2. Davidson, Russ "A Description of Rare and Important Medina Imprints in the University of New Mexico Library." May 1988.


SPECIAL PUBLICATIONS


All research and occasional papers and special publications are available from the Latin American and Iberian Institute; University of New Mexico; 801 Yale NE; Albuquerque, New Mexico 87131; 505 277-2961. Call for prices. To comply with the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, these publications are also available in alternative formats.