

# 1

## **The Case of Kid Chicle**

Military Expansion and Labor Competition,  
1939–1945

In December 1940, Lino Rodríguez Grenot decided to try his luck on the base. A boxer known as “Kid Chicle,” Rodríguez was twenty-seven years old, black, and unemployed. Born in Santiago de Cuba, he lived a marginal existence in Guantánamo. He supported himself by boxing whenever he could, but he was just as likely to be selling lottery tickets and trinkets in the streets. In the only known photo of Rodríguez, he wore a panama hat and a white suit with a jaunty pocket handkerchief. He stared at the camera in a self-conscious projection of youthful ambition and style. With the surge in World War II military construction, there were thousands of new jobs on the U.S. military base, and Lino Rodríguez wanted one.<sup>1</sup>

In Caimanera, Rodríguez’s best hope for work was with the Frederick Snare Corporation, a private company that had won the U.S. government contract to enlarge the base. At first, the Snare Corporation had ferried workers back and forth between Caimanera’s docks and GTMO on its own private launches, but job competition and barely suppressed violence made this untenable. Frustrated, unemployed workers had jumped onto the boats and even attacked a Snare operator, creating disruptions and “unmanageable conditions.” To alleviate the situation and ensure a steady stream of laborers, the U.S. Navy decided to assist the

Snare Corporation. It agreed to carry workers on a “Navy boat manned by two unarmed marines with the [U.S.] colors flying.”<sup>2</sup>

On December 17, Lt. Kenneth M. West was the ranking officer on the ferry. Lt. West had previously worked for the sugar behemoth, the United Fruit Company in eastern Cuba. The navy placed him in charge of transporting workers for the Snare Corporation “due to his experiences in Cuba.” The navy and the Snare Corporation also required all workers to obtain a special pass before they could enter the base. Like many hopeful workers, Rodríguez arrived in Caimanera without the coveted pass, and so he waited jobless on the docks.

On this December day, Lt. West selected twenty-nine men on the wharf to work on the base.<sup>3</sup> Angry that they had not been chosen, more than four hundred unemployed men reportedly rushed at Lt. West. Quickly, Lt. West led his contingent to a privately owned dock several hundred feet away and helped his chosen workers onboard. Lino Rodríguez stood nearby and observed the workers entering the launch. He seized his chance. Unauthorized, he leapt into the boat, presumably believing he could force his way onto the base without a pass and gain a job on his own merits. Lt. West did not welcome the intruder. As the launch pulled away from the dock, he struck Rodríguez with a “black-jack” and threw him out of the boat. Rodríguez fell into the bay and died.

Rodríguez’s death spurred public outrage and unprecedented protests against the naval base throughout eastern Cuba. The crime had taken place in Guantánamo Bay, and hundreds of workers on the docks had witnessed it.<sup>4</sup> After several men fished his corpse out of the water, local unions and the Communist Party argued that Lt. West must be tried for murder in Cuban territory. Rodríguez’s family came forward, and his aunt expressed her desire to see justice done under Cuban law. Workers wore black arm bands in protest; locals marched to the cemetery and demanded justice; and several newspapers predicted there might be a strike.<sup>5</sup>

*Guantanamo* maintained that Lt. West’s blow killed Lino Rodríguez. Drowning might imply that some of the fault lay with Rodríguez and relieve Lt. West of culpability. Four Guantánamo doctors performed an autopsy and concluded that Rodríguez’s lungs were not filled with water. Therefore, they ruled out drowning as the cause of death.<sup>6</sup> Not surprisingly, U.S. officials did not accept this conclusion, and they insisted Rodríguez had “drown[ed] under regrettable circumstances.”<sup>7</sup> Regardless, beaten or drowned, Rodríguez’s death was tragic.

Given the local outrage, the U.S. Navy's principal objective was to keep any lawsuit out of the Cuban court system. Acting Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal believed it would be impossible to conduct a "reasonable and fair trial" in Santiago de Cuba or Guantánamo.<sup>8</sup> To avert a Cuban trial, U.S. officials parsed the scene of the crime in dispute, distinguishing between the bay and the boat. According to the 1903 and 1934 lease agreements, the waters in Guantánamo Bay remained under Cuban jurisdiction. About this, there was no dispute. However, the U.S. Navy argued that the scene of the incident was the boat, not the bay, and that U.S. law governed U.S. vessels. Through this logic, the United States argued that the U.S. legal system had jurisdiction over Lt. West. From the capital in Havana, the Cuban Ministerio de Justicia agreed that crimes committed on foreign ships remained within the jurisdiction of the foreign nation.<sup>9</sup> The U.S. ambassador noted that the Cuban government "had taken a very correct attitude" by allowing the United States to handle the matter.<sup>10</sup> The consequent U.S. court-martial tried Lt. West for "involuntary manslaughter" and "conduct to the prejudice of good order and discipline." He was found not guilty.<sup>11</sup>

In Guantánamo, the case of Kid Chicle captured the desperation of unemployed workers, the precariousness of crossing *la frontera* (the border), and the unchecked power of the U.S. military. The story of Lino Rodríguez embodied the anxieties and competition for World War II-era workers. His death also revealed the growing chasm between government and private base employment and Guantánamo's complex social fabric. As the U.S. military geared up for World War II, the Guantánamo region acted as a border between civilian and military zones, between government and private sectors, between North American and Cuban cultures, and even between Caribbean national groups. Lino Rodríguez was just one of thousands of workers who migrated to Guantánamo and hoped to take advantage of GTMO's growth.

### **WORLD WAR II, NAVAL POWER, AND GUANTÁNAMO BAY**

During World War II the U.S. militarized the Caribbean, creating a defensive perimeter that would outlast the German threat and solidify U.S. power in the region. Since the 1934 Lease Agreement, the United States had not significantly modified its force or its mission at GTMO. World War II changed that. In a 1938 report written under the shadow of European and Japanese mobilization, the U.S. Navy conducted an extensive survey of its bases in the United States and its territories. The report clearly

predicted an emergency and the need for military preparedness on a global scale. Although the Caribbean was far from the anticipated theater of war, the naval officers maintained that GTMO would increase in strategic importance. Atlantic outlying possessions offered key facilities for training and maintenance. GTMO was earmarked as an “intermediate station between the Panama Canal and stations to the east.”<sup>12</sup> World War II became the turning point in the U.S. Navy’s commitment to GTMO.

In 1939 the U.S. military began actively demonstrating its naval superiority in the Caribbean, staging large, dramatic, and extensive war games between Cuba and Puerto Rico. Headlines like “Navy to Build Up Atlantic Squadron,” “Navy Board Urges 41 Defense Bases for Entire Nation,” and “Congress to Vote Navy Equal to Any,” heralded the growing commitment to U.S. mobilization.<sup>13</sup> On the editorial page, the *New York Times* lamented that the U.S. bases in Key West, Guantánamo Bay, and Puerto Rico had been ignored for too long, and it stressed that the Caribbean was now more strategically significant than it had been since 1898.<sup>14</sup> The U.S. naval expansion would have short- and long-term consequences for the Caribbean. In the immediate future, it meant rapid military construction, an increased U.S. military presence, and Latin American nations’ participation, even if marginally, in World War II. For the long-term, it meant an established and developed U.S. naval force that could monitor the Western Hemisphere. As retired Rear Admiral Yates Stirling Jr. commented in 1940, “It is gratifying that the United States at last is learning of the vital necessity for bases in strategically important defense areas. . . . Naval bases for warships and airplanes in Guantánamo, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, together with those in the Lesser Antilles would enable the United States to command the Caribbean and maintain a watchful eye over the north coast of South America whose great oil production makes it vital that we permit no enemy to gain a foothold.”<sup>15</sup> Rear Admiral Stirling connected the war against Germany and the protection of oil in South America with the underlining presumption that the U.S. military presence would continue after the war. Yet before the United States could execute this plan, it needed to modernize its navy and prepare for the immediate fight.

In 1939 President Roosevelt monitored the massive war games being staged in the Caribbean on board the U.S.S. *Houston*. In a mock battle, 150 warships carrying sixty thousand officers and enlisted men practiced maneuvers from the eastern seaboard to northern Brazil with the largest concentration of U.S. ships in Guantánamo Bay.<sup>16</sup> The sheer number of military personnel stationed at GTMO created a spectacle of U.S. power. After the war games, U.S. ships welcomed a small contingent of the San-

tiago de Cuba Lion's Club to visit and admire the fleet. As a local *santiaguero* journalist recounted, "We went over to the ship in groups and admired the high technology, the power of these machines, and their defensive weapons."<sup>17</sup> The navy may have impressed the Santiago Lion's Club, but it was still not prepared to fight a war in two oceans.

Over the next two years, the U.S. government invested heavily in the U.S. Navy, and its installations in the Caribbean were no exception. In 1939 the U.S. Congress granted \$89,478,000 for expanding existing naval stations. This budget increased exponentially as the war in Europe intensified. The First Supplemental National Defense Appropriation Act of 1941 (passed in 1940) added more than one billion dollars to the yearly budget, and the Second Supplemental National Defense Appropriation Act of 1941 requested an additional five billion dollars. By the end of the war, the Bureau of Yards and Docks spent an unprecedented \$9,250,000,000.<sup>18</sup> Through the Lend-Lease Agreement with the United Kingdom, the United States provided fifty destroyers in exchange for military bases in Britain's Caribbean colonies, including Trinidad, Jamaica, Bermuda, St. Lucia, the Bahamas, and Antigua. By connecting bases in Guantánamo Bay, Puerto Rico, the British Lend-Lease bases, and the Panama Canal Zone, the United States fashioned a formidable chain of bases throughout the Caribbean.

Under President Batista, the Cuban government became a staunch ally against the Axis powers. In response to Pearl Harbor, the Cuban Congress declared war against Japan on December 9, and war against Germany on December 11, 1941. Throughout World War II, the United States and Cuba signed nine military agreements and, in addition to GTMO, the United States gained access to air bases in San Antonio, San Julián, and Pinar del Rio. Its rights to these bases extended for six months after the formal conclusion of World War II, and the United States returned them to Cuba in 1946. In return for this cooperation, the United States agreed to purchase Cuban sugar at fixed rates, which profited Cuban growers. Batista also negotiated a twenty-five million dollar U.S. loan for public works. The U.S. Navy believed it too could gain long-term benefits from wartime conditions, and it proposed extending GTMO's boundaries to include additional territory and exclusive control over the Yateras River (the source of GTMO's water supply). The Cuban government had been willing to contemplate a cooperative defense zone with joint control, but it was unwilling to discuss a unilateral U.S. plan. After more than a year of negotiations, the navy dropped its request and GTMO's borders remained fixed at their original points.<sup>19</sup>

During World War II, GTMO served three main military functions: (1) it belonged to the network of Atlantic bases that protected merchant ships and the Atlantic from German U-Boat attacks; (2) it provided an ample training ground for U.S. sailors and marines; and (3) it offered entertainment, recreation, and a bit of debauchery far from direct combat.

Throughout the war, German U-Boats targeted U.S. merchant ships delivering crucial supplies to Great Britain. Although the North Atlantic was the central stage for these conflicts, U.S. Navy and Coast Guard convoys also patrolled the eastern coast and the Caribbean. From 1942 to 1943, Germany sent U-Boats to the Caribbean to stifle shipping and supplies originating in Latin America. This campaign was more successful than is often acknowledged and, in 1942, 36 percent of all allied merchant ship losses occurred in the Caribbean.<sup>20</sup> The risk of German U-Boat attacks loomed large in the U.S. Navy's early planning, and GTMO became a key base in this defense.

As the war progressed and the risks to the Atlantic decreased, GTMO became a central training ground where military personnel prepared for combat as they waited for deployment to Europe or the Pacific. Training officer Colonel Bernard Dubel insisted, "The lads . . . are anxious to go places where there's more action," and gain the glory of Guadalcanal, Wake Island, Guam, and Midway.<sup>21</sup> GTMO became known as a tropical paradise, where sailors could jump off cliffs, splash into the water, drink rum, and play baseball far from the risks of war.<sup>22</sup> The military's increased size also meant that there were more U.S. sailors and marines in Guantánamo than ever before. U.S. officers socialized with Guantánamo's elite, and the influx of military personnel resulted in substantial profits for merchants and restaurant proprietors in the region. Through ongoing social and commercial ties, Guantánamo's political economy became firmly tied to the base.

### GUANTÁNAMO'S SOCIAL LANDSCAPE: COMMERCE, THE ZAFRA, AND THE BASE

Guantánamo never approached the same level of wealth or cultural prestige as Havana or Santiago de Cuba. However, its proximity to the base resulted in an aggressive commercial class that defined Guantánamo's elite. The local press referred to this community as *las fuerzas vivas*, or the city's "vibrant forces." They became the public spokespeople in Guantánamo who advocated for public works, improved sanitation, and greater national investment in Guantánamo's tourist potential.<sup>23</sup>

Sugar and coffee plantation owners and administrators would have held the highest positions in Guantánamo's class structure, but their numbers were small. For example, William G. Osment was born in England, traveled to the United States in the late nineteenth century, and enlisted in the U.S. Army to fight in the Spanish-American War. After the war, this Anglo-North American became the vice president and director of the U.S.-owned Guantánamo and Western Railroad Company. Osment was known as a "lavish entertainer" in Guantánamo.<sup>24</sup> The Guantánamo Sugar Company was also a U.S. corporation, and the chief administrator, William Crosby, occupied an equally powerful position in town. U.S. businesspeople involved with the sugar industry, along with U.S. naval officials, added a North American element to Guantánamo's upper classes.

In contrast, Guantánamo's *fuerzas vivas* were overwhelmingly Cuban. They were hotel owners, restaurateurs, café proprietors, and beer, rum, and soft drink distributors. In 1939 there were already 150 eating and drinking establishments.<sup>25</sup> Antonio Jané Civit, the president of Guantánamo's tourist bureau; José "Pepito" Alvarez, a prominent club owner; and Alfredo Oslé Correa, a promoter for better roads, were all leading members of the *fuerzas vivas*. These ambitious men and women socialized with U.S. officials, maintained close contacts with North American customers, and depended on U.S. dollars for their prosperity. They also welcomed liberty parties and remarked on the uninhibited, carefree, and spendthrift ways of the U.S. sailors and marines, whom they dubbed *francos*, possibly stemming from the term *día franco*, or day off. Moreover, the Guantánamo commercial elite depended on the *francos* to spend money in local bars, clubs, and less reputable establishments. The *fuerzas vivas* included members of the Union Club, the Colonia Español, Block Cataluña, the Lion's Club, the Rotary Club, and later the United Service Organization (USO). These key organizations were where Guantánamo's elite socialized and did business. The *fuerzas vivas* also advocated for better public health standards and infrastructure in Guantánamo and Caimanera. From their perspective, more hospitable conditions for U.S. military personnel equaled greater prosperity for Guantánamo.

Cuban social clubs were segregated by race and nationality, and the prominent civic organizations accepted white Cuban and Spanish members. Cubans of color belonged to a parallel set of organizations, including Siglo XX, Club Moncada, and La Nueva Era, but these societies did not play an equivalent role in Guantánamo's commercial structure.<sup>26</sup>

Guantánamo's West Indian and Chinese members established yet another tier of nationally and racially based mutual aid societies, such as the Masonic Lodge, the West Indian Democratic Association, La Nueva China, and Hoy Yui Kong Sol.<sup>27</sup> These organizations fostered a middle-class sensibility that veered away from political activism. Many of the West Indians worked on the U.S. naval base or in other service occupations, and most Chinese were small business owners, running restaurants, cafés, and laundries.

Guantánamo's working class included white Cubans, Cubans of color, West Indians, and Haitians, all who predominantly worked in the sugar industry. Before World War II, the Guantánamo Sugar Company and the United Fruit Company were the dominant employers in the region. For example, the Guantánamo Sugar Company hired 4500 workers during the *zafra* (harvest) and 2000 during the *tiempo de muerto* (dead period).<sup>28</sup> These jobs offered irregular, seasonal employment and were marked by their brutal physicality. In addition, U.S.-controlled plantations existed as self-sufficient enclaves almost entirely "outside and above [Cuban] law."<sup>29</sup>

During World War II, GTMO opened up thousands of new opportunities. For workers accustomed to the neocolonial control of U.S. sugar companies, the leap to employment on the U.S. military installation may not have been particularly great. GTMO could be seen as just one more branch of the United States' political and economic control in the region.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, U.S. government jobs on GTMO often appeared more attractive than the sugar *centrales*. GTMO offered security, steadier wages, and a level of prestige. Men and women who worked on the base were part of the "aristocracy of labor."<sup>31</sup> As a result, with the sudden increase in base employment, workers throughout the country traveled to Guantánamo and Caimanera in search of these jobs. What they did not know was that the U.S. Navy had subcontracted the majority of new construction work to the Frederick Snare Corporation.

### PASSES, LAUNCHES, AND THE FREDERICK SNARE CORPORATION

The rapid development and growth of the U.S. naval base was a joint effort of the U.S. Navy and its private-sector partner, the Frederick Snare Corporation. The navy granted the Snare Corporation a U.S. government contract and with that delegated authority over the majority of the workforce. At the same time, the navy was more than willing to assist the Snare Corporation with materials, labor, and security information.



With this hedging of responsibility, the navy's reliance on the Snare Corporation raised the question of accountability in the vortex of public-private enterprises.

Prior to World War II, the United States had relied on private companies in Guantánamo, but on a small scale and at least nominally under Cuban jurisdiction. For example, GTMO lacked its own water supply, and the dry, almost desert-like conditions in the region made it impossible for the base to be self-sufficient. The base relied on water from the nearby Yateras River outside its borders. After experimenting with water delivered by train, the United States initiated a competition for an aqueduct. To minimize complications with Cuban law and governance, the United States insisted that the aqueduct could only transport water to the base; it could not service any of the surrounding Cuban communities. The United States rejected outright a bid from the Guantánamo municipal government, which had hoped to use the U.S. contract to improve local public health and access to clean drinking water. Instead, the U.S. Navy granted the contract to Henri Schueg Chassin, based in the Bacardi Company in 1938.<sup>32</sup> This created a precedent whereby a private entity within Cuba worked solely for the U.S. Navy on Cuban soil.

With the urgent need to develop GTMO, the United States again turned to a private corporation. This policy was part of a much larger pattern whereby the federal government increased its reliance on private business during World War II. Under President Roosevelt and Secretary of War Henry Stimson, the U.S. government entered more than 7,400 private contracts to expedite military construction. These contracts cost more than fifty times the equivalent World War I-era ones and signaled the extent to which the federal government allied itself with corporate capital.<sup>33</sup> In the rush to war, the U.S. government entered an unprecedented number of "cost-plus" contracts. Under "cost-plus," each company would recoup their entire "cost," and then receive an additional "plus" for profit, thereby creating an incentive for corporations to participate in the military build-up. Stimson argued the private-sector needed a guaranteed profit. The military situation necessitated immediate action and stimulation, regardless of the price.<sup>34</sup>

The U.S. Navy awarded the Frederick Snare Corporation government contract NOy-4162 to expand GTMO's facilities, and over the next five years it spent thirty-four million dollars. At its peak, the Snare Corporation employed 9,000 local workers, and the U.S. Navy employed an additional 4,000 civil service employees. In his *History of Guantánamo Bay*, Admiral Murphy wrote, "The history of Contract NOy-4162 is

virtually the history of the World War II buildup of Guantánamo Bay.”<sup>35</sup> The prominence of the Snare Corporation elevated the role of a private, nongovernment employer on the base.

The Frederick Snare Corporation was a U.S.-owned company that operated in New York, Havana, Buenos Aires, and the Panama Canal Zone. It constructed much of early Havana’s infrastructure, including highways and the national baseball stadium. Frederick Snare was a well-known figure in Havana’s social scene and, according to *Time*, “Father Snare” changed the “mores of Havana’s better classes.” Most notably, he designed the Havana Country Club, which contained Cuba’s first golf course and “the most lavish and expensive swimming pool in any Caribbean country.” He was the president of the country club until 1946.<sup>36</sup> Already established in Cuba, the Snare Corporation could quickly shift its operations east and modernize the base. The U.S. Ambassador to Cuba George S. Messersmith described the relationship between the U.S. Navy and the Snare Corporation as “desirable.” He had confidence the company’s familiarity with Cuba would make it well suited to the challenge.<sup>37</sup>

Between 1940 and 1943, the Snare Corporation’s presence on the base was massive and unprecedented. Snare built a new self-contained Marine Corps base, new airfields on McCalla Hill and Leeward Point, ninety-two magazines, and a variety of social and recreational facilities, including a chapel and a school. Efficiency was critical, and military and private materials became indistinguishable. As Admiral Murphy recorded, “Due to the speed with which construction was begun, the contractors had no opportunity to make preliminary preparation; therefore all available equipment of the station was turned over to the Frederick Snare Corporation for their use.”<sup>38</sup> In the expediency of war, the Snare Corporation occupied a newly defined niche between private and public entities, which allowed the U.S. Navy to erase, or emphasize, this distinction as it best served U.S. interests.

The United States granted the Snare Corporation broad leeway in its employment practices and recognized that it would employ thousands of local workers. This created a two-tier workforce where the U.S. Navy offered permanent employment at steady wages, even as the Snare Corporation paid workers much less for temporary jobs. Lino Lemes García, a local journalist reported, “There are more than two thousand men working on the base today, some are working for the [U.S.] administration and the others for the Frederick Snare Corporation. Those working directly for the [U.S.] government are earning a higher daily wage and are paid in U.S. dollars.”<sup>39</sup> Snare jobs were also time-sensitive,

construction-related, and short-term. As a result, many men and women gained employment for a brief time, to be laid off and then rehired later. Cuban workers quickly recognized that U.S. government civil service positions came with far better benefits and salaries than the more temporary, contract jobs offered by the Snare Corporation. The Havana-based Communist Party periodical, *Hoy*, paid close attention to the Snare Corporation in eastern Oriente. In a pointed critique, *Hoy* recognized the consequent politics of a private corporation building a military base: “A problem is created when a foreign company insists on . . . discriminating and paying ridiculous salaries for the benefit of military activities put in practice by the government of the United States.”<sup>40</sup>

The U.S. Navy had no qualms about assisting the Snare Corporation in its hiring procedures or blurring the line between government and private employer. The U.S. Navy insisted that it did not have jurisdiction or control over the Snare Corporation’s labor practices; however, it was still involved in its employment policies. Distrusting the Snare Corporation’s ability to weed out potential security threats, the United States gave direct aid and advice. For example, U.S. officials feared that fascist Falangists (Franco supporters) would be able to infiltrate the base and, on this premise, they banned all Spanish employees from working there.<sup>41</sup> The U.S. base intelligence officer investigated Spanish employees for the Snare Corporation and for the U.S. government alike, making no distinction between the two. Even as the Snare Corporation expanded its purview to other regional projects, the U.S. Navy maintained an interest in its hiring practices. For example, the United States also contracted the Snare Corporation to excavate a nickel mine in Mayari, Oriente. To prevent “employment of suspicious persons,” U.S. naval intelligence shared GTMO’s list of “undesirable workers” and effectively created a blacklist. The U.S. Navy listed close to two hundred employees it considered to be a security risk. If the Snare Corporation decided to hire one of these workers, the U.S. Navy volunteered to continue the investigations.<sup>42</sup>

Workers recognized the precariousness of contract employment, but they desperately wanted and needed base jobs. Cuba was just recovering from the Great Depression, and men and women from Santiago de Cuba, Holguín, Camagüey, and even Havana traveled to Guantánamo looking for work and opportunities. By 1940 the local press complained that Guantánamo was overrun with potential criminals, prostitutes, and desperate men and women who were willing to do anything to get a job. As a result, thousands lingered in Caimanera unemployed and hungry.



Figure 3. World War II-era postcard of downtown Caimanera. Photo by Aguirre.

Local journalist Lino Lemes cautioned these migrants to come only if they had an invitation: “I am going to give this advice to the thousands of unemployed in Cuba: Don’t come looking for work on the naval base if you aren’t bringing a letter from the Frederick Snare Corporation in Havana.”<sup>43</sup> In subsequent columns, Lemes referred repeatedly to the “invasion of workers” in Caimanera.<sup>44</sup>

In the initial stages from 1939 to 1940, the hiring process was informal, unregulated, and largely dependent on family connections. First, all workers had to secure a “pass.” The former workers I spoke with remembered getting a pass from a friend or relative who already had a job on the base. For example, Santiago Ruiz was born in Gíbara, a small community in northeastern Oriente. He worked as a musician and barber, but in 1940 he came to Guantánamo in search of better living conditions. He recounted how he originally got a job on the U.S. naval base:

A musician friend of mine came to my barber shop one day for a haircut and shave. He wanted—he had an idea—to start an orchestra. He already knew me, although I didn’t know him. . . . He said to me that he thought we could form an orchestra. . . . I told him, yes, I was interested. . . . He was a boss on the base, and therefore could find me a job. Many days passed, almost like two months after our conversation. . . . Then one day he told me, “Now I’ve managed to get a ‘pass’ so you can work on the base.” I went to the base the next day with him. He spoke English, and he spoke there with the *marino* who was in the port. . . . I ran to complete the paperwork . . . and I achieved a positive result. I began to work on the base in 1944.

During the days, Santiago worked as a mechanic, and in the evenings he performed at the Officers' Club, playing Cuban music and learning North American-style tunes like "In the Mood," and "Moonlight Serenade."<sup>45</sup>

Santiago Ruiz's neighbor and *compañero*, Ricardo Baylor, had a considerably more fraught and anxiety-ridden time acquiring a pass and finding work at GTMO. His parents were Jamaican migrants, and Ricardo grew up in Preston, a United Fruit Company town with a large West Indian community. He had a cousin who worked as a domestic servant on the base, and he recalled somewhat resentfully that she was "a little indifferent" when it came to helping his family make contacts. His brother went to Guantánamo first. He told Ricardo stories about the boss coming out onto the docks in Caimanera, shouting "Ten carpenters! Eight workers!" The laborers waiting on the wharves would then rush and jump into small, crowded launches, pushing their way through for the opportunity to work on the base. "I had to work to help my family, because my mother, you know, she raised us and there were four of us, and so I had to work. . . . And then my brother was able to obtain a 'pass' for me." With the pass in hand, Ricardo moved to Guantánamo in 1945 and began to work on the U.S. military base.<sup>46</sup>

Even a self-conscious anti-imperialist could reconcile his ideology with working for the U.S. *marinos*.<sup>47</sup> For example, as a young boy Alberto Torres admired his father, who was among the founders of the Cuban Communist Party in Caimanera, and he in turn headed the local chapter of the Young Communist League. Despite this political education, Alberto recalled working on the base as a golf caddy. "Yes, in World War II, I began to work on the base before I was eighteen years old. . . . They selected persons of my age, sixteen, fifteen, in order to carry the officers' bags when they played golf. And then the officer would choose me, and they paid two dollars and eighty-eight cents. . . . They couldn't get the ball in the hole, because they were so drunk." He later gained a permanent job in the Supply Department in 1940: "All of my brothers spent time and worked there, because work in Cuba was scarce. Because of this the Americans could assert themselves. . . . The sugar harvest lasted only two months and then there was unemployment."<sup>48</sup> In Guantánamo, the base offered one of the clearest paths to individual economic security, regardless of its ramifications for national sovereignty or Cuban nationalism. Although GTMO was a direct affront to Cuban self-determination and a tangible reminder of U.S. dominance, for most workers, economic need far outweighed any possible political objections.

In Guantánamo, these informal family networks were powerful, and so workers without these ties often felt desperate. A black market quickly emerged. Most notoriously, Francisco Ochoa, the chief of inspectors in the port, began selling passes to workers who wanted to enter the naval station.<sup>49</sup> Security measures were haphazard and easily manipulated, and so Cuban officials were able to initiate this clandestine business and profit from the unemployed migrant population.

Once workers obtained passes, they could travel to the base, apply for jobs, undergo health and security checks, and with luck, begin work. Every potential worker was screened by the base doctor for tuberculosis and other infectious diseases. In addition, base officials measured, weighed, photographed, and fingerprinted prospective employees. Finally, after all these tests, the workers received a number and badge, or *chapa*, enabling them to enter the base. The *chapa* identified workers as men or women of good repute and health and, much like a passport, it was the physical artifact of the workers' privileged travel. These security checks and *chapas* loomed large in Cuban memories. The Guantánamo Municipal Museum has a display case devoted to workers' identification badges, and workers recounted the clearance process in oral and written accounts.<sup>50</sup> In effect, these badges clearly and uncritically marked the Cubans as "foreigners" in their own country.<sup>51</sup>

Not only did workers need a pass and then a *chapa*, but they also had an expensive and physically arduous commute. Some workers, particularly female domestic servants, lived on the base and traveled to Guantánamo only on the weekends. Many more undertook the daily commute from Guantánamo to the base, spending an average of two hours each way. There were no direct roads between Guantánamo and Caimanera, so workers had to travel by railroad. This cost not only time, but money. Transportation cost \$.30 a day, which added up to \$1.50 to \$1.80 a week. Workers' salaries could be as low as \$14.30 a week, and the average laborer earned \$17.68 a week.<sup>52</sup> With these wages, transportation took a significant chunk out of workers' salaries. Once they arrived in Caimanera, workers would then jump on a ferry and travel by water to the base. These launches also cost a daily fee. Lemes reiterated that the boats were overcrowded and potentially unsafe. Workers did not know how to swim, and the boats were not equipped with life jackets or first aid kits.<sup>53</sup> In 1943 a launch actually hit a sunken ship, and several workers were wounded and needed medical attention.<sup>54</sup> This commute ingrained itself in base workers' memories. For example, Walter Knight explained there were large crowds of people clamoring on the docks and

waiting for the launches. Finally, someone would shout “It’s here!” and everyone would rush for the boat.<sup>55</sup> Another worker, Maria Boothe, remembered being afraid: “In the early years there was a launch . . . but me, I didn’t like that much [laughs], I was afraid of the sea. It was about a fifteen minute trip.”<sup>56</sup>

This physical journey to the base was not an accident. For more than thirty years, Guantánamo’s *fuerzas vivas*, and Alfredo Oslé Correa in particular, lobbied, cajoled, and advocated for a direct road between Guantánamo and Caimanera. Although Oslé began his campaign in 1920, he did not see the road completed for more than twenty-five years. It also took until the mid-1950s for a second road to be built directly to GTMO’s northeast gate. This improvement finally allowed base workers to travel by car or bus, rather than by train and launch. The *fuerzas vivas* blamed the delay on the Cuban national government, which generally ignored the needs and the economies of the eastern provinces. In the weeks following the nuclear blasts in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, *La Voz del Pueblo* sarcastically observed: “And to think we started the campaign for the road to Caimanera before they started studying the atomic bomb!”<sup>57</sup> Clearly, neither the U.S. Navy nor the Cuban national government wanted to facilitate easy access to the base.<sup>58</sup> If the U.S. Navy had wanted greater contact with Guantánamo, it could have easily financed it. Instead, it forced workers to travel for several hours each day to reach *la frontera*. By requiring a long commute and holding workers at the docks (instead of at an overland checkpoint), the navy emphasized the journey between Guantánamo and GTMO.

Traveling across Guantánamo Bay was not the workers’ only journey. Many were migrants, either internal migrants from within Cuba or foreign workers who came to Cuba before the Great Depression. In close proximity to Haiti and Jamaica, eastern Cuba acted as a Caribbean crossroads, with a rich history of Spanish, English, and Creole-speaking people. Guantánamo’s multinational community of Cubans, West Indians, Haitians, Chinese, Puerto Ricans, and Spaniards led to competition and demands for jobs based on nationality. Each population had a distinct status in Cuba and a distinct historical relationship to the U.S. government. Officially, the U.S. Navy ignored the national divisions in Guantánamo’s workforce and treated all non-U.S. workers as local hires. Unofficially, the U.S. Navy took full advantage of nationalist animosity among its labor pool. GTMO’s hiring practices inverted Guantánamo’s social structure. Manipulating racial and national hierarchies, U.S. officials often rebuffed Cuban nationals and Spanish migrants and favored West Indians. In response, prospective

employees called on a spectrum of linguistic, legal, and nationalist strategies to gain access to base jobs. Workers argued alternately that language, race, or neocolonial obligation should lead to preferential employment for their nationality. In the process, the military border not only separated North Americans from Cubans, but it also revealed a multinational population defined by disparate legacies of neocolonialism.

## NATIONALITY AND LABOR

GTMO's expansion followed years of national Cuban debates over the role of foreign labor. During the early twentieth century, more than seven hundred thousand Spaniards and three hundred thousand West Indians and Haitians migrated to Cuba. The cumulative total constituted a substantial percentage of the national population, which was just shy of four million people in 1931.<sup>59</sup> The vast majority of the Caribbean migrants worked in the U.S.-dominated sugar industry. Native-born workers resented the competition presented by migrants, and this hostility reached its nadir during the sugar industry's crash and the Great Depression. With the 1933 overthrow of the Machado dictatorship, the new revolutionary government led by Ramón Grau San Martín responded to Cuban workers' long-standing frustration with foreign labor. Under the slogan "Cuba for the Cubans," the government passed a decree on October 18, 1933, authorizing the deportation of unemployed foreigners, and issued a second decree on November 8, 1933, declaring that 50 percent of all jobs must go to native Cuban workers, known as the Law of 50 Percent.<sup>60</sup>

These nationalist and xenophobic measures had a great deal of popular support throughout Cuba. Organized opposition ironically came from opposite sides of the political divide: U.S. corporations, which relied on flexible migrant labor, and the Cuban Communist Party, which valued class over race and nationality. These discriminatory laws delineated who was included and who was excluded from *cubanidad*. Plus, they served as an official reminder that foreign workers were not welcome. The Law of 50 Percent was initially aimed at the disproportionate numbers of Spaniards in the commercial sector, but it also carried a racist tenor. Spaniards lost jobs and returned to Spain, but West Indians and Haitians suffered the brunt of discrimination, job loss, and repatriation. Because of their English-speaking skills and relatively high literacy levels, West Indians sought alternate employment in the service industry, in urban centers, and on the U.S. naval base in Guantánamo. As subjects



of the British Empire, West Indians petitioned the British consul for protection and support. Haitians had no such recourse, and almost forty thousand were forcibly deported.<sup>61</sup> The 1940 Cuban Constitution did not codify the Law of 50 Percent, but it continued to promote nationalist hiring practices that favored Cuban citizens. Thus, national rivalries defined Cuban labor debates before World War II, and these antecedents shaped the environment of worker competition in Guantánamo as the U.S. Navy hired thousands of men and women.

This same era coincided with the United States' proclamation of the Good Neighbor policy. With the onset of World War II, this rhetorical friendship solidified into a hemispheric alliance. The United States employed the mutual language of neighborliness and masked its continued imperial and neocolonial presence in Latin America. Through the Good Neighbor policy, the United States presented its foreign policy as a beneficial partnership, and it sought to escape the obligations that accompanied modern empire. Irregardless, in Guantánamo, GTMO's "neighbors" argued that the United States had concrete and direct commitments to the Cuban community. The trope of neighborliness resonated more than many U.S. diplomats realized, and Cubans used it to appeal to U.S. ideals, rights, and responsibilities.

Guantánamo's politicians, journalists, and workers all believed that the Good Neighbor policy compelled U.S. officials to provide material benefits to Cuban workers. Individual Cubans wrote plaintive letters to the U.S. consulate, essentially begging for a recommendation, a pass, an "in" onto the base, and what they hoped would be a steady job and economic security. They directed their pleas to the U.S. consul and even to the president. For example, José Clemente composed a heartfelt plea to President Roosevelt: "As you see, I've always wanted to work there [GTMO], and I have done everything I can, for I like and have always admired American customs and specially your democracy. . . . There would be nothing that would satisfy me as much as working for Americans. . . . I want to work for Americans. Even when I've been born in Cuba my heart and sympathies are toward the States. Do it and God will choose you as His everlasting President."<sup>62</sup> Clemente drafted his appeal in English and, on the face of it, represented the ideal neocolonial subject who admired and articulated loyalty to U.S. democracy and values. Yet, Clemente's language came full circle, assuming U.S. patronage to the Cuban people in general, and to him, as a loyal neocolonial subject, in particular. This was exactly the kind of demand the United States had hoped to avoid.

The governor of Oriente Province, Dr. Angel Pérez, a native of Guantánamo, specifically asked the U.S. consul to designate base jobs for *guantanameros*. The base commander's response was terse and negative: "We are unable *in accordance with law* to give the governor of Oriente Province any assurance that employment will be given to Cubans at this station." This answer was harsh and evasive, for within a year of this correspondence, the United States had hired several thousand workers. The U.S. officials' key point was that "in accordance with law," the United States had no responsibility to hire Cubans.<sup>63</sup> The Guantánamo mayor also lobbied the navy to give jobs to its immediate neighbors, insisting that Guantánamo workers should be hired before migrants from Havana.<sup>64</sup> Workers themselves clamored for *guantanameros* to have the first stab at base jobs. In 1941 five hundred unemployed workers from Guantánamo protested that they had been waiting for work while the base hired people from other *pueblos* or cities.<sup>65</sup>

Even more galling, the navy hired large numbers of foreign migrants to work on the base. In a nationalist critique, Guantánamo journalist Lino Lemes García emphasized GTMO's presence in Cuba. Co-opting the language of neighborliness, he argued that the base needed to result in benefits for Cubans: "The Yankee government could practically demonstrate the Good Neighbor policy by giving preference to the natives in building the public works."<sup>66</sup> He was angry that the base operated outside Cuban jurisdiction—it did not have to adhere to the Law of 50 Percent or Cuban labor laws. As a result, foreigners could seek employment on the base on the same terms as Cubans and often found jobs ahead of Cuban *guantanameros*. Lemes proposed that if the United States did not hire more Cuban workers, then Cubans must modify the 1934 treaty agreement to include labor protections: "It is a sad and embarrassing fact that while foreigners find work easily on the base, natives must do incredible things to work on the base, even though the U.S. base is in Cuba." It was only by protecting Cuban workers, that the United States could truly call itself a "good neighbor."<sup>67</sup>

Lino Lemes García was the most vocal critic of the working conditions on GTMO. He wrote regularly for Guantánamo's leading daily, *La Voz del Pueblo*, and the less established, *El Vigilante*, while also freelancing for Santiago and Havana papers. His constant editorials and letters to Cuban and U.S. officials made him persona non grata to the U.S. diplomatic corps, who dismissed him as "irresponsible," "shoddy," "discredited," and went as far as placing him on the list of Cubans whose "entry into the United States would be contrary to the



Figure 4. Caricature of Lino Lemes García. The word written on his pencil means "truthful." *La Revista Oriental*, August 1955. Courtesy of the Elvira Cape Provincial Library, Santiago de Cuba.

public interest."<sup>68</sup> From World War II through the Cuban revolution, Lemes addressed almost every issue related to GTMO and Guantánamo, including wages, pensions, public health, prostitution, commercial relationships, customs, and U.S. sailors' liberty parties in town. And despite U.S. officials' patronizing criticism and studied indifference, Lemes wrote for the Guantánamo press for more than twenty years, becoming the most consistent advocate for Cuban workers on the naval base.

In his promotion of Cuban workers, Lino Lemes often singled out West Indians for critique, claiming they garnered jobs on the base at the expense of local Cubans. Many Cuban workers saw West Indians as their direct rivals, and competition for jobs emerged along national lines. From the beginning of the twentieth century, West Indians had been part of Guantánamo and GTMO's social fabric. Most came to work in Oriente's

U.S.-controlled sugar industry. Facing discrimination and economic hardships, West Indian migrants adopted a range of strategies to survive and build communities in Cuba. In the first and second decades of the twentieth century, Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and its internationalist black nationalism attracted a large following in Oriente among the migrant community. Some West Indian migrants participated in the Cuban labor movement and even organized the Antillean Workers' Union. Still, others responded to prejudice by replacing their English names for Spanish monikers to escape dismissal and integrate more easily. And many West Indians also turned inward, to the Episcopal Church, to fraternal organizations, and to private associations such as the Catalina Lodge and the British West Indian Welfare Centre.<sup>69</sup> These individuals were generally literate, English speakers who valued social propriety. For example, in 1943 base workers formed the British West Indies Democratic Association in Caimanera. It welcomed workers from the Frederick Snare Corporation and "everyone of sufficient morality who asks to join." The founders depoliticized their aims, renouncing any discussion of race or politics within "the bosom of the Association."<sup>70</sup> This policy was indicative of West Indians' middle-class aspirations and reluctance to engage in Cuban politics or affiliate themselves directly with black Cubans, Haitians, or other Cubans of color.

West Indians held a disproportionate number of base jobs, working as cooks, chauffeurs, office workers, manual laborers, and domestic servants. Because gaining a job often depended on one's internal connections, West Indians were also in an advantageous position in the run-up to World War II. Lemes went so far as to describe Jamaicans as "good diplomats" for their ability to obtain passes for their relatives and West Indian community members.<sup>71</sup>

GTMO acted as an oddly protective work space for West Indian migrants and their descendants. Their English-speaking skills meant they held numerous supervisory and white collar positions as well as direct contact with U.S. personnel. Moreover, all aliens were required to register on the List of Foreigners. The Cuban government made several attempts to force the U.S. base to cooperate with this practice and register West Indian workers on GTMO. The U.S. government was reluctant to participate because it did not want to administer Cuban law within the base. As a result, foreign nationals could "evade Cuban laws," because the U.S. administration ignored the policy.<sup>72</sup> The boundaries of the base stymied Cuban efforts to register West Indians and offered a shield from Cuban labor laws.

Not surprisingly, West Indians' private organizations, coupled with their favored positions, made them targets within Guantánamo. Cubans often ignored West Indians' vulnerability in the general workforce and viewed their lack of formal political activity as a sign of passivity. There were almost no positive images of West Indians in the press; instead, most references appeared in the crime reports.<sup>73</sup> Although these accounts did not explicitly racialize or disparage West Indians for their blackness, they repeatedly referred to them as foreigners and *jamaiquinos*. In eastern Cuba, there was a clear linguistic distinction between *jamaicano* and *jamaiquino*. To the West Indian community, *jamaicano* implied respect, but *jamaiquino* was insulting and derogatory.<sup>74</sup> The normalized use of *jamaiquino* in the press reflected the derision aimed at the migrants.<sup>75</sup>

In Lino Lemes's campaign for more Cuban workers, he also emphasized what he saw as West Indians' "submissive" personalities, opining that if the United States preferred "the Jamaicans, the Chinese, the Indians, and other foreigners who were not protected by the American Flag, maybe it is because these workers are more docile."<sup>76</sup> In the Santiago de Cuba paper, *Oriente*, José Octavio Muñoz also argued that West Indian workers had an unfair advantage at GTMO because they "subject themselves more docilely to the anti-Cuban procedures that are prevalent here."<sup>77</sup> Juan Carlos Pulsara, a former base worker, bluntly articulated this common sense notion that West Indians were "mild," "submissive," and had an "obedient character." He commented that they were often given supervisory positions because they did not "revolt or make demands. . . . The Jamaicans had this defect: [they were] very submissive, you understand me? . . . They were very, very submissive, and they liked to denounce the Cubans for whatever irregularities they committed."<sup>78</sup>

West Indian workers navigated a precarious landscape defined by British imperialism in their home islands and U.S. neocolonialism in Cuba.<sup>79</sup> As black men and women, they often asserted their *Britishness* to distinguish themselves from Cubans of color, even as they too were excluded from the upper echelons of Oriente society. This attachment to a British identity sometimes resulted in isolation from Cuban politics and national debates.<sup>80</sup> Significantly, GTMO also mimicked U.S. strategies in Panama, which had also relied on West Indian migrants to build the canal. In both the Canal Zone and in GTMO, the United States elevated the status of West Indians and created a new class of favored workers who gained their privilege precisely for being outside the national politic.<sup>81</sup> As a result, in the 1940s U.S. officials could effectively take advantage of these English-speaking workers and the division in the labor

force. The naval base elevated the positions of West Indians and effectively transformed the social order of Guantánamo.

The United Kingdom was not the only country with Caribbean colonies, and the small Puerto Rican community in Guantánamo occupied a peculiar position between U.S. citizenship and U.S. subjecthood. Puerto Ricans' status was multiple and ambiguous. Puerto Ricans were technically U.S. citizens, but this citizenship claim was diminished by Puerto Rico's colonial position vis-à-vis the United States.<sup>82</sup> Puerto Ricans also shared many cultural ties to Cubans, including language, religion, and historic links to both Spain and the African Diaspora. But, Puerto Ricans were also migrants and excluded from Cuban citizenship. Puerto Rican workers found themselves vying for jobs on GTMO, a place equally anomalous and laced with questions of sovereignty and citizenship as Puerto Rico itself.

In the context of World War II, the United States required all U.S. citizens in Cuba, including Puerto Ricans, to register with the U.S. Selective Service. In a letter written in Spanish to the U.S. consulate, Juan Almodóvar Sánchez requested what was required of him, as a U.S. citizen, regarding military inscription. The U.S. consul responded in Spanish, informing him that he had to register at the Guantánamo Sugar Company.<sup>83</sup> Not only did this again conflate U.S. military and economic power in eastern Cuba, it also revealed a North American community with Spanish surnames. When U.S. consul Gordon Burke made his report to the State Department regarding the distribution of selective service cards, almost all of those registered had Spanish names: Mario Almenares, Eduardo Alvarez, Ignacio Ávila, Antonio Balaguer, Armando Benítez, and Horacio Modesto.<sup>84</sup> Many of these men might have been U.S. citizens of Cuban descent, but this population also undoubtedly included numerous Puerto Ricans.

Puerto Rican migrants lobbied for their rights to work on the U.S. military base, and they pointed to their U.S. citizenship and loyalty to the United States in making these claims. For example, Eddy Pagán, a Puerto Rican worker, wrote two letters to the U.S. consul complaining that officials favored non-U.S. workers on the base. Pagán went out of his way to declare that he was "born under the American Flag," remained loyal to the U.S. Congress and Constitution, and considered himself a child of Washington and Lincoln. He criticized U.S. officials for dismissing Puerto Ricans before Cuban, Jamaican, or Chinese workers.<sup>85</sup> As a Puerto Rican, he was a U.S. citizen and deserved preferential treatment for base employment. Pagán called on his colonial position within the U.S. empire to

gain status, even though his letters and claims to “America” also revealed his tenuous claim to U.S. citizenship.

Puerto Ricans’ status as U.S. citizens was contested, and many petitioners used the word *subdito*, or subject, alongside or instead of *ciudadano*, or citizen. This slippage shows the duality of Puerto Ricans’ claims to U.S. citizenship and their status as colonial subjects. For example, Juan Martínez Lugo wrote to the U.S. State Department in 1940. “I write to you in order to say that I am Juan Martínez Lugo, an American citizen of the United States. I came from Puerto Rico . . . but now I can’t find work in any places. I have a big family and our life is to [*sic*] difficult now. I beg you some recommendation to Military Chief of Guantánamo Navy Army. If you need some reference of mi, I can send to you my passport and other documents.”<sup>86</sup> Although the letter was written in English, his Spanish spelling of “mi” reflected his mixed sensibility. For his efforts, the U.S. consulate in Santiago de Cuba answered his letter without acknowledging his claims to U.S. citizenship and denied any knowledge of GTMO’s activities: “In reply you are informed that this consulate has no jurisdiction over the naval station, and for this reason has no official information as to the work that is being done there.”<sup>87</sup> In another example, Santos Lugo wrote to the U.S. consulate asking for employment on GTMO in 1939. Unlike Pagán and Martínez, Lugo did not define himself as a U.S. citizen, but rather as a *subdito*, a North American subject.<sup>88</sup> This word choice unintentionally undercut his claim to full U.S. benefits, equality, and preferential employment status. Pagán too concluded his epistle stating that he was a U.S. citizen *and* a “subject of the great nation.” Although these linguistic differences may seem minor, they accurately reflected Puerto Ricans’ ambiguous position and the second-class nature of their U.S. citizenship.

Puerto Ricans were also sidelined because they were arguably indistinguishable racially or culturally from the general Cuban population. In their letters to U.S. officials, Puerto Ricans often asserted their experience as veterans of the U.S. Army and their rights as U.S. subjects or citizens; however, many wrote to the U.S. Consulate in Spanish, identifying themselves linguistically with Cuba rather than the United States. In an angry and detailed complaint, Pedro Salgado and José Fernández identified themselves as “Puerto Ricans, who are American subjects,” and they allied themselves with their Cuban counterparts. “We must clarify that this Company [Frederick Snare Corporation] wants to employ foreign personnel. . . . This Company is pleased to employ Spaniards, Jamaicans, and other foreigners who can bully their way in, while Puerto Ricans and

Cubans are treated and seen as if they were dogs.”<sup>89</sup> Salgado and Fernández claimed Puerto Ricans and Cubans held equal rights vis-à-vis the U.S. government as colonial *subditos*. They pointed to their competition as the “foreign” Jamaicans. The U.S. officials translating their missive ignored or failed to recognize Salgado and Fernández as Puerto Ricans or as U.S. citizens (or subjects). The translator’s summary simply stated: “[A]ccording to these writers, the Cubans are not getting their share of it [work]. . . . The writers complain that Jamaican negroes are being favored, etcetera.”<sup>90</sup> In this conclusion, Salgado and Fernández “became” Cubans in the diplomatic record without any particular privileges to base employment. Cuban and Puerto Ricans both believed their claims should supersede groups they saw as foreign. They lobbied the U.S. government alternately as “good neighbors” and U.S. citizens, but both populations still found themselves in a subordinated neocolonial position, dependent on the U.S. military.

Finally, World War II changed the politics of loyalty on the base. Despite the minimal threat of a German invasion, U.S. officers kept a vigilant eye on possible German, Japanese, and Spanish spies. The war was on, and the base was protecting U.S. interests in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>91</sup> The Cuban government and U.S. investors had welcomed Spanish workers throughout the early twentieth century for their whiteness and for their labor, but now the United States feared Spanish fascists might infiltrate the base. On this premise, they banned all Spaniards. As Captain George Weyler explained: “About that time [1942], all employees known to be Spanish citizens were discharged for the reason that it was believed that the majority of these employees were associated with ‘Falangistas’ and entertained pro-Axis sympathies.”<sup>92</sup> The base also canceled its contracts with Spanish merchants, including one of Guantánamo’s leading elites, José “Pepe” Alvarez.<sup>93</sup> This defensive strategy reversed decades of preferential treatment of Spanish migrants in Cuba based on their perceived “whitening” of the population.

However, nationality was not as clear-cut as the U.S. officials imagined or desired. Spanish workers promptly went to the municipal judge of Caimanera, Juan Pérez Pérez and bought doctored birth certificates “proving” their Cuban nationality. Through this legal sleight of hand, they planned to regain their jobs on the base. Loyalty became a matter of paperwork, and to the chagrin of U.S. officials, Judge Pérez Pérez happily obliged. U.S. officials angrily stated, “There is conclusive proof that Juan Pérez has been engaged over a period of time in a false birth certificate racket.”<sup>94</sup> José Fernández Pérez, José Pereira García, José López



Rodríguez, Manuel Rodríguez López, Antonio Dalmau Vicons, and Ismael Fernández Paradela, all born in Spain, worked on the U.S. naval base before 1942. After being laid off in 1942, these men paid Judge Pérez between twenty-five and thirty-five dollars for false birth certificates, claiming that they were born in Guantánamo or Caimanera, so they could then reapply for base jobs.<sup>95</sup> These incidents infuriated U.S. officials, perhaps out of fear that military security had been breached or simply embarrassment at being duped by a corrupt local judge. These Spanish workers had demonstrated the limitations of U.S. security and surveillance in the region. Proof of loyalty and *cubanidad* could easily be bought and sold in the local marketplace.

Of course this deception was the last thing the U.S. Navy wanted or anticipated. Its military authority was rooted in its power to maintain borders and monitor who could and could not enter the base. The base intervened in Guantánamo's social hierarchy and gained power by ignoring, or manipulating, local norms, laws, and prejudices. In the process, the naval base magnified national divisions and the tangled histories of neocolonialism and migration within Guantánamo. And yet the Spanish case is telling, for it deflates the U.S. military's appearance of omnipotence. Cubans, Puerto Ricans, West Indians, and Spaniards used the political and cultural tools available to them to navigate and take advantage of the U.S. imperial outpost. The rush for jobs and economic competition created an environment of instability and flux, where workers did almost anything they could to get to GTMO.

### **KID CHICLE: DEATH AND MEMORY IN GUANTÁNAMO BAY**

The case of Lino "Kid Chicle" Rodríguez represented the culmination of unemployment and disorder in Guantánamo during World War II. The tragedy placed work and labor at the center of diplomatic relations and exemplified the contradictions of neocolonialism. In Guantánamo, locals responded to Rodríguez's death with a decidedly regional perspective, whereas national actors had more freedom to downplay or overplay the story depending on their political allegiances. And by 1941 the U.S. and Cuban governments hoped to sweep the case away. It was not until after the Cuban revolution in 1959, that the anti-imperialist, Castro government revived the Caso del Chicle and reframed it as a demonstrative example of Yankee aggression in Guantánamo Bay.<sup>96</sup>

Before the death of Rodríguez and throughout the autumn of 1940, the Guantánamo press had repeatedly hammered away at the unfair pass

system. Rodríguez's death crystallized the complaints and injustices with the subcontracting system locals had already identified. In fact, on the day of Rodríguez's death, Lino Lemes reported that the Snare Corporation had refused to open a local employment office to standardize the application process, and so workers had to bribe the contractors.<sup>97</sup> In the aftermath of the tragedy, the local community blamed Sr. Francisco Ochoa, a Cuban official, and designated him as a key villain in the event. The Santiago de Cuba daily, *Diario de Cuba*, reported that local workers wanted to "lynch" Sr. Ochoa, judging him responsible for Rodríguez's death and believing he had given passes only to workers who came with influence or paid a bribe.<sup>98</sup>

Anger at U.S. economic and military power intersected, particularly given that the main aggressor, Lt. West, had worked for the United Fruit Company before becoming an officer in the U.S. Navy. Lino Lemes called attention to Lt. West's earlier history with the UFC in Preston and concluded: "Lt. West was responsible for the premature death of the boxer Lino Rodríguez Grenot, the defenseless victim of the savage Yankee marine, who maybe thought that a man of color did not merit the same consideration or respect as a white man."<sup>99</sup> From a Guantánamo perspective, the distinction between U.S. private capital and U.S. military power collapsed. Lt. West was a former UFC employee, an officer in the U.S. Navy, and working to supply labor for the Frederick Snare Corporation. In this instance, Lemes identified all three with patronizing and racially biased attitudes toward Cubans. It is not surprising that local workers did not consider the U.S. military and the Frederick Snare Corporation as separate, independent entities.

From the U.S. Navy's perspective, it was imperative to maintain the division between military and private operations, even when admitting a mutually beneficial relationship. In a confidential memo after the event, Acting Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal identified earlier labor disputes on the docks as the impetus for the U.S. Navy's assistance to the Snare Corporation.<sup>100</sup> By sending U.S. launches captained by U.S. Marine Corps officers, the U.S. Navy strengthened the public-private arrangement, even as it sought to delineate where the private corporation's responsibilities began and where the U.S. Navy's ended.

After the immediate shock and public clamor over Rodríguez's death, the leading Guantánamo newspapers, *La Voz del Pueblo* and *El Vigilante*, downplayed the protests and minimized the disruption. *La Voz del Pueblo*, the region's most prominent paper, tempered its reporting and hoped that the judicial authorities would quickly intervene.<sup>101</sup> Even the

more populist *El Vigilante* advised, “Calm, people, calm,” voicing its faith that Lt. West would be punished.<sup>102</sup> The Santiago de Cuba paper, *Diario de Cuba*, also cautioned, “We all must cooperate to re-establish the normal, cordial relations between the people of Caimanera and Guantánamo, and the authorities on the naval station, because our economic life greatly benefits from this exchange.”<sup>103</sup> Despite the tragedy, Guantánamo’s economic well-being necessitated amicable, not hostile, relations with the base.

The Havana press, from the conservative *Diario de la Marina* to the Communist *Hoy*, also reported on the Kid Chicle case, putting local Guantánamo politics and the U.S. military base in the national news. The *Diario de la Marina*, known for its sympathetic ear to the U.S. government, reluctantly covered the event with minimal attention to detail. The paper waited several days to publish an account, never mentioned Rodríguez or West by name (instead saying a Cuban worker had lost his life at the hands of a U.S. lieutenant), and emphasized that U.S. authorities had begun an investigation.<sup>104</sup> Still, news from Oriente rarely appeared in the *Diario de la Marina*, and the brief article attested to how base workers’ travails could affect U.S.-Cuban relations and play to a national audience. On the opposite end of the political spectrum, *Hoy* articulated an anti-imperialist analysis of the Rodríguez case. The paper predicted energetic protests would paralyze the base if legal charges were not brought against West.<sup>105</sup>

In several editorials, *Hoy* framed Rodríguez’s death as one of many events in a long list of neocolonial outrages. The U.S. disregard for human life was apparent and inexcusable. The United States continued to treat Cuba like a “conquered country.”<sup>106</sup> In its most vitriolic language, an editorial thundered, “This act occurred easily, because to the Yankee officer it appeared a normal thing to end the life of a Cuban worker. Surely this Señor had the discriminating conscience of a colonialist like all imperialist agents. They believe our people are inferior. . . . To them, it is like liquidating a dog.” In this tenor, *Hoy* railed against the Snare Corporation for devaluing the lives of Cuban, African, Chinese, and all people of color.<sup>107</sup> Unlike the Guantánamo *fuerzas vivas*, who lived in the shadow of economic dependence on the U.S. military, the national Communist Party was able to denounce the U.S. military as imperialists.

Along with the national press attention, worker organizations throughout eastern Cuba sent telegrams in rapid succession to the national government in Havana. Unions and guilds in Caimanera, Las Tunas, Antilla,

Santa Clara, Camagüey, Central Miranda, Holguín, and Santiago de Cuba called on the Cuban government for “justice,” to “save Cuban dignity,” and to ask “for severe punishment for the guilty party.”<sup>108</sup> Because of the foreign status of the naval base, this incident of brutality had the possibility of becoming a national, or even an international, crisis. The Cuban government responded, and President Batista commissioned Cuban investigators to visit Caimanera almost immediately.

Not surprisingly, the U.S. Navy and State Department officials hoped the case would disappear as quickly as possible and refused to term the event a “murder” or a “crime.” The story barely registered in the U.S. press. It did appear in the *New York Times*, but only for a day.<sup>109</sup> It also ran in the *Chicago Defender*, indicating black North Americans’ interest in U.S.-Cuban relations and the U.S. military’s treatment of people of color outside its borders. Unlike Cuban or mainstream U.S. accounts, the *Defender* explicitly labeled Lt. West as a *white* officer and reiterated Cuban accounts that the blackjack, and not drowning, had caused Kid Chicle’s death.<sup>110</sup> This example aside, the majority of U.S. commentary and reports remained sterilized of all guilt or remorse. The U.S. Navy referred to Rodríguez’s death as the “incident involving a lieutenant at the U.S. naval station at Guantánamo and a Cuban workman.”<sup>111</sup> Admiral George Weyer explained without admitting any responsibility: “Lino Rodríguez died as a result of an accident sustained by one of our boats.”<sup>112</sup>

That said, the navy did conduct a court-martial, and the U.S. ambassador was even a bit “embarrassed” when Lt. West was acquitted of all charges. Although pleased to learn the United States did not have to “assume any responsibility for the loss of this man’s life,” he did suggest an “act of grace” of five thousand dollars to Rodríguez’s family.<sup>113</sup> U.S. officials felt guilty enough to search out Rodríguez’s aunt and offer her a lump sum in compensation for the death of her nephew, but only after several weeks of agonizing and debating the merits of his aunt as a “legitimate” caretaker. They did not want to appear as if the monetary compensation was a sign of guilt or responsibility.<sup>114</sup> As the case continued to linger, the U.S. officials’ disdain for Rodríguez’s life became palpable and less discreet, and by 1942 the U.S. consul described Rodríguez as “that worthless Cuban boxer.”<sup>115</sup> But with the money distributed, the case was closed and, for the most part, it was forgotten. Even the otherwise exhaustive account by Admiral Murphy, the 1953 *History of Guantánamo Bay*, erased all memory of Lino Rodríguez.

This incident did not appear again in Cuban accounts until after the Cuban revolution, when Lino Rodríguez was resurrected as one of the

first martyrs of the base. Rodríguez's death so clearly demonstrated the U.S. military's unchecked power in Guantánamo that revolutionary historians revived the events and created an official history. In a 1964 article in *Venceremos*, the state-run newspaper, Kid Chicle's death was featured prominently as an early example of U.S. aggression and as an event that fostered an "anti-imperialist conscience" in the public.<sup>116</sup> And, as recorded in Rigoberto Cruz Díaz's 1976 exposé on the U.S. naval base, many local informants remembered Kid Chicle.<sup>117</sup> In the Guantánamo Municipal Museum, there are several display cases recounting the events of Kid Chicle, including an example of a "blackjack." School children visit the museum and learn about Lino Rodríguez and U.S. violence. In this way, Rodríguez has been remembered, and his death has been given new meaning. In light of the Cuban revolution, Kid Chicle became the archetypal Cuban worker struck down by U.S. imperialism.

However, Lino Rodríguez was not the only Cuban worker to die in the construction frenzy during World War II. These other casualties did not generate publicity, nor were their stories passed down to later generations. Instead, they remain forgotten by the U.S. and Cuban governments and by Guantánamo historians. For example, in the weeks before Rodríguez's death, another Santiago worker, Agustín Alvarez, died on the base in an automobile accident. Again, Alvarez worked for the Snare Corporation, not the U.S. military. Lino Lemes chastised the U.S. government for not intervening in this case and for avoiding responsibility. Lemes pointed out that if the U.S. government insisted "only the American flag flies" on the base, then it should be accountable for what happened there. If U.S. law governed the base, Lemes wanted to know why the United States did not investigate the accident or the Snare Corporation.<sup>118</sup> Months later, Lemes again penned, "Another Worker Dies on the Yankee Base." He attributed this work-related death to the lack of medical attention on the base for Cuban workers, and he sent a letter and his article to President Roosevelt.<sup>119</sup> In May 1941, there was another death due to the Snare Corporation. Master Carpenter Venancio Hechavarría went to work on the base in the morning, "strong," "healthy," and "robust," but by the end of the day he left in agony, without his full mind or the ability to speak. Later that day, he died. The local doctor believed that his death was due to exposure to toxic conditions. Lino Lemes hoped the Snare Corporation would compensate Hechavarría's widow, but he doubted this would take place: "We know that there can be no justice with this company." Lemes urged an active press campaign and a photographic display of Hechavarría's corpse and funeral.<sup>120</sup>

U.S. brutality and violence did not define these deaths as it did with Kid Chicle, but these incidents similarly begged the question of employment and the U.S. responsibility to its Cuban workforce. The problem was two-fold. First, the U.S. military did not want to accept responsibility for work-related accidents or deaths on the base, for to have done so would have been an admission of wrong-doing or weakness. Second, as a private employer, the Snare Corporation had incredible flexibility and could guard the U.S. government from direct accountability. In these conflicts between workers and the base, the Snare Corporation offered the U.S. military more than just speed, efficiency, and lower costs; it offered protection against direct liability.

Finally, there was at least one other case where a Cuban man died at the hands of a U.S. marine. Manuel Luís Rodríguez González was a twenty-nine-year-old Cuban, who worked for the Snare Corporation in the employees' canteen. On a late October evening, a U.S. sentry on guard shot and killed Rodríguez González. According to Captain George L. Weyler, there was a U.S. marine posted on the leeward point who acknowledged Rodríguez González's death. The body was identified, embalmed, and returned for burial in Guantánamo. Weyler indicated that the circumstances surrounding the shooting were unknown.<sup>121</sup> A young marine appeared too quick to pull the trigger, and he shot Rodríguez González without any provocation or known cause.

Unlike Kid Chicle Rodríguez's death, the death of Rodríguez González garnered almost no attention in the local press. There was a single article in *Hoy*. It blamed the incident on a drunken *marino* and demanded urgent action to protect Cuban lives. There was no subsequent clamor or uproar, and the press accounts did not come close to matching the publicity surrounding Kid Chicle.<sup>122</sup> Instead, Rodríguez González's common-law wife, Luisa Hernández Vásquez, went to a local attorney and inquired about compensation for herself and her child "who had been legitimated according to the laws of Cuba."<sup>123</sup> Captain Weyler distanced himself and the U.S. Navy from the Rodríguez González case: "As you know, the U.S. government is in no way responsible nor liable for the criminal acts of its employees, including the personnel of the armed forces. It is my understanding that the employees of the *fonda* [canteen] in which Rodríguez worked are covered by insurance and that any indemnity or claim will be paid from the social insurance company." What happened next is unclear. Captain Weyler noted, "The Court of Inquiry recommended further judicial action against the marine sentry and this tribunal is now in session."<sup>124</sup> The

name of the marine sentry appears nowhere in the documents, nor does the result of his tribunal, nor any records of compensation paid to Manuel Rodríguez González's family. There is also no further information in the Guantánamo press or historical accounts.

It is difficult to reconcile these silences with the tumult of activity and protest in the case of Kid Chicle. In many ways, Manuel Rodríguez González's death was equally violent, and the U.S. military equally culpable. In this instance, a U.S. marine shot Rodríguez González on the base. The U.S. consul attributed the subdued response to fears of economic retaliation if there was another public uproar: "The incident [Manuel Rodríguez González's death] was given very little publicity in the local papers, doubtless due to the fact that the belief is prevalent here that it would perhaps contribute to the definite withdrawal of all liberty and visits in Santiago by the personnel at the base."<sup>125</sup> This analysis does not seem sufficiently compelling. While the commercial elite was indeed dependent on U.S. liberty parties, it does not explain the lack of outrage from labor unions, the Communist Party, or journalists like Lino Lemes in the aftermath of this tragedy.

Unlike Rodríguez González, who died on the job, Kid Chicle died trying to get a job. Moreover, Kid Chicle's death was public and occurred in the waters between Guantánamo and GTMO. Unemployed workers on the docks and the twenty-nine Cuban workers in the launch all witnessed his death. The United States could not separate this incident from the memories of insecurity and worker competition, or minimize its symbolism for the men and women who jumped on launches and crossed Guantánamo Bay. In contrast, Rodríguez González's death, although also violent, happened within the territory of the base and without witnesses. Taking place away from the docks and the boundary lines, Rodríguez González's death was forgotten. Kid Chicle alone became the symbol of Guantánamo's victimization and U.S. aggression memorialized in state-sponsored accounts and local memory. He represented the unemployed worker who looked for economic opportunity and struggled to make his way to the base during the World War II boom. For a community so close to the U.S. border, Kid Chicle's death signified the journey, psychological and physical, between Guantánamo and GTMO.

In the weeks following Kid Chicle González's death, the Frederick Snare Corporation opened an employment office in Guantánamo to help facilitate the passes and avoid future conflicts. Employment on the base was not steady, and by 1942 the base renovations had been completed.

In short order, the Snare Corporation closed its Guantánamo office and layoffs were endemic. From a peak of 13,000 workers, the U.S. Navy decreased its civilian workforce to approximately 3,500 by 1945. After the early years of World War II, the military risks to the base decreased and the main arena of the naval war moved to the Pacific, far from the Caribbean. But the military establishment remained long after the fighting ended. Modernized and expanded, GTMO continued to rely on local workers. These men and women continued to negotiate their working conditions between Guantánamo and GTMO as the United States redefined its mission in the Cold War.