

CUBA AND RAILROADS

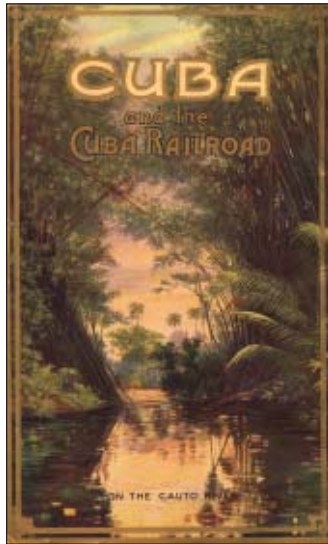
PART 1: Main Lines and the Making of a Nation

Railroads have exerted a long and remarkable influence on Cuba's social and economic development. The Camino de Hierro, or Iron Road, which began operations in 1837, was the first railroad in the Caribbean. By the middle of the 20th century, Cuba boasted the highest rail density in Latin America and the seventh highest in the world. One-third of the rail system belonged to common carriers, divided roughly evenly between the United Railways of Havana (renamed Occidentales, or Western, in 1952) and Consolidated Railroads of Cuba. These railroads linked the major cities with through passenger and freight service. In addition, Cuba had a dense network of sugar-mill lines,

which were privately owned and handled the seasonal needs of the island's biggest industry. One of the lines, Hershey

Cuban, doubled as a heavily used common carrier between the outskirts of Havana and Matanzas Bay. Based on archival research in Cuba and elsewhere, this article describes the origin, expansion, and consolidation of the national system. Where appropriate, the article also addresses the broader context of the Cuban economy, the sugar industry, and the political relationship between the island and the United States: How history shaped the

building of Cuba's railroads and how the railroads in turn shaped Cuba.



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A 1913 brochure issued by the Cuba Railroad.

By **LUIS V. DOMINGUEZ** and **MANUEL DIAZ CEBALLOS**