Beginning in the late 1800s and continuing—often sporadically—for three decades, anarchist movements operated in Cuba, Mexico, Panama, Puerto Rico and Spanish-speaking migrant zones in the southern United States. Because anarchists always saw themselves as part of a larger working-class internationalist movement fighting against the forces of bourgeois internationalism, these men and women developed linkages throughout the Caribbean, Mexico and southern US. In so doing, they created two, often overlapping, transnational networks in ‘tropical’ North America.

Three particular historical developments linked the emergence and development of the Caribbean network. First, in Latin America Spanish immigration into Cuba was surpassed only by Spanish immigration to Argentina in the early 20th century. Many of these working-class migrants were either committed anarchists or had been exposed to a long tradition of anarchist activity in Spain. Spanish anarchists sometimes dominated the embryonic anarchist movements (as in Panama) and sometimes supplemented Caribbean-born anarchists as in Cuba, Florida and Puerto Rico.

Second, this network spread at the same time as US military and economic influence stretched throughout the Caribbean Basin beginning in the 1890s. In this context, anarchists represented a transnational movement shaped by and in response to the growing interconnectedness of transnational capital flows and expanding US foreign policy. In fact, one should note that the anarchist network linking Cuba, Puerto Rico and Panama developed in countries whose recent ‘independence’ was linked to US foreign policy: Cuban independence came as a result of US intervention (1898) and then military occupation (1898–1902 and 1906–09) as US-based industrial concerns poured onto the island; Puerto Rican independence from Spain resulted in the island becoming increasingly linked to the US, which would grant US citizenship to
Puerto Ricans in 1917; and, Panama’s independence in late 1903 was directly linked to US designs to build a canal across the isthmus.

Third, development of a strong anarchist presence in Cuba facilitated the network’s emergence. Havana was not just a stopping off point for Spanish anarchists but more importantly a hub that linked the spokes of the network. Key to Havana’s central role as the network hub was the anarchist weekly newspaper ¡Tierra! (“Land!”), the longest-running (1903–1914) and most widely circulated organ for communication and fundraising. Other anarchist papers in Havana played brief roles coordinating the network, and small newspapers in Florida, Puerto Rico and Panama helped organise the movements in those locales. In addition, anarchists sometimes utilized American Federation of Labour (AFL)-linked papers in Florida and Puerto Rico. Yet, ¡Tierra! was the most vital newspaper to link these geographically dispersed movements that stretched from the southern US to the northern edge of South America.

The other important Latin American anarchist network in the northern half of the Western Hemisphere existed in Mexico and the US Southwest. Anarchist traditions could be found in parts of Mexico from the mid-1800s, but the first sustained transnational anarchist movement originated with Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón and the Mexican Liberal Party (Partido Liberal Mexicano, or PLM). After being forced into exile to Texas in 1904, the Magonistas eventually migrated to Los Angeles, California where they published the long-running newspaper Regeneración (“Regeneration”), a paper that continued to function with the aid of their comrades even when the PLM’s main leadership faced mounting legal problems and jail time in the US. The PLM maintained links to anarchists in Mexico and around the United States. In particular, Regeneración facilitated communication between the California anarchists, the US-based Industrial Workers of the World (IWW, or Wobblies) who developed Spanish-speaking unions on both sides of the border, and Spanish-speaking anarchists in Florida and Cuba where anarchists celebrated the PLM and both closely followed and funded the Mexican Revolution.1

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1 This chapter explores two occasionally interlocking networks: one radiated out of Havana, Cuba and connected the broader Caribbean Basin. The other created a circuit stretching from Los Angeles, California in the United States to Mexico City and the borderlands between the United States and Mexico. Not explored is a third network that linked Spanish-speaking anarchists throughout the United States with