

African Slavery and Spanish Empire

Imperial Imaginings and Bourbon Reform in Eighteenth-Century Cuba and Beyond

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Abstract

This article traces a philosophical shift that opened the door to a new departure in eighteenth-century Spanish empire: a newly emerging sense that the slave trade and African slavery were essential to the wealth of nations. Contextualizing this ideological reconfiguration within mid-eighteenth century debates, this article draws upon the works of political economists and royal councilors in Madrid and puts them in conversation with the words and actions of individuals in and from Cuba, including people of African descent themselves. Because of the central place of the island in eighteenth-century imperial rivalry and reform, as well as its particular demographic situation, Cuba served as a catalyst for these debates about the place of African slavery and the transatlantic slave trade in Spanish empire. Ultimately, between the mid-eighteenth century and the turn of the nineteenth, this new mode of thought would lead to dramatic transformations in the institution of racial slavery and Spanish imperial political economy.

Keywords

history – Cuba – Spanish empire – African slavery – slave trade – political economy – comparative empires – imperial reform – Seven Years' War – Britain

To European observers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Spanish empire had become a model of what *not* to do. Although early generations of British and French explorers in the Americas sought to emulate the pursuit of Indian gold, the political theorists of Spain's rivals soon shunned what they perceived to be the fundamental errors of its expansion and governance.

Obsessed with land-based conquest and rule over indigenous peoples, so the critique went, the Spanish had utterly neglected commerce. This fatal flaw was seen as the cause of its perceived ruin.¹

By the eighteenth century, in the face of heightened challenges from the French, Dutch, Portuguese, and especially British, Spanish political theorists had already begun to rethink matters themselves. As Anthony Pagden has written, none of the early modern empires were more prone to self-doubt and self-reflection than the Spanish.² By the half-century before the disintegration of Europe's American empires, Spanish administrators and subjects were engaging in a dynamic transatlantic debate about how to rejuvenate and consolidate their own sprawling territories. This discourse guided the implementation of the Bourbon reforms of the Spanish monarchy, pursued alongside parallel processes in rival European courts.

In virtually all European empires, the mid-eighteenth century and especially the aftermath of the Seven Years' War were times of reform. Not only the Spanish but also the British, French, Portuguese, Dutch, and Danish reconfigured political philosophies and their concrete policy applications during this time. In each realm, debate inspired various ideas and engendered different policies.³ In the Spanish case, however, one sees a particularly striking departure that will serve as the focus of this essay. Throughout this debate

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- 1 David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); J.H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492–1830* (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 2006); Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Britain, Spain, and France, c. 1500–1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) and “The Struggle for Legitimacy and the Image of Empire in the Atlantic to c. 1700”, in ed. Nicholas Canny, *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Vol. I, The Origins of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 34–54; Sophus A. Reinert, *Translating Empire: Emulation and the Origins of Political Economy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011) and “Rivalry: Greatness in Early Modern Political Economy” in eds. Philip J. Stern and Carl Wennerlind, *Mercantilism Reimagined: Political Economy in Early Modern Britain and its Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 348–370, 350. See also Eliga Gould, *The Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press/Omohundro Institute, 2000) and Vincent Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire, 1763–1793*, 2 vols. (New York: Longmans, Green, 1952, 1964). For a contemporary who made similar comparisons, see Abbé Raynal, *L'Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (Amsterdam: 4 vols., 1770).
 - 2 Anthony Pagden, “Heeding Heracles: Empire and Its Discontents, 1619–1812” in eds. Richard L. Kagan and Geoffrey Parker, *Spain, Europe, and the Atlantic: Essays in Honour of John H. Elliott* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 316–333, at 316.
 - 3 Eds. Sophus A. Reinert and Pernille Røge, *The Political Economy of Empire in the Early Modern World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

about the perceived nature of Spain's universal monarchy, and how best to remake it, there emerged a new understanding that African slavery and the slave trade were essential to the wealth of nations. This was coupled with the new conviction that slave-based economies required a different political economy than Spain had pursued until then.

As frequently as historians of colonial Latin America and Spanish Empire refer to the Bourbon reforms, they do not as often connect them to slavery or the slave trade. And yet the desire to reform the slave trade and expand slavery lay at the very heart of this impulse for "Enlightened" reform in Spain and Spanish America.⁴ In what was a dramatic departure from policies in place since the sixteenth century, starting in the mid-eighteenth century, the Spanish state began actively and programmatically to promote and prioritize the West African trade in humans. From a position one government minister in 1752 had described as "with our eyes closed as to the manner of this traffic," Spanish authorities made a number of reforms both to expand the traffic in slaves under its own flag and to govern the growth of African slavery and the place of people of African descent in its overseas territories.⁵

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- 4 For some examples of the vast literature on the Bourbon reforms in English alone, see Allan J. Kuethe and Kenneth J. Andrien, *The Spanish Atlantic World in the Eighteenth Century: War and the Bourbon Reforms, 1713–1796* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Gabriel B. Paquette, *Enlightenment, Governance, and Reform in Spain and its Empire, 1759–1808* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) and Gabriel Paquette, "Introduction" and Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, "'Enlightened Reform' in the Spanish Empire: An Overview," in *Enlightened Reform in Southern Europe and Its Atlantic Colonies, c. 1750–1830*, in ed. Gabriel Paquette (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 1–22 and 33–36.; Stanley J. Stein and Barbara H. Stein, *Apogee of Empire: Spain and New Spain in the Age of Charles III, 1759–1789* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); D.A. Brading, "Bourbon Spain and Its American Empire", *The Historical Journal*, vol. 24, no. 4 (Dec. 1981); John R. Fischer, *Bourbon Peru, 1750–1824* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003); Anthony McFarlane, *Colombia Before Independence: Economy, Society, and Politics under Bourbon Rule* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), *Reform and Insurrection in Bourbon New Granada and Peru* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990); Jacques A. Barbier, *Reform and Politics in Bourbon Chile 1775–1796* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1980); John Fisher, *The Economic Aspects of Spanish Imperialism in America, 1492–1810* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997); John Lynch, "The Institutional Framework of Colonial Spanish America", *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 24, Quincentenary Supplement: The Colonial and Post Colonial Experience, Five Centuries of Spanish and Portuguese America (1992), pp. 69–81; Jaime E. Rodríguez O., *The Independence of Spanish America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and David Brading, "Bourbon Spain and its American Empire", in ed. Leslie Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1:389–440.
- 5 Archivo General de Indias [henceforth AGI] SD 2209, Madrid 18 March 1752, Don Julián de Arriaga to Marques de la Ensenada.

So eager were Spanish authorities to promote this realm of commerce that the very first “free and unrestricted trade” technically permitted in Spanish empire was “free trade in slaves” and slaves only, declared in 1789. Not only were import duties on slaves removed but bounties were also introduced to give a reward per enslaved African that an importer brought in. This was a dramatic turn from a previously restrictive royal policy of monopoly contracts.⁶

Coming just two years before the outbreak of the Haitian Revolution in 1791, which destroyed the sugar industry in the world’s then largest producer and drove up global prices, this new Spanish policy is usually seen as an inevitable concession in the face of increased contraband slave trading and burgeoning sugar boom in the Spanish Caribbean. In a series of influential articles, Dale Tomich has linked the expansion of slavery and the slave trade in Cuba, the leader of this boom, to structural transformations in global capitalism, as well as the introduction of foreign capital and new technologies from Britain and the U.S.⁷ As do many other historians, Tomich takes as the mouthpiece and architect of this new departure in Spanish political economy the Cuban sugar planter and lawyer Francisco de Arango y Parreño (1765–1837). A powerful lobbying force at the Spanish court, Arango penned his influential “*Discurso sobre la agricultura de La Habana y métodos de fomentarla*” in 1793.⁸

However, the Spanish Crown actually began this shift earlier and much more consciously in an attempt to modernize its empire in a shifting climate of

6 “Free trade in slaves” was initially declared in 1789 for Cuba, Santo Domingo, Puerto Rico, and the province of Caracas. In 1795 it was extended to New Granada, Cartagena, the Río de la Plata, and Peru, and in 1804 Guayaquil and Panama. AGI Indiferente 2821, *Real cédula de Su Magestad concediendo libertad para el comercio de negros con las islas de Cuba, Santo Domingo, Puerto Rico, y provincia de Caracas, a españoles y extrangeros, bajo las reglas que se expresan*, 1789; James Ferguson King, “Evolution of the Free Slave Trade Principle”, *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 22, no. 1 (February 1942), pp. 34–56, esp. 51–2.

7 Dale Tomich, “World Slavery and Caribbean Capitalism: The Cuban Sugar Industry, 1760–1868”, *Theory and Society*, vol. 20, no. 3, Special Issue on Slavery in the New World (June 1991), pp. 297–319 and *Through the Prism of Slavery: Labor, Capital, and World Economy* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

8 “*Discurso sobre la agricultura de La Habana y medios de fomentarla*”, in Francisco de Arango y Parreño, *Obras*, vol. I (La Habana: Imagen Contemporánea, 2005), pp. 144–198; Dale Tomich, “The Wealth of Empire: Francisco de Arango y Parreño, Political Economy, and the Second Slavery in Cuba”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 45:1 (January 2003), pp. 4–28. For other nuanced discussions of the relationship between Francisco de Arango y Parreño, Spanish political economy, and Cuba’s sugar boom, see essays by Leida Fernández Prieto, Rafael de Bivar Marquese, Mercedes García Rodríguez, and in particular José A. Piqueras in *Francisco Arango y la invención de la Cuba azucarera*, in eds. María Dolores González-Ripoll and Izaskun Álvarez Cuartero (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 2009).

European competition. In Cuba and other Spanish American territories, state promotion of the African slave trade began in the mid-eighteenth century and was accompanied by a new departure in Spanish political and economic thought. This evolution in political thought was shaped less by Cuba's sugar elite of the 1790s and more by the conditions of military and economic rivalry predominant several decades earlier. It also took a different course in Spain than similar debates among its rivals. For example, at this same time, French physiocrats were denouncing slavery as economically backward, and Adam Smith was at least failing to endorse it.⁹ Indeed this particular stance was shaped by the distinct patterns of two and a half centuries of Spanish American colonialism and Madrid's own perceptions of the best and most efficacious means of catching up with its competitors.

Tracing the context for this new thinking back to mid-eighteenth century debates, this article draws upon the works of political philosophers and royal councilors in Madrid and puts them in conversation with the words and actions of individuals in and from Cuba, including people of African descent themselves. Because of the central place the island played in eighteenth-century imperial rivalry and reform, Cuba served as a catalyst for these debates about the place of African slavery and the transatlantic slave trade in Spanish empire. As the work of Josep Fradera, Jorge Domínguez, Allan Kuethe, and G. Douglas Inglis has shown, the island was a testing ground for Bourbon reforms later exported throughout Spanish America.¹⁰

9 Pernille Røge, "A Natural Order of Empire: The Physiocratic Vision of Colonial France after the Seven Years' War", pp. 32–53, 35–66, 42, and Thomas Hopkins, "Adam Smith on American Economic Development and the Future of European Atlantic Empires", pp. 32–75, 66, in Røge and Reinert, *The Political Economy of Empire in the Early Modern World*, in Stern and Wennerlind, *Mercantilism Reimagined*; J.H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492–1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), ch. 10.

10 Allan J. Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753–1815: Crown, Military, and Society* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986); Jorge Domínguez, *Insurrection or Loyalty: The Breakdown of the Spanish American Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980) and "Los llorones cubanos: The Socio-military Basis of Commercial Privilege in the American Trade under Charles IV", in *The North American Role in the Spanish Imperial Economy*, in eds. Jacques A. Barbier and Allan J. Kuethe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 142–156; Allan J. Kuethe and G. Douglas Inglis, "Absolutism and Enlightened Reform: Charles III, the Establishment of the Alcabala, and Commercial Reorganization in Cuba", *Past & Present*, 109 (November 1985), pp. 118–143. See also Juan Bosco Amores Carredano, *Cuba en la época de Ezpeleta* (Pamplona: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 2000) and Josep Maria Fradera, *Colonias para después de un imperio* (Barcelona: Ediciones Bellaterra, 2005), p. 22.

The discourse surrounding African slavery and the slave trade that emerged at this time was both emblematic and formative of new thinking about the nature of Spanish empire. Inspired by foreign models, this ideological reconfiguration was governed by a much older political rhetoric concerned with preserving, at least in theory, a sense of the unique relationship between the Spanish Crown and its African subjects. It also sought to distinguish Spanish empire from the European rivals it sought at the same time to emulate. While this discourse does not tell us much about the realities of the lives of the enslaved, it does reveal the origins of a philosophical shift that ultimately led to dramatic transformations in the institution of slavery and Spanish imperial political economy.

Spanish Political Thought at Mid-Eighteenth Century

Even today, historians sharply disagree in their characterizations of Spanish colonialism, particularly in its later stages. As described by such scholars as J.H. Elliott and Stanley and Barbara Stein, a traditional interpretation of the eighteenth century posits an empire in decline due to fiscal crisis at the center, increased competition from European rivals, and growing demands for local autonomy from creoles overseas.¹¹ By contrast, a revisionist group of scholars has argued that Spanish imperial governance remained vital and tremendously lucrative up until the financial pressures and political ruptures of the Napoleonic wars and the invasion of Spain in 1808.¹² In several recent studies,

Fradera argues that the British invasions of Manila and Havana during the Seven Years' War acted as primary catalysts for fiscal, military, and political reorganizations directly afterwards, even though projects of rejuvenation had started before.

- 11 Stein and Stein, *Apogee of Empire*; see also *Silver, Trade and War: Spain and America in the Making of Early Modern Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) and *The Colonial Heritage of Latin America: Essays on Economic Dependence in Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); and to a lesser extent, Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World*, pp. 325–411. See also McFarlane, *Colombia Before Independence*; David Brading, *Miners and Merchants in Bourbon Mexico, 1763–1810* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971); John Lynch, *Latin American Revolutions, 1808–1826: Old and New World Origins* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994). This reading dovetails with nationalist historiography, which seeks the causes for independence in imperial breakdown during the decades prior and paints a negative portrait of the effects of Spain's Bourbon reforms.
- 12 Jeremy Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009); Fradera, *Colonias para después de un imperio*; Regina Grafe and Alejandra Irigoin, "A Stakeholder Empire: The Political Economy of Spanish

Gabriel Paquette has painted a rosy picture of “Enlightened reform” in Spanish empire as a process of creative emulation of its rival European powers and successful adaptation of commercial and political doctrines.¹³

By the seventeenth century, Spanish political thinkers known as the *arbitristas* were already puzzling how Spain could be so poor with so much New World gold and silver. After the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, when Spain lost its European empire, the Crown and its ministers felt a new urgency to exploit better the growing wealth of overseas possessions. At this point, a number of Bourbon political reformers, known as the *projectistas*, began combining the thinking of the seventeenth-century *arbitristas* with serious study of foreign models, as well as the writings of French and British political economists, in order to arrive at new roadmaps for Spanish empire.¹⁴ With the final settlement of Spain’s European conflicts in the 1750s, the Spanish government was also able to devote more attention to American matters and trade.¹⁵

The consensus among these Bourbon *projectistas*, like the *arbitristas* before them, was that commerce, not conquest, and population growth, not precious metals, were the keys to national wealth. True wealth lay in the hard work and productivity of subjects devoting their lives to agriculture and manufacture, both regarded as anemic at the time in Spain and its overseas possessions. Population growth would not only develop economies and provide more tax revenue to the Crown, but also, conveniently, help Spain better possess and defend its vast territories from foreign encroachment. In this way, Spanish reformers were absorbing and adapting popular theories of such northern European thinkers as Josiah Child, Charles Davenant, François Véron de

Imperial Rule in America”, *The Economic History Review*, 65, no. 2 (May 2012), pp. 609–651; Carlos Marichal, *Bankruptcy of Empire: Mexican Silver and the Wars Between Spain, Britain, and France, 1760–1810* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Antonio Mestre Sanchis, *La ilustración española* (Madrid: Arco Libros, 1998) and *Apología y crítica de España en el siglo XVIII* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2003); Francisco Sánchez Blanco, *El absolutismo y las Luces en el reinado de Carlos III* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2002).

- 13 Paquette, *Enlightenment, Governance, and Reform*, and “Views from the South: Images of Britain and its Empire in Portuguese and Spanish Political Economic Discourse, ca. 1740–1810”, in *The Political Economy of Empire in the Early Modern World*, pp. 76–104.
- 14 Luis Perdices de Blas, *La economía política de la decadencia de Castilla en el siglo XVIII: Investigaciones de los arbitristas sobre la naturaleza y causas de la riqueza de las naciones* (Madrid: Editorial Síntesis, 1996), p. 145.
- 15 John Shovlin, “War and Peace: Trade, International Competition, and Political Economy”, in Stern and Wennerlind, *Mercantilism Reimagined: Political Economy in Early Modern Britain and Its Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 305–327 at 310.

Forbonnais, Joshua Gee, and David Hume, during what was a generative moment in European political economic discourse more broadly.¹⁶

Both implicitly and explicitly, these writers were also comparing the perceived failures of Spain's governance over its overseas territories with the great successes of French and British colonization in the West Indies. In a manuscript that circulated in the 1740s, the government minister José del Campillo y Cosío pointed out that Barbados and Martinique had provided tremendous wealth to Britain and France. According to Campillo, the success of these islands came from focusing on settlement rather than conquests, promoting commerce and agriculture, and allowing subjects to enrich themselves, which in turn benefitted state treasuries.¹⁷

Given this new political climate in Spain, it follows that Cuba and other circum-Caribbean possessions began to have more salience. During the prior century, Spanish political reformers had been far more likely to discuss Mexico and Peru in their writings about the Americas. However, during the eighteenth century Spanish political theorists increasingly began to take the Caribbean into account. The first object of their attention was contraband. Given the encroachments of British, French, and Dutch settlements, the Caribbean presented a security challenge for the safe passage of American gold and silver to Spain. In the first half of the eighteenth century, officials in Spain, Guatemala, New Spain, and Peru warned of the danger of contraband siphoning the mineral wealth from Spanish empire and strengthening the colonial ventures of Spain's rivals.¹⁸

16 Paquette, *Enlightenment, Governance, and Reform*, pp. 36–45, and “Views from the South”; Shovlin, p. 310; Sophus Reinert, *Translating Empire*, pp. 46–60.

17 José del Campillo y Cosío, *Nuevo sistema de gobierno económico para la América* (Madrid: Imprenta de Benito Cano, 1789), pp. 1–2. David Brading has called Campillo's text “the reformer's Bible...the definitive text which inspired this Bourbon revolution”, *Miners and Merchants in Mexico, 1763–1810* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 25–26.

18 Jerónimo de Uztáriz, *Theórica y práctica de comercio y de marina* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1969), first published in 1724; Pedro Peralta Barnuevo, *Lima inexpugnable* (Lima: Luis Antonio Eguiguren Escudero, 1966), first published in 1740; Bernardo de Ulloa, *Restablecimiento de las fábricas y comercio español* (Madrid, 1740); Fernando de Echeverz, *Ensayos mercantiles para adelantar por medio del establecimiento de una compañía el comercio de los frutos de el Reyno de Guathemala* (Guatemala, 1742), modern edition first published by Carmelo Sáenz de Santa María as appendix to the article, “Inglaterra y el reino de Goathemala”, *Revista de Indias*, nos. 167–168 (Madrid, 1982), pp. 109–121. On these texts and other relevant literature, see Sara Almarza, “El comercio en el siglo XVIII: Arbitrios a las autoridades”, *Revista de Indias*, 45:175 (1985), pp. 13–25 and Johanna von Grafenstein Gareis, “El caribe en las obras de economistas y políticos españoles del siglo XVIII”, *Montalbán*, Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, Caracas (June 2002), pp. 181–206.

As officials in Spain began to see it, the exchange of prime materials for manufactured goods via Caribbean smuggling undermined the economic health and viability of its overseas possessions. Spain needed to enhance the commercial development of its Caribbean possessions in order to ward off increased colonial competition. The political economists Fernando de Echeverz and Jerónimo de Uztáriz, for example, advocated that Spain counteract this problem by emulating the commercial model of Dutch empire and in particular, the Dutch East India Company.¹⁹ This line of thought would come to fruition with the establishment of the Royal Gipuzkoan Company of Caracas in 1728 and the Royal Havana Company in 1740. In broad terms, these monopoly companies were designed to counteract contraband and to promote and control strategic avenues of trade—*cacao* in Caracas and tobacco in Havana—in an atmosphere of increasing imperial competition.²⁰ This new attention to contraband and commerce, combined with an increased willingness to borrow models from Spain's European rivals, would soon reshape reformers' attitudes toward the African slave trade as well.

The Question of the Slave Trade

With this new interest in matters related to the Caribbean, agriculture, trade, and contraband, the Spanish court understandably began to pay more attention to African slavery and the slave trade. Neither phenomenon was of course new to Spain or Spanish America.²¹ Free and enslaved Africans had played a

19 Almarza, pp. 17–19. Gabriel Paquette has shown how the Bourbon reformers were also inspired by study of the British East India Company; see “Enlightened Narratives and Imperial Rivalry in Bourbon Spain: The Case of Almodóvar’s *Historia Política de los Establecimientos Ultramarinos de las Naciones Europeas (1784–1790)*,” *The Eighteenth Century*, vol. 48 no. 1 (2007), pp. 61–80.

20 Ronald D. Hussey, *La compañía de Caracas, 1728–1784* (Caracas: Banco Central de Venezuela, 1962); Montserrat Garate Ojanguren, *Comercio ultramarino e ilustración: la Real Compañía de la Habana* (San Sebastián: Real Sociedad Bascongada de los Amigos del País, 1994); Mariano García Ruipérez, “El pensamiento económico ilustrado y las compañías de comercio,” *Revista de historia económica*, 4:3 (1986), pp. 521–548.

21 For slavery in early modern Spain, see Debra Blumenthal, *Enemies and Familiars: Slavery and Mastery in Fifteenth-Century Valencia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); William D. Phillips, *Slavery in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); eds. Fabienne P. Guillén and Salah Trabelsi, *Les esclavages en Méditerranée: Espaces et dynamiques économiques* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2012); Aurelia Martín Casares and Margarita García Barranco, *La esclavitud negroafricana en la*

vital role in the colonization of the Americas since the first free African arrived in Hispaniola as a member of Columbus's second voyage in 1494. They served alongside the conquistadors, and by 1600 Africans rivaled if not outnumbered Spaniards in New Spain.²² But despite the longevity of Spanish slaveholding and the centuries-long presence of people of African descent in Spanish America, the subjects of the Spanish Crown found themselves on the outside looking in on the tremendous riches being produced in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by a new kind of economic model: the large scale sugar and slavery complex taking off first in Barbados and later, Jamaica, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Saint-Domingue.

Not only were Spanish subjects not a part of this agricultural boom, but they also remained disenfranchised from the transatlantic African slave trade. Spain was the only major European power in the Americas to have no West African territorial possessions, since the Treaty of Tordesillas. Subsequently, it had no stake in a transatlantic slave trade increasingly perceived as critical to imperial competition and the production of wealth. Under the *asiento* system, the Crown limited the number of enslaved Africans foreign traders were allowed to bring to Spanish territories. In 1762 the influential government minister the Conde de Campomanes wrote, "the traffic in slaves in the West Indies is one of the objects of greatest attention there. Nevertheless [in Spain] it is a subject almost wholly ignored in detail."²³

Given its complicated nature, the traffic in enslaved Africans began to draw reformers' attention from a number of different angles. As a branch of commerce, like the trade in *cacao* or tobacco, it demanded better control within

historia de España, siglos XVI y XVII (Granada: Comares, 2010); Vicenta Cortés Alonso, *Esclavos y libertos en los mundos ibéricos: Obra completa de Vicenta Cortés Alonso* (Madrid: Editorial Mundo Negro, 2011); Alonso Franco Silva, *La esclavitud en Andalucía, 1450–1550* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1992).

22 Herman L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570–1640* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Herbert S. Klein and Ben Vinson III, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford UP, 2007); Enriqueta Vila Vilar, *Hispanoamérica y el comercio de esclavos* (Seville: Escuela de Estudios Hispanoamericanos, 1977); Frederick P. Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru, 1524–1650* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974); and Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), chp. 3.

23 Pedro Rodríguez, Conde de Campomanes, *Reflexiones sobre el comercio español a Indias*, ed. Vicente Llobart Rosa (Madrid: Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda, 1988), p. 307; Pablo Tornero Tinajero, "El suministro de mano de obra esclava en Cuba: El estado español y oligarquía criolla (1765–1820)," in *Cuba la perla de las Antillas: Actas de las I Jornadas sobre "Cuba y su historia"*, in eds. Consuelo Naranjo Orovio y Tomás Mallo Gutiérrez (Madrid: Doce Calles and Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1994), pp. 313–324, citation 316.

the economic circuits of the Spanish economy. It was characterized by too much contraband and corruption, and foreign traders had been too successful permeating Spanish American markets. Since 1713, when the British gained the *asiento*, slave trafficking increasingly served as an entrée into other sorts of sideline British contraband trade. And yet at the same time, the slave trade was now suddenly seen as critically important: a prime mover for the development of overseas economies and a source of new populations to work, populate, and defend Spanish territories.

In his *Reflexiones sobre el comercio español a Indias*, the Conde de Campomanes pointed out how crucial an easy slave supply had been, for example, for the growth of gold and diamond mining in Brazil and the vibrant tobacco industry in Virginia and Maryland.²⁴ In fact he called the British *asiento* of 1713 both “the most intolerable yoke the Spanish nation had ever suffered” and the “worst error” Spanish politics had ever made. By allowing the British to take advantage of contraband trade under the guise of the *asiento*, Spain had permitted Britain, Campomanes claimed, to ruin its commerce to the West Indies. Furthermore, British and other foreign traders had an interest in not introducing too many Africans into Spanish lands “in order not to increase the agriculture and strength of our colonies.” This was most unfortunate, Campomanes pointed out, because unlike Indians, people of African descent served the Crown in other ways, too. For example, he commented that in America *mulatos* were viewed as Spaniards and proved very useful in military matters. Thus in order to rectify this grave situation, populate Spain’s American possessions, and defend and secure them against potential British encroachment, he advocated the founding of a free port for Spanish slave trading on the Canary Islands and the introduction of slaves into American territories free of duties.²⁵

Views such as these were informed and shaped by Cuban creole elites who inserted themselves into the conversation in Spain. In a report commissioned by the Council of the Indies in 1749, the Havana lawyer and *alcalde* Bernardo Joseph de Urrutia y Matos insisted that only the expansion of the slave trade

24 The choice of these industries seems to reflect those areas in which the Spanish Crown was already invested. White indentured laborers played a significant part in Maryland and Virginia; see for example Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) and Lorena S. Walsh, *Motives of Honor, Pleasure, and Profit: Plantation Management in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1607–1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2010).

25 Campomanes, *Reflexiones sobre el comercio español a Indias*, pp. 93–5, 279, 316, 332, 334–5, 457; Piqueras, “Los amigos de Arango en la corte de Carlos IV”, in *Francisco Arango y la invención de la Cuba azucarera*, p. 157.

would remedy Cuba's economic woes. Through their control of the *asiento*, foreigners not only dominated Cuba's external commerce via contraband but also impeded its development by not providing enough quantity or quality, as he put it, of enslaved Africans for sale.²⁶ Making enslaved Africans "abundant and cheap," he reasoned, would benefit the numerous economic niches where they had proven themselves indispensable: the naval shipyard, maritime trade, the agriculture of tobacco, sugar, and foodstuffs, the curing of hides, mining, and more. In essence, Urrutia y Matos was arguing to make the slave trade to Cuba look more like those to Barbados or Martinique. Notably, he was not yet arguing to make Cuba's diversified economy look more like these islands, with their dominant sugar industries. Instead he emphasized the myriad niches enslaved Africans filled in Cuba's multifaceted pre-sugar-boom economy.²⁷

In 1757 Nicolás de Ribera, a creole subject from Cuba who had established himself in Madrid in his later years, wrote a lengthy description of the island of Cuba for the Spanish king. It brimmed with recommendations no doubt influenced by these discussions at court and in council. He too decried Spain's over-long attachment to a culture of conquest, rather than commerce, and claimed that the current moment had proven that agriculture and industry are "the truly inexhaustible mines."²⁸ He argued that Spanish empire ought to strengthen its industry and agriculture, in Cuba and elsewhere, and even its navigation (as he put it, on the model of New England and Bermuda, whose merchants of course did a great deal of commerce).²⁹

As Ribera saw it, too, the key to reviving Spain's fortunes lay in expanding its population.³⁰ One way to do that was by means of the slave trade. Spain ought

26 Bernardo Joseph de Urrutia y Matos, *Cuba: fomento de la isla, 1749: Primer estudio geoeconómico de la isla*, (Puerto Rico: Ediciones Capiro, 1993), pp. 38, 40.

27 Historians of the sugar industry in Cuba in general concur that the industry built steadily in the late eighteenth century, taking off in the 1790s. See Mercedes García Rodríguez, *La aventura de fundar ingenios: La refacción azucarera en la Habana del siglo XVIII* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2004) and *Entre haciendas y plantaciones: Orígenes de la manufactura azucarera en la Habana* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2007); Pablo Tornero Tinajero, *Crecimiento económico y transformaciones sociales: esclavos, hacendados, y comerciantes en la Cuba colonial (1760–1840)* (Madrid: Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social, 1996); and Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1947).

28 Nicolas Joseph de Ribera, *Descripción de la isla de Cuba*, ed. Hortensia Pichardo Viñals (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1975), p. 86.

29 Ribera, pp. 158, 186.

30 "[Cuba] en fin es una alhaja preciosísima de nuestra monarchia que debe cuidarse mucho, y el principal modo, es haciendola poblar bien", Ribera, p. 128.

to liberalize the slave trade, he argued, as it would not only improve agriculture but also increase the number of its inhabitants overseas, of both African and European descent. According to Ribera, the examples of Barbados, French Saint-Domingue, and Martinique showed the economic benefits of introducing more slaves. He argued, though, that unlike the British, the Spanish were known for better treating their slaves—converting them to Christianity, incorporating them into society, and ultimately making them and their descendants loyal and productive vassals of the Crown.³¹ Under the Spanish system of slavery, as opposed to the British, according to Ribera, many African-born *bozales* came to be good Catholics, with an interest in the prosperity of the state. They had wives and children, as well as a *peculium*, with which many bought their own freedom and even became rich. Remarkably, he found, within just a few years of their arrival in the Americas, *bozales* learned to speak Spanish, and they even took up arms and defended the territory if they were instructed and trained. “Little does it matter to the State,” he wrote, “whether the inhabitants of Cuba be black or white, as long as they work hard and are loyal.” The sons of *bozales*, he wrote, “could only be distinguished from Spaniards by color.”³²

At least in part, Ribera based his argument for expanding the slave trade on the utility to the state of more free black subjects. This was not as much part of the more or less contemporaneous discourse in Britain and France about the advantages of expanding colonial populations.³³ This sanguine view of the potential of people of African descent to be worthy (loyal, Catholic) subjects of and defenders of the Spanish Crown was also strikingly at odds with the kinds of concerns about free blacks that were raised in Cuba after the Haitian Revolution and the island’s sugar boom. Rather than emphasize the benefits of free blacks to Spanish empire, Francisco de Arango y Parreño came to see free blacks, and especially free black militias, as a potential danger. In a 1795 report, he warned that whether free or enslaved, “they are all blacks, and more or less have the same complaints and the same motives for living angry with us.”³⁴ By contrast, Ribera’s line of thinking has its analog in similar writings from the pre-Haitian Revolution era that were primarily concerned with augmenting

31 Ribera, pp. 137–142.

32 Ribera, p. 143.

33 In the British and French examples, blacks were not generally considered desirable “population.” See Abigail Swingen, “Labor: Employment, Colonial Servitude, and Slavery in the Seventeenth-century Atlantic”, in Stern and Wennerlind, *Mercantilism Reimagined*, pp. 46–73; and Røge, “A Natural Order of Empire”, pp. 35–36.

34 Archivo General de Simancas [henceforth AGS] Guerra Moderna 6854, Exp. 32, *En relación con el fomento y agricultura de Cuba con necesidad de esclavos negros se considera la reforma de las milicias de negros y mulatos libres*, 1795, 10r.

and better exploiting the population of Spanish possessions.³⁵ This was a broader interest of reforming empires, but one that took a distinctive shape when applied to the diverse populations of Spanish America.

In a parallel example from Campillo's writings about Mexico, the reformer discussed at great length the necessity of Spain making better use of its vast indigenous population. These views were informed by a visit Campillo made to New Spain while on a naval commission to Havana between 1719 and 1724. The Indians of America, he insisted, should be granted more of their own lands and encouraged to farm. Thus they would provide useful settlers of Spanish lands, economic producers, and markets for Spanish manufactures. Importantly, Campillo promoted this policy as an alternative to increased importation of African slaves, which opened the door to much contraband and dependency on foreign merchants. His ideas hardly went far in practice, yet they demonstrate a burgeoning Iberian interest in exploiting diverse populations in the interest of the Crown, as well as de facto recognition of the spaces that subjects of non-European origins already did or potentially could fill. Additionally, they point to a Spanish effort to distinguish itself from British colonialism, in part an argument about the superiority of Catholic over Protestant models, as well as a White Legend of Spanish rule to counteract the Black one.³⁶

At the same time, these statements by Ribera about the utility of more free black subjects were also shaped by the actions of people of African descent themselves. By the mid-eighteenth century, people of African descent had spent more than two centuries in the Americas practicing trades, buying their freedom and those of others, forming families, serving in the king's militias, defending Spanish possessions, growing rich, and contributing to state treasuries. In some cases, they even passed as little different than their fellow subjects of European descent.³⁷ Through the process of Bourbon reform, this

35 For a similar attitude towards the indigenous population in Peru, see Emily Berquist Soule, *The Bishop's Utopia: Envisioning Improvement in Colonial Peru* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

36 Campillo y Cosío, *Nuevo sistema de gobierno económico para la América*, pp. 94–95, 120–121; Stein, *Silver, Trade, and War*, pp. 204–215.

37 For sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth-century Cuba, see Hubert H.S. Aimes, *A History of Slavery in Cuba, 1511–1868* (New York: Octagon Books, 1967 reprint, original 1907); Alejandro de la Fuente with the collaboration of César García del Pino and Bernardo Iglesias Delgado, *Havana and the Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), chp. 6; Pedro Deschamps Chapeaux, *Los batallones de pardos y morenos libres* (Havana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1976), *El negro en la economía habanera del siglo XIX* (Havana: UNEAC, 1971), and *Los cimarrones urbanos* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1983); María Elena Díaz, *The Virgin, the King, and*

discourse on enslaved Africans and their descendants as loyal and fitting subjects of the Spanish Crown, of economic and military utility to the state, was what opened the doors to a new set of Spanish policies that protected, prioritized, and expanded the slave trade into Spanish America. A crucial catalyst for change, though, was a devastating Spanish defeat at British hands: the British invasion and year-long occupation of Havana at the end of the Seven Years War.

Test Case: Cuba

The British invasion and occupation of Havana in 1762–3 drew Spain's attention to Cuba, highlighted its strategic importance as never before, and placed tremendous pressure on Spanish administrators to develop the island's economy and military defenses better or risk losing it for good. Upon the island's restitution, Spain desperately needed to strengthen the defenses of the island, broker stronger ties with its white elite population there, and set Cuba on a new and more productive path. In addition, Cuba's demographic situation of postconquest native depopulation gave these questions of new sources for its military and labor force heightened urgency. Subsequently, the rapid growth of transatlantic human trafficking and African enslavement in Cuba would have tremendous ramifications for policies vis-à-vis the slave trade that affected much broader territories. Cuba subsequently became the site of a trial run for

the Royal Slaves of El Cobre: Negotiating Freedom, 1670–1780 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Herbert S. Klein, "The Colored Militia of Cuba, 1568–1868," *Caribbean Studies*, 6:2 (July 1966), pp. 17–27; Jane G. Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); José Luis Belmonte Postigo, *Ser esclavo en Santiago de Cuba: Espacio de poder y negociación e un contexto de expansión y crisis, 1780–1803* (Aranjuez: Doce Calles, 2011); María del Carmen Barcia, *La otra familia: Parientes, redes, y descendencia de los esclavos en Cuba* (Havana: Casa de las Américas, 2003); Matt D. Childs, *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle Against Atlantic Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), chs. 1–3; Rafael L. López Váldes, *Pardos y morenos: esclavos y libres en Cuba y sus instituciones en el Caribe hispano* (San Juan: Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, 2007); Franklin W. Knight, *Slavery and the Transformation of Society in Cuba, 1511–1760: From Settler Society to Slave Society* (Mona, Jamaica: Department of History, University of the West Indies, 1988); Manuel Moreno Fraguas, *El ingenio: Complejo económico social cubano del azúcar*, 3 vols (Havana: Ciencias Sociales, 1978); William C. Van Norman, *Shade-Grown Slavery: The Lives of Slaves on Coffee Plantations in Cuba* (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 2013).

a series of commercial, political, and military reforms that were later exported to other parts of Spanish America.³⁸

Shortly after the news of Havana's capture reached Spain, in November of 1762, the counselor Francisco de Craywinckel presented a report to the Crown comparing Britain and Spain and urging the need "to make the most of this disgrace." While the embarrassing loss of Havana demonstrated Britain to be, at the time, "much more powerful than Spain," he did not find the differences between the two realms insurmountable. Britain surpassed Spain in the arts of navigation, commerce, and agriculture, but given some time to remake itself, Craywinckel predicted, Spain would catch up with its rival and throw off "dependence on other states."³⁹

When Spain reclaimed its prized New World stronghold at the end of the Seven Years' War, Charles III sent the Aragonese nobleman, Ambrosio de Funes Villalpando, the Conde de Ricla, to overhaul Cuba's governance and begin reforms of its military and economy. The circle of government and military officials who arrived in Havana with Ricla in 1763 immediately set about strengthening and reorganizing the island's defenses. Upon the restitution of the island to Spanish rule, the strategic value of people of African descent, who had played a critical role in the defense of the island, was immediately apparent. When the engineer Silvestre de Abarca made the rounds of western Cuba inspecting troops and fortifications, he counted more black and mulatto militiamen than white ones.⁴⁰ Alejandro O'Reilly in turn performed a military review of the island, during which he established four new battalions of militia, including two of free blacks and *mulatos*. During his short tenure in Cuba, the Captain General Conde de Ricla freed over 150 slaves who had distinguished themselves defending Havana during the British siege,⁴¹ sanctioned the importation of up to 7,000 royal slaves to rebuild the city's fortifications,⁴²

38 Jaime Delgado, "El Conde de Ricla: Capitan General de Cuba", *Revista de Historia de América*, nos. 55/56 (1963), pp. 41-138; Elena Schneider, "The Occupation of Havana: War, Trade, and Slavery in Eighteenth-century Cuba" (Ph.D. diss.: Princeton University, 2011).

39 Biblioteca del Real Palacio [henceforth BRP] II/2869, no. 16, *Discurso que con motivo de la pérdida de la Habana formó Don Francisco Craywinckel*, 1762, 295v; Archivo Histórico Nacional [henceforth AHN] Estado 2927, pp. 1-25.

40 Academia de la Historia, Ms. 9/5406, *Defensa de la Habana y su castillo por Don Silvestre Abarca*, 1773.

41 Schneider, "The Occupation of Havana", p. 336.

42 Between 1763 and 1772 only 4,000 slaves were actually sold on the island for that purpose; see Francisco Pérez Guzman, *La Habana, clave de un imperio* (Havana: Ciencias Sociales, 1997), p. 130. Pablo Tornero Tinajero puts the numbers somewhat higher: over 4,000 slaves

and organized and expanded the militias of free blacks and *mulatos*, according to O'Reilly's recommendations. The importance of black soldiers to the island's defense was not lost on officials in Madrid either. The Conde de Ricla sent two of the most accomplished black veterans of the defense of Havana to the court of Charles III. On Christmas Eve of 1763 Captain Antonio de Soledad and Sub-lieutenant Ignacio Albarado of the battalion of free blacks of Havana performed displays of arms before the King, received medals of His effigy, and were permitted to kiss His hand. Other black veterans showed up in Spain as well demanding their official manumission and financial reward in return for their loyal service.⁴³

In contrast with these men, of particular concern in the aftermath of events in Cuba was the seeming lackluster defense of the island by the majority of the white creole population. Even more, the Havana elites had displayed an unsettling degree of compliance with and even openness to British rule. Madrid in 1763–4 was the setting for a prolonged, public treason trial for those civil and military leaders of Havana who had failed adequately to defend Havana against British attack. Another trial targeted two members of the Havana city council, Sebastian de Peñalver y Angulo and Gonzalo Recio de Oquendo, who had willingly served as lieutenant governors of British Havana under Lord Albemarle.⁴⁴ These men, found guilty of treason for cooperating too willingly with the occupiers, had extensive experience and stake in the British slave and contraband

sold into state slavery to work on the fortifications between 1763 and 1765; see Pablo Tornero Tinajero, *Crecimiento económico y transformaciones sociales: esclavos, hacendados, y comerciantes en la Cuba colonial, 1760–1840* (Madrid: Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social, 1996), p. 37. See also Evelyn Powell-Jennings, "War as the Forcing House of Change': State Slavery in Late Eighteenth-century Cuba", *William & Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 62:3 (July 2005), pp. 411–440, esp. 424.

43 AGI Cuba 136A, *Libro de servicio de batallón de morenos libres de La Havana*, 1770, ff. 614, 631; AGI SD 2209, Aranjuez 10 May 1763, From King to Conde de Ricla regarding Santiago de Sotolongo, slave of Don Manuel Antonio de Sotolongo; AGI SD 2208, Letter of Joseph Antonio Moreno; AGI SD 1215, No. 84, Consejo de Indias, 6 September 1768.

44 Biblioteca Nacional de España, *Proceso formado por orden del Rey Nuestro Señor por la Junta de Generales que S.M. se ha dignado de nombrar a este fin sobre la conducta que tuvieron en la defensa, capitulación, pérdida, y rendición de la plaza de la Habana, y esquadra, que se hallaba en su puerto el Mariscal de Campo Juan de Prado...*, 2 vols. (Madrid, 1763–4). AGI SD 1590, *Expediente contra Don Sebastián de Peñalver y otros reos en la rendición de la plaza de la Habana a los ingleses*, 1771. Celia María Parceró Torre argues that the treason trial was meant to give the Spanish public scapegoats; see her *La pérdida de la Habana y las reformas borbónicas en Cuba (1760–1773)* (Junta de Castilla y León: Consejería de Educación y Cultura, 1998), pp. 194–202.

trades into Cuba.⁴⁵ One lesson to be learned from the occupation was this: a long history of trading with the enemy, in slaves and contraband, had undermined the Havana elite's loyalty to Spain.

Spain felt an urgent need to diagnose the problems that had led to Cuba's loss and to tie the island more closely to its Spanish sovereign. Ricla was also concerned with making Cuba able to produce enough revenue to pay for the troops, fortifications, naval protection, and administration the island required.⁴⁶ Consequently, the post-Seven-Years'-War moment presented a unique occasion to put theoretical debates about political economy into practice. To that end, Charles III's envoys in Cuba wrote several reports about development economics for the island of Cuba. These reports provide both a window on political and economic thinking vis-à-vis Spain's most important Caribbean possession, as well as a more general response to Craywinckel's call to meet the British challenge.⁴⁷ In what was a marked turn from prior policy, all of these reports advocated opening the slave trade to the island.

In his general report of 1764, Alejandro O'Reilly considered the scarcity and high cost of enslaved Africans one of the principal causes of Cuba's economic underdevelopment. Because African slaves were the only workforce in the island's logging, ranching, and agriculture—and particularly in the key industries of sugar and tobacco⁴⁸—O'Reilly considered them “the most indispensable merchandise in order to make this interesting colony flourish.” More slaves would not only produce more revenue for the King but also make Spain's vassals there more loyal to him: as O'Reilly put it, “And when a vassal is rich, what can he fault his Sovereign?”⁴⁹

Not only did O'Reilly use the explicitly commercial language of “merchandise” to describe African slaves but he also looked for models in the slave trading patterns of Spain's European competitors. He pointed out that the Spanish policy of monopoly contracts had impeded, not aided, the supplying of Cuba with enslaved laborers. “The French, English, and Dutch,” he wrote, “whose establishments on the coast of Africa assure them that they obtain blacks with great convenience, know how greatly the happiness of their colonies depends

45 Schneider, “The Occupation of Havana”, pp. 53–65.

46 AGS Hacienda 2342, Havana 1 April 1764, O'Reilly to Don Julian de Arriaga, 330r; Bibiano Torres Ramírez, *Alejandro O'Reilly en las Indias* (Sevilla: Escuelas de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1969).

47 Eduardo Torres-Cuevas, “El grupo de Aranda en Cuba y los inicios de una nueva época”, in eds. José Antonio Ferrer Benimelli et al, *El Conde de Aranda y su Tiempo*, vol. 2 (Zaragoza: CSIC/Institución Fernando el Católico, 2000), pp. 323–348.

48 AGS Hacienda 2342, p. 333v.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 331v.

on the introduction of them, and far from imposing tributes, or measures that make it difficult, they have encouraged it, and always protect the trade through as many means as the government can." O'Reilly mentioned that during the British occupation of Havana, the enemy commander Lord Albemarle had imposed a 40 *peso* tribute on each slave imported, "which he has done to make difficult the introduction of what was most convenient and necessary for the island."⁵⁰ Indeed O'Reilly saw Albemarle's restrictions on slave imports as connected to rivalry between British and Spanish Caribbean isles. In his mind, the way to develop the island of Cuba and bind its elite to Spain was simple: the expansion of the slave trade, state support of slave purchase, and the removal of duties on imported Africans.

Writing from Havana in 1768, the Belgian-born military engineer Agustín Crame, who accompanied Ricla and O'Reilly to Cuba, reported similar conclusions to the Council of the Indies. Like O'Reilly, he had taken part in the military review of the island. Accompanying his report was the most detailed map of the island ever before produced. As Crame saw it, Cuba had great potential for both agriculture and commerce,⁵¹ yet as he reasoned, agricultural zones required a different political economy than mining regions. "I am very aware of the rigorous prohibition of our laws against the least commerce with foreign colonies...But will it always be necessary to subject all of America to one law? Will a land of mines whose natives extract rich metals be the same as an agricultural colony that cannot flourish without slaves?"⁵²

According to Crame's prescription for this new model of "agricultural colony" in Cuba, abundant numbers of enslaved Africans were needed, as no European migrants would willingly submit to the rigors of labor in the field. Nor would it conform with the spirit of Spanish laws to force families of Indians to migrate to Cuba for this work, an option he considered but dismissed.⁵³ As he saw it, prohibitions against trade with foreigners should be cast aside, in order to meet the island's needs for African slaves. In his words, the "passion" Cuba's inhabitants had for supplying themselves with slaves could not even be contemplated; hence, in a strange twist of language, "blacks were the worst enemy that trade prohibitions could possibly have." As Crame saw it, a political

50 Ibid., p. 333.

51 BRP II/2827, Havana, 9 December 1768, *Discurso político sobre necesidades de la isla de Cuba, escrito en el año de 1768 por el ingeniero en jefe don Agustín Crame*, ff. 236–265, citation 238r. On Crame as a precursor to Arango, see Leida Fernández Prieto, "Crónica anunciada de una Cuba azucarera", in *Francisco Arango y la invención de la Cuba azucarera*.

52 BRP II/2827, *Discurso...Crame*, 254r.

53 Ibid., p. 240v.



FIGURE 1 Map of the Island of Cuba drawn by Luis de Surville, 1771. Copy of the original by Agustín Crame, Biblioteca del Real Palacio, II-2827.

economy designed to prevent the leakage of mineral wealth from Spain's American territories had been rendered obsolete by the exigencies of slave-driven agriculture. In essence, according to this logic, it was the slave trade and the perceived necessity of more enslaved Africans for every aspect of Cuba's development that dismantled the logic of mercantilist trade prohibitions.⁵⁴

Borrowing new kinds of metaphors from manufacturing and from Spain's European rivals, Crame wrote that "blacks" were "the most useful machines for agriculture." Both "machines" and "prime material" for colonial economies, once "put into motion cultivating the land they take on a value much greater than they cost initially."⁵⁵ By his optimistic calculations, adding just 100 slaves to Havana would generate 200,000 pesos of sugar.⁵⁶ Just as Britain, he argued, needed to acquire raw wool for its cloth industry, so did Spain need to buy slaves for its expanding agriculture of tobacco and sugar.⁵⁷

Even as he used jumbled, dehumanizing language of machinery and raw materials, Crame's report also grappled with the paradoxes of this new way of thinking about Africans in Spain's overseas territories. His discussion gets at the heart of this dissonance between new and old modes of thought. As he acknowledged, blacks were not just "machines" but also "humans," and although "obscured by the barbarism of their initial education and oppressed by slavery, aspire for liberty, and are capable of all, or most, of the passions of the rest of mankind."⁵⁸ This was the crux of the problem: to see them as "machines" broke from several centuries of precedent, in which the Spanish Crown and Church recognized the personhood of enslaved Africans and in fact justified the African slave trade with the logic that it was better to live a slave in Catholic lands than free in pagan ones.⁵⁹ To disrupt that treatment might induce rebellion and revolt.⁶⁰

54 See Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic*, pp. 73–90. On the debates about whether "mercantilism" ever existed in practice, see Stern and Wennerlind, "Introduction", in *Mercantilism Reimagined*, pp. 1–2.

55 BRP II/2827, *Discurso...Crame*, p. 243v, 244r.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 254v.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 244r.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 242v-r.

59 The classic articulation of this logic can be found in Alonso de Sandoval, *Un tratado sobre la esclavitud*, Introduced and translated by Enriqueta Vila Vilar (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1987), p. 415.

60 This is the quintessential contradiction about arming slaves and in fact all people of African descent explored in eds. Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan, *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

Yet in contrast to the way that thinking about slavery and the slave trade would evolve after the Haitian Revolution,⁶¹ Crame voiced the notion then current in Cuba that for a number of reasons, more slaves equaled more security. As Crame saw it, by comparison with French Saint-Domingue, Martinique, and Jamaica—lands “covered” with blacks and especially slaves—Cuba had much room to increase the number and percentage of slaves without incurring any undue risks. Crame acknowledged that Jamaica had faced slave rebellions (most recently in Tacky’s Revolt of 1760–1, or the Coromantee Wars), but, as he wrote, “in our constitution obedience is more certain than the English one.”⁶² In fact, to his mind, blacks were useful for many ends, even in warfare, and in times of peace a number of them should be prepared for that labor.⁶³ In this instance, Crame was expressing a familiar, even if still remarkable, degree of confidence about the unique and superior forms of Spanish slavery, the utility of black militias, the remoteness of the possibility of slave rebellion, and the ease of putting it down. He also foreshadowed an important argument prevalent in nineteenth-century Cuba about the comparative obedience of the Cuban slave and mildness of the institution on the island.⁶⁴

Historians have often depicted the British occupation of Havana as a moment of massive slave importation that tipped the island’s fate toward sugar monoculture on a British West Indian model.⁶⁵ However, to Crame what it showed was that Cuba could not rely for its slave supply on its competitors the British. He pointed out the restrictions the British commander Lord Albemarle had placed on slave importation during the British occupation, capping the

61 Ada Ferrer, “Noticias de Haití en Cuba”, *Revista de Indias*, 63:229 (2003), pp. 675–694; Ada Ferrer, Consuelo Naranjo Orovio, Ma. Dolores González Ripoll, Gloria García, and Josef Opartny, *El rumor de Haití en Cuba: Temor, raza, y rebeldía, 1789–1844* (Madrid: Centro Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2004).

62 BRP II/2827, *Discurso...Crame*, p. 242v. Vincent Brown, “Slave Revolt in Jamaica, 1760–1: A Cartographic Narrative”, (2012): <http://revolt.axismaps.com/>.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 243r.

64 José Gomariz, “Francisco de Arango y Parreño: El discurso esclavista de la ilustración cubana”, *Cuban Studies*, 35 (2004), pp. 45–61; Jamie Holeman, “A Peculiar Character of Mildness: The Image of a Humane Slavery in Nineteenth-century Cuba”, in *Francisco Arango y la invención de la Cuba azucarera*.

65 For classic accounts that use 1762–3 as a turning point in Cuban history, opening up the pathway to sugar’s ascendancy, see Levi Marrero, *Cuba: Economía y sociedad* (Madrid: Editorial Playor, 1978); Manuel Moreno Friginals, *El ingenio: complejo económico social cubano del azúcar* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1978), vol. I; Hugh Thomas, *Cuba, or the Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Da Capo Press, reprint 1998, copyright 1971); Fernando Portuondo del Prado, *Historia de Cuba, 1492–1898* (La Habana: Editorial Minerva, 1957); Clifford L. Staten, *The History of Cuba* (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 2003).

total number to be sold and setting a higher price than had been the norm under the Royal Havana Company monopoly.⁶⁶

The reasons Crame cited for expanding the slave trade were political (ensuring the satisfaction and hence loyalty of the island's elite), military (populating the island and providing manpower for its defense), and economic (curbing contraband and developing the agricultural sector, which would drive further settlement and provide revenue for the Crown). Crame noted that inhabitants of Cuba were well aware of the development their island lacked and the freedom of commerce it needed. Striking an ominous tone, given the recent behavior of Havana elite during the British occupation, he wrote, "Never has a developing city rebelled."⁶⁷ Echoing a point made by O'Reilly, Crame shared the concern that the Havana elite's desire for more slaves was so acute it might even trump their loyalty to Spain.

O'Reilly and Crame were not the only voices advocating Spanish expansion of the slave trade. In the influx of reports from Cuba in the 1760s, a central point often repeated was that the supply of slaves to the island of Cuba, and Spanish empire more broadly,⁶⁸ needed to be expanded. Another plan for Cuba's development from the late 1760s considered expanding the slave trade to at least 3–4,000 Africans per year, a measure that would ensure supposedly "marvelous progress" for the island.⁶⁹ Like Ribera's, this proposal also imagined a broader slave trade meeting demand throughout Cuba's diversified economy, but without necessarily remaking it. This report argued for expanding the slave trade to Cuba by pointing out that blacks and *mulatos*, both free and enslaved, composed almost all the artisans, workers, and day laborers on the island. "They are the ones that perform the skilled trades...and from whom are composed the battalions of militias of their name newly created for the defense of the island. Ultimately, upon them depends entirely the greater or lesser happiness the island achieves, and in the case of their lacking in number, they would

66 BRP II/2827, *Discurso...Crame*, p. 256v.

67 "Jamás se ha visto que un pueblo que se está fomentando se rebelde." *Ibid.*, pp. 237r-237v.

68 BRP II/2855, no. 2, *Prospecto del proyecto para el establecimiento del abasto de negros de la Isla de Cuba*, pp. 19–31, citation 31r. The argument for Peru can be seen to be Don Miguel de Gijón y León, *Memoria que Don Miguel Gijón escribía para la Real Sociedad de Madrid, relativa al comercio de Indias, presentada en la junta general de 7 de marzo de 1778* (dated 7 May, 1776, Madrid, and published in "Memorias de la Sociedad económica de Amigos del País de Madrid," vol. III, pp. 262–281), "Los negros transportados de Africa al Perú, son unos colonos infinitamente más útiles al Rey y al Estado, que los que se convidan voluntarios y pagados."

69 AGI SD 1156, no. 4 *Dictamen sobre las ventajas que pueden sacarse para el mejor fomento de la isla de Cuba*. S/F, but probably written in the late 1760s.

reduce everything here to a pitiful embryo.”⁷⁰ Here as elsewhere, the language employed indicated that Africans were seen as necessary to grow and develop virtually every aspect of Spanish settlement.

As these reports from Cuba demonstrate, the pressures of imperial competition had generated several new ways of thinking and talking about the importance of people of African descent to Spanish empire. In Cuba, after the end of the Seven Years’ War, they also ushered in a new set of measures and policies, as well as the expansion of the slave trade to the island. Indeed the realization had set in that if Spain were to satisfy the demands of the inhabitants of Cuba and consolidate its hold over the island, against both internal and external threats, it would have to secure its own direct supply of Africans, as the French, British, and Portuguese did. This pressure for expanding the slave trade exerted from Cuba’s private and public sectors, combined with that applied from Peru, Buenos Aires, Caracas, Santo Domingo, and Puerto Rico, contributed to Spanish authorities making a concerted effort to intensify the slave trade.

This transformation of political thought catalyzed the implementation of a number of new policies with regard to African slavery and slave trading in the period from the 1760s through to 1807. The slave trade served as a new bonding agent between center and peripheries, as Spanish authorities committed themselves to experimenting with ways to expand access to enslaved African laborers in America. Before the declaration of “free trade in slaves” in 1789 and the use of bounties to promote the trade, a series of other measures were introduced. These included the establishment of a Spanish slave trading monopoly company, the *Compañía gaditana de negros*, in 1765; the dramatic escalation of the number of royal slaves; the acquisition of territory meant to serve as Spain’s first slave trading entrepôt in West Africa in 1778; and the attempt between 1784 and 1790 to codify laws for the first time in the long history of Spanish slaveholding with regard to not only enslaved Africans but also all people of African descent in its American possessions.⁷¹ Cumulatively, these new policies helped

70 “Ellos son los que dan las manos a las artes, los brazos al harado, y de quien se componen algunos de los vatallones de milicias de su nombre nuevamente creados para la defensa de la isla, y por ultimo en resumen a ellos es a quienes se debe enteramente la mas o menos felicidad que se logra, y si se diera el caso de que faltaran que daria esto reducido a un lastimoso embrion.” *Ibid.*, pp. 34v-35r.

71 Bibiano Ramírez Torres, *La compañía gaditana de negros* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-americanos, 1973); Manuel Lucena Salmoral, *Los códigos negros de la América española* (Alcalá de Henares: Universidad Alcalá, 1996), *Regulación de la esclavitud negra en las colonias de América española (1503-1886): Documentos para su estudio* (Alcalá de Henares: Universidad de Alcalá, 2005); Mariano L. de Castro and María Luisa de la Calle, *Origen de la colonización española en Guinea Ecuatorial (1777-1860)* (Valladolid:

set the stage for Spain's nineteenth-century empire, part of the dramatic expansion of an industrial mode of slavery—i.e., slavery with railroads—that occurred simultaneously in the Spanish Caribbean, Brazil, and the U.S. South.⁷²

Conclusion

During the second half of the eighteenth century, the Spanish government radically reoriented its thinking on the issue of the transatlantic slave trade and African slavery in its American territories. The dramatic expansion of slavery in Spanish empire was not an unforeseen consequence of shifts in broader global economies, but rather a conscious policy planned for and debated throughout Spanish empire. It grew out of a new perception of how nations built wealth arrived at amid a climate of imperial competition. These new ideas about large scale slavery were at the heart of the Bourbon reforms, Spain's process of "rival modernization" across the eighteenth century.⁷³ This idea of the connection between slavery and modernity would engender a political economy of exploitation that persisted and expanded into the nineteenth century, the century of abolition and of the institution's apogee.

The discourse that governed this transition—first in thought, then in policy—was shaped by the example of Spain's European rivals and shifting ideas about the relationships between slavery, the slave trade, the defense of empire, and the production of wealth. In turn, these ideas were worked out in a circular discourse moving between Spanish political economists and officials and subjects overseas, engaging with the actions of people of African descent themselves. As much as Spanish political writers borrowed from their rivals in seeking to expand slavery and slave trading in their overseas possessions, they also took great pains to distinguish and justify the unique and, as they saw it,

Universidad de Valladolid, 1992); Manuel Cencillo de Pineda, *El brigadier Conde de Argelejo y su expedición militar a Fernando Poo en 1778* (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Africanos, 1948); I.K. Sundiata, "A Note on an Abortive Slave Trade: Fernando Po 1778–1781", *Bulletin de l'Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire, Serie B*, vol. 35, issue 4 (1973), pp. 793–804.

72 Dale Tomich, "The Wealth of Empire" and "'The Second Slavery': Bonded Labor and the Transformation of the Nineteenth-century World Economy", in *Through the Prism of Slavery*.

73 I prefer this term to "defensive modernization," used in Stanley J. Stein and Barbara H. Stein, *Apogee of Empire: Spain and New Spain in the Age of Charles III, 1759–1789* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), p. 351; and *The Colonial Heritage of Latin America: Essays on Economic Dependence in Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 88.

preferable modes of their own version of African slavery. This rhetoric demonstrates that imperial policies were not developed in a vacuum, but in unending conversation and competition with those of their competitors, as well as in response to new developments and the raising of multiple voices overseas.

There was, of course, an appreciable gap between the rhetoric justifying practices of transatlantic African slavery and their lived realities. The presence and persistence of this discourse, however, reminds us of the relentless need to self-justify among European monarchies, and the backwards-looking rationalizations given for new departures in policy. Ultimately, these policies by necessity also had to take into account the spaces that people of African descent had already carved out for themselves and the rights and privileges the Crown had expressed an interest in protecting over the many prior centuries of Spanish expansion. By the mid-eighteenth century, for example, there was already an appreciable population of African descent and a sizable free population of color in the Americas. Many of their number had bought their freedom through self-purchase, or *coartación*, a policy that the Crown protected, and willingly served in the King's militias. His own policies and justifications would have to be elaborated in dialogue with these precedents and unfolding events overseas. Indeed all of the language of the 1750s – 80s, arguing for a new departure in Spanish slavery, was shaped by both the actions of these individuals and the legacy of these older modes of enslavement in Iberian worlds.

It was only later that the older language that governed this dramatic expansion of slavery was rendered obsolete by the dramatic economic, demographic, and social transformations it set into motion. By the 1790s, which saw the multiple effects of the Haitian Revolution on the island of Cuba, including the sugar boom, the sugar elite had grown rich and powerful enough to begin to redirect the imperial center's declarations about the proper role and place of people of African descent in Spanish empire. Most dramatically, they rallied together, along with planters in Louisiana, Puerto Rico, and Santo Domingo, to reject as too lenient the new legal code for free blacks and enslaved Africans the Crown tried to introduce.⁷⁴ At this time, the language used to refer to people of African descent in Cuba, and the modes of African slavery on the island, began to look more like what had reigned in the French and British West Indies during

74 AGI Estado 7 Nos. 4 and 5, Havana 5 February 1790, *Carta de los Sres. Marqués de Cárdenas de Monte Hermosos y Don Miguel José Peñalver y Calvo, Apoderados del Cuerpo del hacendados de dueños de ingenios de fabricar azúcar, al Conde de Floridablanca*; Manuel Lucena Salmoral, *Los códigos negros de la América española* (Alcalá de Henares: Universidad Alcalá, 1996); Javier Malagon Barceló, *Código negro carolino* (Santo Domingo, D.R.: Ediciones Taller, 1974).

the peak of the agricultural monoculture of sugar export.⁷⁵ By this point, Cuba was also launching itself in the direction of industrial slavery and the hardening of the institution, in ways that would lead to especially brutal repression of the free population of color.⁷⁶ While the language that was used to justify this expansion of slavery and the slave trade reflected the more diversified roles that people of African descent played in Spanish America at the time, many would soon find their lives more circumscribed by the ensuing escalation of the trade.

75 In French Saint-Domingue, racial lines hardened after the Seven Years' War. On enslaved Africans see Malick W. Ghachem, *The Old Regime and the Haitian Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012) and Gabriel Debien, *Plantations et esclaves à Saint-Domingue* (Dakar: Université de Dakar, 1962). On free people of color, see Stewart R. King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001); John Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French St. Domingue* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006); and Dominique Rogers, "On the Road to Citizenship: The Complex Route to Integration of the Free People of Color in the Two Capitals of Saint-Domingue" in *The World of the Haitian Revolution*, in eds. David Patrick Geggus and Norman Fiering (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 65–78.

76 On the particularly brutal repression after the 1844 insurgency of La Escalera in Cuba, see Richard L. Paquette, *Sugar is Made With Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict Between Empires over Slavery in Cuba* (Wesleyan, Ct.: Wesleyan University Press, 1988) and Michele Reid-Vazquez, *The Year of the Lash: Free People of Color and the Nineteenth-century Atlantic World* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2011).