

# **FOUNDING MOTHERS: FEMALE REBELS IN COLONIAL NEW GRANADA AND SPANISH FLORIDA**

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Spain was the first European nation to bring enslaved Africans into the Americas and the basic formula it employed, and which was later emulated by other slave trading nations, was to bring over one female for every three males. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Dataset (TASTD) confirms that, of the estimated twelve million Africans who arrived alive in the Americas, approximately four million (one in three) were women. The TASTD also documents a striking and gendered pattern of African resistance to the Atlantic slave trade. More ship-board revolts took place on ships with large numbers of women aboard.<sup>1</sup> We should not be surprised, then, to find that African women continued to fight for their freedom once they arrived in the Americas. Some of these rebellious women fled slavery and found freedom in remote maroon camps. Others transformed their lives by “working” an accommodating legal system to become free subjects of the Spanish crown. This essay examines the micro-histories of two African rebels, separated by time and space, who escaped enslavement to create free lives and found new communities in the Spanish world.

## **LA VIRREINA JUANA OF CARTAGENA**

In May 1693 an aged black woman sat imprisoned in the Cartagena jail while an artist painted her portrait. Intrigued by the presumption of the title she claimed “La Virreina,” or the Vice-Queen, Governor Martín de Cevallos y Lazerda commissioned Juana’s portrait “for the novelty” and later hung it in his official residence. Describing the final portrait, the governor caustically remarked that the artist had favored Juana by making her appear more clean and tidy than she really was.<sup>2</sup>

One wonders what Juana was thinking as she posed and as her image slowly came to life on the canvas. She might have considered the process an act of recognition and commemoration. When asked why she called herself the Virreina of Matudere, Juana replied because she was the “fundadora” or founder of the maroon community. Juana ruled Matudere for almost two decades, but after her war captains killed and castrated Spanish officers, and an alleged plot between

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the maroons of Matudere and African Americans in the urban areas was uncovered, the citizenry of Cartagena finally paid for and mounted a military expedition that eradicated her community.<sup>3</sup> By the time Juana sat for her portrait, many of her subjects were dead and others languished in nearby cells, awaiting execution or exile, and Juana may well have recognized that the artist was enacting a secondary capture and that she was a trophy being put on display. This essay utilizes religious, military, criminal, and civil records to confirm maroon accounts of this settlement, the sources of Juana's authority, and how Juana came to call herself Vice-Queen years before Spain established a viceroyalty of New Granada.

From its foundation, Cartagena experienced almost unceasing slave rebellion and marronage. As early as 1540 the king promulgated a royal pardon for "all the fugitive and uprisen slaves" of Cartagena.<sup>4</sup> Despite this offer of clemency, Cartagena's enslaved Africans and African Americans continued to run away to the rugged hinterlands outside the city. Soon, a series of maroon communities, or *palenques*, ringed Cartagena. The most famous of these was Matuna (later transformed into San Basilio), founded at the beginning of the 17th century and ruled by King Benkos-Bioho and his wife, Queen Wiwa.<sup>5</sup> Kathryn Joy McKnight has written about another palenque queen, Leonor, who ruled the palenque of Limón in the 1630s, and it is possible that some of the other numerous maroon communities encircling Cartagena were also ruled by queens.<sup>6</sup> Spanish officials alternated between peaceful overtures toward and military force against these maroon settlements. Their military campaigns adopted the language and character of Christian crusades and St. James, the patron saint of the Spanish Reconquest, once known as Santiago Matamoros, took on a new persona as Santiago Matanegros, "the Negro slayer."<sup>7</sup> Cartagena's residents lived in a state of paranoia, feeling themselves surrounded by potential enemies.

As an official port of the Spanish Fleet, the Carrera de Indias, Cartagena became the primary slave entrepôt for South America. In the early years of the Atlantic slave trade to Cartagena, most of the captive Africans came from the rivers of Guinea and Cape Verde regions, but after the union of the Spanish and Portuguese crowns in 1580, the Portuguese Company of Cacheu began to introduce more enslaved workers from Angola and the Kingdom of Kongo. In 1621, the same year he betrayed a peace treaty and beheaded King Benkos-Bioho, Governor García Girón estimated that the slave population of the province exceeded 20,000. Other contemporary sources estimated the number of enslaved Africans living in Cartagena itself at 3,000–4,000, while the Spanish population was only 2,500.<sup>8</sup> The Europeans in Cartagena were outnumbered, like their counterparts in other Caribbean slave societies, and they struggled with conflicting desires for profits and security.

From the lengthy interrogations that followed Matudere's destruction, we know that the community had existed since around 1675, and that, in fact, there

were already some fifty-four men and forty women living at the site when Juana, her husband, and their three sons arrived. Her husband Domingo's account of the settlement's history reads like an "Epic of Old Mali" in which the righteous heir to the throne finally reclaims it after years of wandering and travail. Domingo said that he, Juana, and their sons, Thomas and Vizente, were enslaved unjustly by Fernando Padilla, and when the family members finally fled slavery, they spent their first six months of freedom living in the dense forests in a shelter of branches. Later, they moved to a second spot where the family built two *bohios* or huts. When they found the land unaccommodating, they moved a third time to the place called Matudere. How Juana came to acquire authority over an already established settlement is unknown, but residents called her Virreina and presented her with gifts of clothing and other objects taken during raids on nearby ranches or estancias.<sup>9</sup>

Juana's ethnicity is never explicitly stated in these documents, but when interrogated, Joseph Carabalí said Juana "hablaba como xptiana" (spoke as a Christian), meaning she was at least somewhat acculturated. Her son Vizente provided the clue that Juana understood the Arará language, which suggests that she was not Arará herself. It is possible, however, that she was from the same Ewe-Fon culture, in which, as Edna Bay has shown, women exercised considerable influence in politics.<sup>10</sup> Juana's husband, Domingo Padilla, was listed as a *criollo* (someone born in the Americas, or creole), but his father, who also lived at Matudere, was from Angola, and Domingo himself was sometimes also called Domingo Angola, indicating he shared an ethnic identification with his father.<sup>11</sup>

In 1693, a Franciscan friar, Fernando Zapata, visited Matudere in an attempt to peacefully "reduce" Matudere's inhabitants to Christian living and loyalty to Spain. He described being met by Matudere's war captain Pedro Mina, out on patrol with a squad of eight to ten men whose faces were decorated with red and white paints, the colors of Shango, the Yoruba god of thunder and war. Writing about later festivities, the priest again stressed the exoticism of the Minas whom he described celebrating their "customary dances."<sup>12</sup>

In contrast, Father Zapata referred to the *criollos*, the American-born residents of Matudere, who he said were led by Juana's husband, Captain Domingo de Padilla, as "domestic." The friar was impressed that this group had built an "adequate" church that contained "paper images" (presumably Christian ones since he stated no objections to them). Father Zapata's distinctions among the maroons, and maybe that of the maroons as well, were not based simply on being African or "country born" because Diego Biáfara and Francisco Arará served as "masters of the church" and led the Catholics in Matudere—those who "lived in Christianity, knew the prayers, sustained the church, and prayed the rosary." The priest asked for and received a demonstration of one of their services and he said

the maroons recited the rosary as a chorus “with devotion” and that they knew the proper responses and seemed to understand. Interestingly, Father Zapata made no mention at all of La Virreina, perhaps unable to conceive of a woman having authority.<sup>13</sup>

Only a month after Father Zapata’s visit, warriors from Matudere ambushed and defeated a Spanish force of some sixty men sent out against them, appropriated their weapons, and sent the commander’s testicles wrapped in a cloth (as a sort of amulet), back to the governor in Cartagena. Matudere’s Arará warriors may have been practicing traditional forms of humiliation against defeated enemies, but such a shocking mutilation unnerved the already anxious townspeople.<sup>14</sup> To settle the hysteria, Governor Martín de Cevallos himself led a retaliatory expedition against Matudere. Calling on St. James/Santiago, and in the middle of a terrible thunderstorm, the Spanish forces launched a spectacular night raid against the maroon camp. A lightning bolt hit the hut where the maroons stored their powder, igniting a great explosion. The light of the fires helped the Spaniards track the scattering maroons, but the round-up continued for weeks, as the Spanish authorities paid forty pesos for every live maroon delivered and four pesos for a head. Their pursuers finally caught La Virreina, her husband, and their sons who joined their former subjects already sweltering in the Cartagena jail.<sup>15</sup>

The governor and his counselors then interrogated the prisoners under oath. The lengthy interrogations of survivors like Juana provided detailed information about the make-up of the large and multicultural settlement. These reports document approximately 250 survivors of the Spanish raid, more than a hundred of whom were either African-born, or born to African-born parents. Among the Africans identified by nation were twenty-eight Minas, nineteen Ararás, ten Congos, nine Luangos, five Angolas, three Popos, three Yolofes, two Caravalies, one Bran, one Goyo, and at least one Biáfara. Others designated as *criollos* were divided into two groups: *criollos de la montaña* to identify those persons born free in the palenque, and *criollos escapados* to designate American-born runaways from Spanish cities.<sup>16</sup>

Juana and her husband both claimed that Juana was the *fundadora*, or founder, of Matudere. Domingo used the title “captain,” but Juana’s choice of an honorific title is more interesting. Rather than use “queen,” as others had before her, she chose the Spanish title, “Virreina.” She may have wished to make a political statement as only New Spain (Mexico) and Peru then rated “viceroys” and in New Granada (Columbia), the highest Spanish official was only a governor.<sup>17</sup> It is also possible that maroons had elected Juana to her position. In its political, military, and social organization, Matudere resembled what Spaniards would have recognized as well-organized and Juana and Domingo’s authority over diverse ethnolinguistic factions within their camps was similar to that exercised by Spaniards in their own multicultural cities.

After completing their interrogations, and with Juana's portrait now dry, the governor and his council declared the captives guilty and decreed their punishment. The Virreina, Juana, who was then approximately 60 years old, received two hundred lashes and exile, as did many others. Her father-in-law, Domingo Angola and the sick, very old, or young captives, including Juana's sons Thomas and Vizente, received a hundred lashes each before their owners were allowed to post bond and recover them. As was customary after such expeditions, the unclaimed runaways were later sold and the profits distributed as payment to their captors. And in a final statement of reclaimed space and authority, the officials of Cartagena hung and quartered thirteen of Matudere's defenders, including Domingo Padilla, at the Plaza Matadero (Plaza of the Slaughterhouse). Officials placed Domingo's head at the gate of the Half Moon, where he had once collected runaways, and placed the mutilated body parts of the executed along the country roadsides "as an example and terror to others of this class."<sup>18</sup> Thus was Juana's viceroyalty of Matudere undone, but in the countryside, maroon settlements were at that very moment re-forming; and deep in the Colombian hinterlands, African communities, forms of organization, language, and culture were kept alive for centuries, surviving to this day in places such as the famed San Basilio.<sup>19</sup>

### NANSI WIGGINS OF SPANISH FLORIDA

About a century later, another enslaved African woman found a different route to freedom that proved less dangerous than Juana's, if not trouble-free. She too was the matriarch of a large free family, but her family was interracial and multicultural. The Senegalese woman, Ana Gallum (alias Nansi Wiggins), first appeared in Spanish Florida historical documents as an enslaved worker belonging to the English planter and Indian trader Don Joseph (or Job) Wiggins. At some unknown point, when British Loyalists still ruled Florida (1763–1784), Wiggins freed Nansi and in 1781 he married her in a Protestant ceremony at Rollestown, although the marriage was not legally recognized by the Spanish Catholics. Even without the benefit of a Catholic marriage, however, Nansi enjoyed a variety of rights in Spanish Florida that she never could have claimed across the international border in Georgia.<sup>20</sup>

Although separated only by the narrow St. Marys River, slavery and concepts of race and gender were fundamentally different in these two locales. Spaniards had constructed legal and social identities for women and the enslaved that drew on a variety of sources, including Roman and Visigothic law, Aristotelian philosophy, Catholic theology, and centuries of customary law and practice in a racially and ethnically diverse metropolis.<sup>21</sup> In the 13th century, King Alfonso the Wise blended these diverse sources into the *Siete Partidas*, a legal code that governed the treatment of both women and enslaved people.<sup>22</sup>

This code, which operated across the Spanish Americas, offered enslaved persons certain rights and protections that would not be conceivable under English law. Most important was that Spanish law considered slavery a mutable legal condition, neither racially defined nor permanent.<sup>23</sup> The law offered many avenues out of bondage, and the medieval ideal of charity toward “miserable classes” encouraged Spanish owners to manumit favored slaves, often in their wills.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Spanish law and custom permitted enslaved people to work on their own account on Sundays and on the many feast days of the Catholic calendar. They could also hire out their time for an agreed upon return to their owners and by these methods acquire and own property such as animals, boats, musical instruments, and tools that further advanced their earning potential. This allowed the lucky and industrious to purchase their own freedom or that of relatives or friends. The state might also free enslaved persons for meritorious deeds such as military service. This lenient attitude toward manumission created a free black class in Spain, and later in Spain’s American colonies, most of which was concentrated in urban areas. Once freed, formerly enslaved persons enjoyed the same rights as any other Spanish subject, and many of the freedpeople were women.

The *Siete Partidas* classified women, along with children, invalids, and delinquents, as in need of supervision, but also deserving of familial and societal protection. In some ways this limited, at least temporarily, a woman’s legal autonomy and economic power. A woman in Spanish society was subject to the will of her father or brothers until they died or until she reached 25 years of age or married. But, paradoxically, the same medieval Spanish law and customs that limited them also allotted free women specific rights and protections. For example, women could inherit, hold, and disperse property left to them by either parent, including real property, and it could not be seized for the debt of their husbands. Moreover, by law, women and men inherited equally from their parents, except in very notable exceptions. A husband could not alienate the dowry or *arrás* (the groom’s marriage gift) of his wife, and upon the husband’s death, the widow was also eligible for one half of the *bienes gananciales*, or monies earned jointly over the course of the marriage. With her husband’s written license or power of attorney, a woman could, and did, enter into a wide variety of legal transactions. Moreover, because Spanish principles of *buen gobierno*, or good government and justice, required access to the courts for all subjects, women, free or enslaved, could also testify in secular courts and seek redress for grievances.<sup>25</sup>

Enslaved women, who under Anglo-Saxon law might be considered doubly oppressed by race and gender, had rights under Spanish law to personal security and legal mechanisms by which to escape a cruel master, conjugal rights and the right not to be separated from their children, and the rights to hold and transfer property and initiate legal suits.<sup>26</sup> Women of all ethnicities, backgrounds, and legal

conditions, including free and enslaved women of African descent, clearly understood the significance of law in Spanish society and took advantage of their rights in Spanish Florida. The intimate nature of the legal tribunal, which consisted of the governor, his legal counsel, and the royal notary, and the small size and inter-relatedness of the community may have minimized petitioners' fears about approaching the court.<sup>27</sup>

Although men and women employed much the same formulaic language in their petitions, women and enslaved persons might also include within their memorials and petitions references to their weakness, poverty, or lack of other sources of assistance in order to elicit the proper sympathetic responses from the court. In a community that operated within the idiom of family, women frequently referred to themselves as mothers and made references to their children. If they were sick, widowed, or abandoned, they made sure to mention it. The court was then held accountable for the same acts of charity and justice that a patriarch would be expected to render to family members or those of the "miserable classes."<sup>28</sup>

If the women who approached the court were illiterate, as they often were, they could use the services of a friend or of the government notary. In those cases, the women's "Xs" would be accompanied by the signature of the person assisting and by the notation "at the request of who cannot write." But literate women of all races and ethnicities wrote and signed many of their own memorials and petitions. Women sometimes required the assistance of translators when they produced texts, and this fact, too, was duly noted in the documents. Many women in colonial Florida, like Nansi, however, were multilingual, especially women of African descent.<sup>29</sup>

Just as they learned new languages, women of African descent learned to manipulate Spanish law, customs, and gender conventions to their advantage. Due to Spanish custom and law, and to the particular economic and political circumstances of Spanish Florida, a greater percentage of women of African descent became free in that colony than in the Anglo colonies to the north. Until 1790, hundreds of women became free in Florida by the provisions of Spain's religious sanctuary policy, and their children were born free.<sup>30</sup> As in other areas of the circum-Caribbean, Spanish law and custom permitted enslaved African American women to hire out their own time, to manage their own property and economy, and even to seek more beneficent owners who would agree to purchase them. Enslaved women could also purchase themselves or family members through the institution of *coartación* or gain their freedom or that of their children through uncompensated manumission. Sometimes, as in Nansi's case, this involved a sexual relationship with their owners.<sup>31</sup> Once free, women of African descent living in Spanish colonies enjoyed full citizenship and the legal and customary rights enjoyed by Spanish women. They operated small businesses, litigated in the

courts, and bought and sold property, including slaves. Some such as Nansi became plantation mistresses.

European-African unions were common and accepted in Florida, much as they were on the African coast and in other areas of Latin America where African–Native American unions were also found. Many of Florida’s wealthiest ranchers, planters, government officials, and merchants had large mixed-race families (sometimes in addition to their white families) and they recognized their mixed-race children, educated them, and provided for them in their wills. Among the prominent planters, merchants, and government officials with African wives and consorts and mixed-race children in 18th century Spanish Florida were Joseph (Job) Wiggins, Zephaniah Kingsley, James Erwin, John Fraser, Francis Richard, Luis Mattier, Francisco Xavier Sánchez, John Sammis, Oran Baxter, Juan Leslie, Miguel Ysnardy, Eduardo Wanton, the brothers Jorge J. F. Clarke and Carlos Clarke, and the physicians Tomás Tunno and Tomás Sterling. Even in cases involving concubinage, such as Nansi’s, the law and community consensus protected the widows and heirs, and the church often interceded “paternally” on behalf of mothers of African descent. Many men left substantial property to their common-law wives and natural children, and the community respected the desires of the deceased, as well as the rights of the bereaved.<sup>32</sup>

Women also made full use of the powerful institutions of the extended kinship group *parentela* and *clientela*, or clientelism, to advance their interests and those of their children. Spaniards viewed society as an extension of family structures, as did members of many African nations, and women of African descent developed important connections in St. Augustine, Florida, through marriage, concubinage, and godparent choices that could produce tangible benefits.<sup>33</sup>

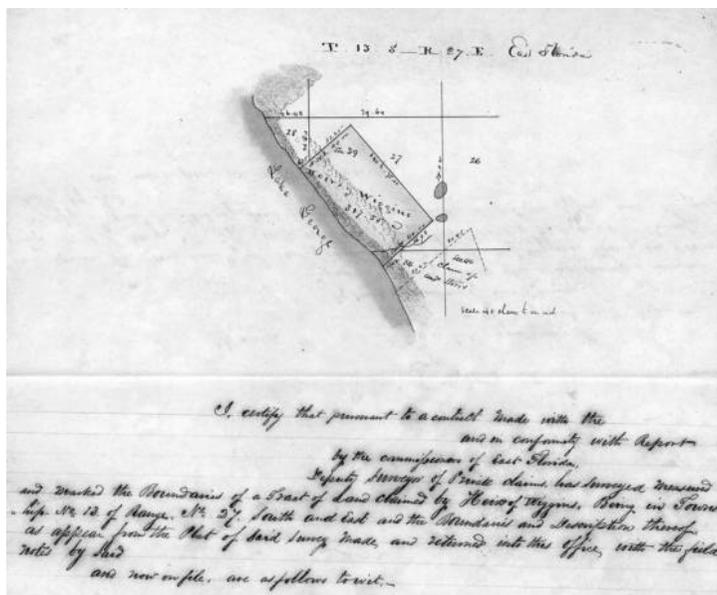
Nansi and Job Wiggins lived together for over eighteen years before his death and they had six children, all of whom were baptized in the Catholic Church. Thus, although Nansi likely began her life in Senegal as a Muslim, and later was married in the Protestant faith, she apparently knew that her children would gain advantage and additional protection by being baptized Catholic.<sup>34</sup> When Wiggins died in 1797, Nansi was left in charge of their minor children and an estate that included a furnished plantation house, fourteen hundred acres of land, farm equipment, almost one hundred head of cattle, and fourteen enslaved workers who lived in six cabins. She continued to manage the estate, probably with the help of her grown sons, and appeared frequently in the legal records of the day, buying and selling horses and slaves.<sup>35</sup>

Nansi’s life as a plantation mistress was not an easy one. Soon after her husband’s death, Nansi reported that she had been raped by Pedro Casaly, who had come to her plantation to get a horse. On his way back to town, Casaly was drowned, but Nansi was left pregnant. She appealed to the court for financial

assistance for the son that was born of the rape; interestingly she named him Pedro. The governor and everyone else in the community knew Nansi held substantial property and had important and wealthy “family” on whom she could depend, namely the white consorts of her daughters, so no government assistance was forthcoming.<sup>36</sup>

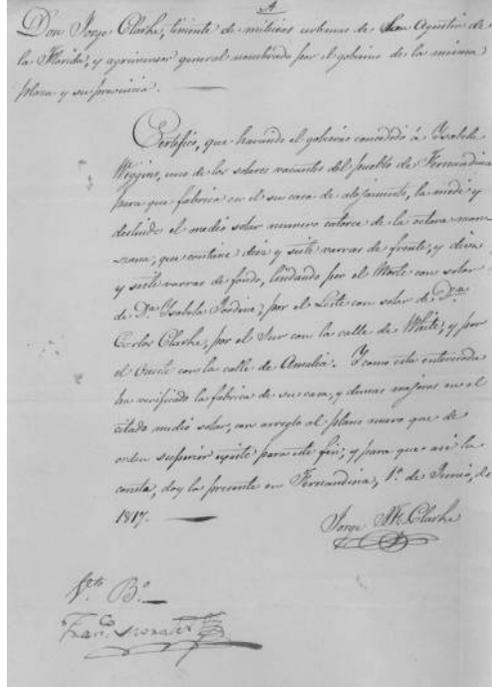
Then, in 1800 the Seminole and Lower Creek Indians elected the former Loyalist soldier William Augustus Bowles as director of their newly created state of Muskogee and declared war against Spain.<sup>37</sup> Nansi had to move with her children to the safety of the town of Fernandina, on Amelia Island. Nansi and Job’s older son, Benjamin Wiggins, who had learned Hitchiti as a child on the frontier, remained on the mainland serving as an Indian translator in the free black militia.<sup>38</sup>

Although not much of a town initially, Fernandina became a flourishing port after the United States embargo of the transatlantic slave trade in 1808, when Spanish slave traders saw an opportunity and began to introduce newly enslaved African captives. Planters from Georgia and South Carolina flocked to Florida to buy the forbidden Africans, turning Fernandina into a boom town.<sup>39</sup> Fernandina’s prosperity also attracted ambitious free blacks such as Nansi, who applied for, and received, land grants in the new town.<sup>40</sup>



Drawing of Elizabeth Wiggin’s 300-acre Spanish Land Grant on the east side of Lake George, FL.

Florida's governor Enrique White appointed Don Jorge J. F. Clarke in 1811 to survey and design an urban renewal plan for the rapidly growing town of Fernandina. To encourage the beautification program, residents who already held land and had built homes were guaranteed reimbursement for any moves or required changes to their homes, as well as titles to their lots. Nansi Wiggins and her daughters were among those who took advantage of the government offer, and Clarke granted Nansi two lots and two half-lots. Nansi's lots were nearby those that Clarke granted her daughters, several of whom, like their mother, had formed families with men of English descent who had grown up in British Florida. Nansi's daughter Beatriz (also known as Ysabel or Elizabeth or Patty) was, in fact, the consort of Clarke's brother, Carlos. Carlos Clarke and Beatriz Wiggins shared English ancestry and a common birthplace and background, as well as their six children, all of whom Carlos Clarke recognized at their Catholic baptism.<sup>41</sup>



Land grant for lot for Elizabeth Wiggin's house in Fernandina, FL.

Nansi's other daughters also owned property on nearby blocks and all built substantial new homes on their land grants.<sup>42</sup> Living on the same block as Nansi and Beatriz Wiggins was Beatriz's sister-in-law, Flora, the consort of Don Jorge J. F. Clarke. Flora's house backed up to that of Flora and Clarke's daughter, Felicia

Garvin, who also lived with a white consort and their children. The women of the extended Wiggins family thereby gained support and companionship from one another and became founding members of a thriving new community.<sup>43</sup> One former resident recalled: "The town consists of about forty houses, built of wood, in six streets, regularly intersecting each other at right angles, having rows of trees (Pride of India) and a square, with a small fort of eight guns, fronting the water. Several of these houses are two stories high, with galleries, and form a handsome appearance."<sup>44</sup> The town also featured a Catholic church, which no proper Spanish town would do without, a hospital, inns, stores, and warehouses to serve the growing population.<sup>45</sup> In 1811 Nansi Wiggins petitioned the Spanish government for additional land on which to work with four slaves and live with her then 12-year-old son, Pedro, but the acting governor replied that she already owned land on the St. John's and ordered her to get that acreage into cultivation or lose it.<sup>46</sup>

Nansi's connections to Jorge J. F. Clarke and his brother Carlos Clarke were critical to her family's fortunes. In addition to being an official government surveyor, Jorge J. F. Clarke served as *capitán de partido* or *juez pedaneo* for Fernandina in 1812, a position that combined the functions of conciliator, policeman, and judge. In 1816 Clarke assumed an expanded role of *capitán* for the larger Upper and Lower St. Marys district, with "superintending jurisdiction for the whole," in effect becoming "deputy governor." Meanwhile, he continued to serve as the royal surveyor, facilitating and documenting claims for most of the property owned by Florida's free blacks.<sup>47</sup> Nansi's son-in-law, Carlos Clarke, was commander of the Company of Pardos and Morenos of Fernandina and served as lieutenant of the Provincial and Urban Militias of Florida, commanding one hundred men of the pardos and morenos units from Havana as well as Fernandina's local black militia unit.<sup>48</sup> Thus, both Clarke brothers held influential positions from which to protect the extended black community in which they had many kin and friends, and they functioned as their patrons, sponsors, and supporters.

In 1820, on the eve of the United States acquisition of Florida in 1821, Carlos Clarke legally sold Beatriz land and property in order to document her claim and ownership. The family and client connections that Nansi Wiggins and her daughters and their extended community formed with the Clarks were especially critical during Florida's territorial transition. Jorge Clarke surveyed many land grants for free blacks, and he and his brother helped them document and retain these grants when the United States finally took Florida from Spain in 1821.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, the majority of the free black householders would lose their property under United States rule. Despite Carlos Clarke's efforts to protect Beatriz and their children, in a case that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, the federal government later voided Beatriz's claim to 300 acres on the east side of Lake George on the basis that she failed to comply with the conditions of the

Spanish grant, which required her to live on and improve the property.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, fifteen years later, well into the U.S. territorial period when race relations had deteriorated, Carlos Clarke successfully deeded his son Thomas Clarke, Nansi Wiggins's grandson, 250 acres of land on the Indian River "in consideration of the natural love and affection [towards his] son."<sup>51</sup>

The important Afro-European families founded in 18th-century Florida, with the Wiggins as only one example, left slavery behind and acquired property, land, education, and extended economic and social networks. These early advantages sustained them through later years of racial discrimination, legal challenge, and loss of social place under United States rule characterized by chattel slavery and white supremacist practices. Still, elements of the early advantage persisted.

At a conference at the Smithsonian Institution, suitably entitled, "Will the Circle Be Unbroken?," a fellow panelist, Professor Yvonne Daniel, a dance anthropologist whose research explores contemporary Afro-Hispanic cultural traditions in Cuba, asked if I had any information on her ancestor. I was amazed to learn that she referred to Jorge J. F. Clarke, who as a surveyor, judge, family member, and patron played such a critical role in advancing and protecting Nansi Wiggins and her extended family in Spanish Florida.<sup>52</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Several important institutional, political, and social factors protected African American women in Florida and other Spanish colonies, even those enslaved. One was the observance of a legal code that upheld the rights of slaves and the property rights of women generally and that supported the access of both to the courts. In this litigious society, all could generate lawsuits and make their voices heard. The courts in Spanish Florida regularly supported the inheritance rights of women and children of African descent if their relationship to the deceased had been publicly acknowledged, even when the mothers were not legally married to the fathers of their children. After centuries of experience, Spaniards were accustomed to Africans in their communities, and interracial sexual relationships were common in Florida. While white racism was not absent, racial categorization was less rigid than in Anglo areas and personal connections and behavior were more important. Another factor was the particular political circumstances in Spanish Florida. Bordered by a competing nation that practiced chattel slavery, Florida sought to weaken the enemy by attracting and then freeing enslaved people, and this policy worked to the advantage of women as well as men. Also important were the family-based religious and social systems and the gender conventions operating in Spanish Florida, which held that women, including women of African descent, free or enslaved, were due certain protections, particularly against sexual violation

and excessive physical mistreatment. This is not to suggest that these violations did not ever occur; indeed, I document them in my research, but I also show that enslaved Africans in Spanish Florida, even those who had recently debarked, quickly understood that when they could report such abuse, they would receive legal redress. Assisted by the corporate nature of Spanish society and Spain's medieval tradition of integration and assimilation and by the almost constant threat to Spanish sovereignty in Florida, multiple generations of Africans leveraged linguistic, military, diplomatic, and artisanal skills into citizenship and property rights. Although other Africans and their descendants remained enslaved, they enjoyed more legal and social protection in this Spanish colony than they would during the next two hundred years of Anglo history in Florida.<sup>53</sup>

These two remarkable women, Juana and Nansi, both rebelled against their enslaved conditions, although each chose a different path to freedom. Juana's proved more difficult, and ultimately, untenable. Earlier Spanish officials had held a weaker hand, and found it the wiser, and less costly, course to make peace with maroon communities such as Juana's. Thus, the Spaniards signed treaties recognizing the independence of Esmeraldas in Ecuador and San Lorenzo de Cerralvo in New Spain (Mexico), among others. By the end of the 17th century, however, Spanish officials in Cartagena were determined to eliminate the maroon threat and Juana's "vicerealty" was one of many that were destroyed. Her community was dispersed, her husband killed, and she and her children returned to slavery.

Whereas Juana tried to escape the Spanish world, Nansi integrated herself into it fully. She and her daughters married, or formed alliances and families with, important men in the community who could offer them protection and a certain degree of status. They also gained important material benefits from their integration and cultural adaptation to Spanish norms, including land and houses held in their own names. Nansi was secure enough to petition the government on repeated occasions, represent herself in court proceedings, and manage her extensive properties independently—all activities that would have been impossible for her in the contemporary U.S. South.

Her daughters followed Nansi's lead and were similarly independent, but they and many other free black women and their families would see their gains undone when the U.S. government assumed control of the Territory of Florida on 10 July 1821. As early as August of that year, several hundred free blacks began emigrating from St. Augustine and Pensacola to Cuba and Mexico where the Spanish government granted the exiles homesteads and meager pensions.<sup>54</sup> At least one of Nansi's daughters, Juana Wiggins, relocated to Havana where she continued to pursue her legal rights in the Spanish courts. Other free African Americans remained among their Seminole allies to fight two more wars against the U.S. government before some agreed to move west to Indian territory.<sup>55</sup>

As these examples show, enslaved women who most directly challenged the Spanish system faced the harshest retaliation. Juana suffered gravely for her rebellion, but she escaped the death penalty that female rebels often faced under Anglo law. Nansi suffered rape and hardships on the Florida frontier, but she was able to utilize legal and social resources in the Spanish world that enabled her to raise her large family and establish their security despite the geopolitical turmoil in which they all lived.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup><http://www.metascholar.org/TASTD-Voyages/>—The TASTD is essential for the study of slavery in the Americas and although it is strongest on the English trade, a number of young scholars are contributing critical new data on the Spanish and Portuguese trade of earlier periods. See *Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*, ed. David Eltis and David Richardson (New Haven, CT, 2008).

<sup>2</sup>Martín de Cevallos to Antonio Ortiz de Talora, 29 May 1693, Santa Fe 213, Archivo General de Indias, Seville (hereafter AGI). See also Jane Landers, “Conspiradores esclavizados en Colombia en el siglo XVII,” in *Afrodescendientes en las américas: trayectorias sociales e identitarias: 150 años de la abolición de la esclavitud en Colombia*, ed. Claudia Mosquera, Mauricio Pardo, and Odile Hoffman (Bogotá, Colombia, 2002), 181–93.

<sup>3</sup>Junta de Guerra, Testimony of Don Juan de Berrio, 30 April 1693, Santa Fe 212, AGI; “Autos sobre la reducción y pacificación de los negros fugitivos y fortificados en los palenques de la Sierra de María, 1691–1695, Santa Fe 212”; “Entrada y Derrota del Palenque de Matudere,” Santa Fe 213, folios 41–274, AGI. Juana is identified as *Virreina* and *fundadora* on folios 499 and 533.

<sup>4</sup>Roberto Arrazola, *Secretos de la historia de Cartagena* (Cartagena, Colombia, 1967), 242.

<sup>5</sup>King Benkos-Bioho founded his dynasty at Matuna around 1600 and although he eventually agreed to a peace treaty, he was betrayed and hung by Governor García Girón in 1621. Orlando Fals Borda, *Historia doble de la costa, Tomo I Mompox y Loba* (Bogotá, Colombia, 1979), 52-A-59<sup>a</sup>; Anthony McFarlane, “*Cimarrones and Palenques: Runaways and Resistance in Colonial Colombia*,” *Slavery and Abolition* 6, no. 3 (1985): 134–5. For other 17th-century palenques, see María Cristina Navarrete, *Historia social del negro en la colonia Cartagena, siglo XVII* (Santiago de Cali, Colombia, 1995), 20.

<sup>6</sup>“Testimonio de los procesos y castigos . . . que se hicieron . . . por el Maestro de Campo Francisco de Murga gobernador y capitán general de Cartagena . . . contra los negros cimarrones y alçados . . . de los palenques . . . del Limon . . . Polín y Çanaguare, 1633–1644,” Patronato 234, R. 7, no. 2, AGI cited in McKnight, “Confronted Rituals: Spanish Colonial and Angolan ‘Maroon’ Executions in Cartagena de Indias (1634),” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 5, no. 3 (2004): 1–19. McKnight also transcribed and annotated sections of this document in “Gendered Declarations: Testimonies of Three Captured Maroon Women, Cartagena de Indias, 1634,” *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 12, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 499–527. For more on maroon women see Jane Landers, “Maroon Women in Spanish America,” *Beyond Bondage: Free Women of Color in the Slave Societies of the Americas*, ed. David Barry Gaspar and Darlene C. Hine (Bloomington, IN, 2004), 3–18.

<sup>7</sup>Roberto Arrazola called the 17th century “the 100 years war against the maroons.” Roberto Arrazola, *Palenque: primer pueblo libre de América* (Cartagena, Colombia, 1970), 48; Fals Borda, *Historia doble*, 52B; Autos sobre la reducción y pacificación, Santa Fe 212, op. cit. The Crown had ordered a peaceful resolution in the Real Cédula, of 13 July 1686, Santa Fe 531, libro 11, folio 217, AGI. For more on the pacific approach, see Jean-Pierre Tardieu, “Un proyecto utópico de manumisión de los cimarrones del ‘Palenque de los montes de Cartagena’ en 1682,” in *Afrodescendientes en las américas*, op. cit., 169–180.

<sup>8</sup>María del Carmen Borrego Plá, *Cartagena de Indias en el Siglo XVI* (Sevilla, Spain, 1983), 57–61, 423–29 and “Cartagena de Indias en el siglo XVI: la conformación de una sociedad mestiza en la época de los Asturias,” in *Historia económica y social del Caribe colombiano*, ed. Adolfo Meisel Roca (Bogotá, Colombia, 1994), 61–108.

<sup>9</sup>Entrada y Derrota, Santa Fe 213, op. cit., folios 530v.

<sup>10</sup>Edna G. Bay, *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey* (Charlottesville, VA, 1998), chap. 2.

<sup>11</sup>Entrada y Derrota, Santa Fe 213, folios 512v, 522.

<sup>12</sup>Father Fernando Zapata to Governor Martín de Cevallos, 21 April 1693, Santa Fe 213, AGI. As at San Basilio and other palenques, African-born men captained those of their own nation.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.; John Thornton describes dances as a central element of military training and war preparations in the Kongo. John K. Thornton, "African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion," *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 4 (1991): 1112–1113 and "African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution," *The Journal of Caribbean History* 25, no. 1 (1991): 58–80.

<sup>14</sup>Report of Governor Martín de Cevallos, 29 May 1693, Santa Fe 213. Robin Law shows that ritual decapitation and castration of enemies were important features of warfare in contemporary Dahomey until leaders forbade the practices late in the 18th century. Robin Law, "'My Head Belongs to the King': On the Political and Ritual Significance of Decapitation in Pre-Colonial Dahomey," *Journal of African History* 30, no. 3 (1989), 399–415.

<sup>15</sup>Report of Martín de Cevallos, 29 May 1693, Santa Fe 213, AGI. In reported Catholic apparitions Santiago was said to descend from the heavens on a white charger as thunder pealed. The African deity Shango allegedly used lightning bolts to strike down his enemies, thus, Spaniards and Africans alike may have read that event as a sign of divine intervention. Henry John Drewel, John Pemberton III, and Rowland Abiodun, *Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought* (New York, 1989).

<sup>16</sup>"Autos sobre la reduccion y pacificación," Santa Fe 212, op. cit., "Entrada y Derrota," Santa Fe 213, op. cit.; María del Carmen Borrego Pla's study of these communities focused on Spanish military and political campaigns against them but did not mine the rich ethnographic material in the same documents. She also misidentified the settlement of Matudere as Matubere. Borrego Pla, *Palenques de negros*, op. cit.

<sup>17</sup>"Limón's Queen Leonor was actually a criolla (born in the Americas) who McKnight theorizes was elevated to Queen by a small group of Malembas who entered the community. McKnight, "Confronted Rituals," op. cit.

<sup>18</sup>"Entrada y Derrota," Santa Fe 213, op. cit., folios 531–539. The brotherhood of Nuestra Señora de Gracia y la Caridad asked for, and received, permission to bury the remains of the executed.

<sup>19</sup>For an ethnographic study of the modern community of San Basilio, see Aquiles Escalante, *El palenque de San Basilio: una comunidad de descendientes de negros cimarrones* (Barranquilla, Colombia, 1979).

<sup>20</sup>Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana, IL, 1999), 153.

<sup>21</sup>Heath Dillard, *Daughters of the Reconquest: Women in Castilian Town Society, 1100–1300* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), 12–35. On the legal and social position of women in Spain and the Spanish colonies, see Eugene H. Korth and S. J. and Della M. Flusche, "Dowry and Inheritance in Colonial Spanish America: Peninsular Law and Chilean Practice," *Americas* 43 (April 1987): 395–410; Asunción Lavrin, "Introduction" and "In Search of the Colonial Woman in Mexico: The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Latin American Women: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Asunción Lavrin (Westport, CT, 1978), 3–22, 23–59.

<sup>22</sup>Landers, *Black Society*, 7–9; Cortés López, *Orígenes de la esclavitud*, 151–76; For numerous examples of self-purchase or gratis manumission in early modern Seville, see Alfonso Franco Silva, *Regesto documental sobre la esclavitud Sevillana (1453–1513)* (Seville, Spain, 1979).

<sup>23</sup>The classic work on comparative Anglo/Spanish slave law is Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen: the Negro in the Americas* (New York, 1947). Also see William D. Phillips, Jr., *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade* (Minneapolis, MN, 1985), 138–139, 155, 160–163; José Luis Cortés López, *Los Orígenes de la esclavitud negra en España* (Madrid, 1986), 133–50.

<sup>24</sup>Maureen Flynn, "Charitable Ritual in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain," *Sixteenth-Century Journal* 16, no. 3 (1985): 335–47, and *Sacred Charity: Confraternities and Social Welfare in Spain, 1400–1700* (Ithaca, NY, 1989).

<sup>25</sup>Dillard, *Daughters of the Reconquest*, 35–67, 96–126. In colonial Latin America, unmarried women over the age of twenty-five and widows enjoyed even more freedom than their married counterparts. Lavrin, "In Search of Colonial Women," 30, 41. Also see Patricia Seed, *To Love, Honor, and Obey in Colonial Mexico: Conflicts over Marriage Choice, 1574–1821* (Stanford, CA, 1988); Susan Socolow, "Love and Marriage," and Ramón A. Gutiérrez, "From Honor to Love: Transformations of the Meaning of Sexuality in Colonial New Mexico," in *Kinship Ideology and Practice in Latin America*, ed. Raymond T. Smith (Chapel Hill, NC, 1984), 237–63.

<sup>26</sup>Phillips, *Slavery from Roman Times*, 154–70.

<sup>27</sup>Landers, *Black Society*, 136–146; For comparable findings in Louisiana, see Kimberly S. Hanger, "'The Fortunes of Women': Spanish New Orleans's Free Women of African Descent and Their Relations with Slave Women," in *Discovering the Women in Slavery: Emancipating Perspectives on the American Past*, ed. Patricia Morton (Athens, GA, 1996), 153–178.

<sup>28</sup>Another standard closing might be "The humble petitioner fully expects to be graced with the charity and justice for which your esteemed Majesty is well-known. I kiss your hand and pray that God grant you many years."

On treatment of the “miserable classes” and Christian obligations, see Flynn, “Charitable Ritual in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain.”

<sup>29</sup>Landers, *Black Society*, 138.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 23–28, 76–79 and *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), chap. 1.

<sup>31</sup>Landers, *Black Society*, 139–150; Hubert H. S. Aimes, “Coartación: A Spanish Institution for the Advancement of Slaves into Freedmen,” *Yale Review* 17 (February 1909): 412–31.

<sup>32</sup>*Black Society*, 150–153; Daniel L. Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley: African Princess, Florida Slave, Plantation Owner* (Gainesville, FL, 2003) and “Family Ties That Bind: Anglo-African Slave Traders in Africa and Florida, John Fraser and his Descendants,” *Slavery and Abolition* 20 (December 1999): 1–21. Also see Frank Marotti, Jr., “Edward M. Wanton and the Settling of Micanopy,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 73 (April 1995): 456–470; Kimberly Hanger finds many similar cases of cross-racial inheritance in Spanish New Orleans. See *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769–1803* (Durham, NC, 1997).

<sup>33</sup>McAlister, *Spain and Portugal*, 133–52. For an excellent look at how these systems actually operated, see Stephanie Blank, “Patrons, Clients and Kin in Seventeenth-Century Caracas: A Methodological Essay in Colonial Spanish American History,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 54, no. 2 (May 1974): 260–83 and Hanger, *Bounded Lives*, op. cit.

<sup>34</sup>Baptisms of Patricia Wiggins (b. 1782), María Wiggins (b. 1785), Benjamin Wiggins (b. 1788), and Abigail Juana Wiggins (b. 1789) all on 13 February 1795; Baptisms of Ana María Wiggins (b. 15 May 1792) and Jorge José Wiggins (b. 10 July 1795) both on 8 November 1797. Black Baptisms, Catholic Parish Registers, P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History, Gainesville, FL (hereafter PKY), microfilm reel 284 J, PKY.

<sup>35</sup>Testamentary Proceedings of Jacob Wiggins, 14 Nov. 1797, East Florida Papers (hereafter EFP), PKY, microfilm reel 134. Declaration of Ana Gallum, 3 October 1799.

<sup>36</sup>Testamentary Proceedings of Jacob Wiggins, 14 Nov. 1797, EFP, microfilm reel 134, PKY; Declaration of Ana Gallum, 3 October 1799, *ibid.*; Baptism of Pedro Casaly, (b. 18 September 1799) on 5 September 1800. The child is listed as the natural son of Pedro Casaly and Ana Wiggins, free black from Senegal. Black Baptisms, CPR, microfilm reel 284 J, PKY.

<sup>37</sup>Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolution*, chap. 3; Gilbert C. Din, *War on the Gulf Coast: The Spanish Fight against William Augustus Bowles* (Gainesville, FL, 2012).

<sup>38</sup>Landers, *Black Society*, 104, 225.

<sup>39</sup>Jane Landers, “Slavery in the Spanish Caribbean and the Failure of Abolition,” *REVIEW, A Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center*, Special Issue *Review XXXI-3-2008*, n.p. in Special Issue, “The Second Slavery: Mass Slavery, World-Economy, and Comparative Microhistories, Part II,” ed. Dale Tomich and Michael Zeuske.

<sup>40</sup>By 1813, 902 blacks lived on Amelia Island, accounting for sixty-seven percent of the total population of 1330. Most of the persons of color labored on plantations beyond the neat town squares, but thirty-seven of the forty-one free blacks and mulattos lived in Fernandina. Census of Fernandina and Amelia Island, 1814, Census Returns, 1784–1814, EFP, microfilm reel 148, PKY.

<sup>41</sup>Landers, *Black Society*, 243.

<sup>42</sup>In the census of 1814, Fernandina’s free blacks were grouped into sixteen households, seven of which were female headed, including those of Nansi and her daughters. Census of Fernandina and Amelia Island, 1814, EFP, microfilm reel 148, PKY. *The United States v. Wiggins*, 14 Peters, 334; Spanish Land Grants in Florida, Historical Records Survey, Tallahassee, FL, 1940–41 (hereafter SGLF), 339–40.

<sup>43</sup>Susan R. Parker has traced similar residential patterning for Spanish mothers and daughters in St. Augustine and argues that because Castilian law allowed women to hold and dispose of property, mothers bequeathed to daughters rather than to husbands or sons, thus maintaining control of home sites over the generations. This made them attractive marriage partners and was a source of economic and social power. Some of the female property owners received their properties as dowries, which Spanish courts assiduously protected. Susan R. Parker, “In My Mother’s House,” unpublished paper, Florida Historical Society meeting, May 1992.

<sup>44</sup>Clarke laid out a model city along rectilinear lines of thirteen squares, four lots wide and four long. James G. Forbes, *Sketches, Historical and Topographical, of the Floridas, More Particularly of East Florida* (1821; reprinted, Gainesville, FL, 1964), 74.

<sup>45</sup>Map of Fernandina and Key, State Archives, Tallahassee, Fla. Forty percent of Florida’s total population (3,729) lived on Amelia Island by 1815. David Bushnell, “The Florida Republic: An Overview,” in *La República de las Floridas: Texts and Documents*, ed. David Bushnell (Mexico City, 1986), 7–18.

<sup>46</sup>Petition of Nancy [sic] Wiggins, 3 July 1811, and reply by Governor Juan José de Estrada, 9 July 1811, State Florida Land Records, Record Group 599, Series 992.

<sup>47</sup>Clarke's district comprised Amelia, Tiger, and Talbot islands, both banks of the Nassau River, and the right bank of the St. Marys. The other elected magistrates were Zephaniah Kingsley and Henry (Enrique) Yonge. Hill, "George J. F. Clarke," 228–30; George J. F. Clarke to Captain John R. Bell, 25 July 1821, cited in C. Seton Fleming, "George I. [sic] F. Clarke," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 4 (July 1925), 31–42; D. C. Corbitt, "The Return of Spanish Rule to the St. Marys and the St. Johns, 1813–1821," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 20 (July 1941): 47–71.

<sup>48</sup>Tomás Llorente to José Coppinger, 17 Septembr 1817, Correspondence Between the Governor and Subordinates on the St. Johns and St. Marys Rivers, EFP, microfilm reel 63, PKY.

<sup>49</sup>Hill, "George J. F. Clarke"; SLGF, vols. 1–4.

<sup>50</sup>"Land Claims in East Florida," *American State Papers: Public Lands*, vol. 6, (Washington, DC, 1830), 113.

<sup>51</sup>The six natural children of Carlos Clarke and Beatriz Wiggins were Ana Josefa Clarke, born 12 January 1799, and baptized 31 October 1799; Carlos Manuel Clarke, born 24 January 1802, and baptized 20 February 1802; María Leonór Clarke, born 7 Apr. 1804, and baptized 9 Apr. 1804; José Clarke, born 25 Aug. 1805, and baptized 30 January 1807; Ysabel Josefa Leona María Wiggins, born 11 April 1809, and baptized 22 April 1809; and Jayme Francisco Clarke, born 16 July 1812, and baptized 6 November 1812. Black Baptisms, CPR, vol. 2, microfilm reel 284 J, and CPR, vol. 3, microfilm reel 284 K, PKY; Hill, "George J. F. Clarke," 208.

<sup>52</sup>Yvonne Daniel, *Rumba: Dance and Social Change in Contemporary Cuba* (Bloomington, IN, 1995). The family still holds property near St. Augustine, as do other black families who first acquired land and legal rights under Spanish rule. Since that chance meeting at the Smithsonian I have enjoyed long telephone conversations with Professor Daniel and her brother, Kirby Payne, who attended law school in New York City, and discussions of the complex genealogy compiled by another family member, Edward Gourdine, a lawyer, the first black judge in Massachusetts, and an Olympic athlete who ran with Jessie Owens. Professor Daniel and I also shared another panel recently at the "Exploring Dimensions of African Diasporas" conference at Johns Hopkins University, which will result in a collection edited by the convener, Professor Franklin Knight.

<sup>53</sup>Landers, *Black Society*.

<sup>54</sup>On race relations in territorial Florida, see Canter Brown, Jr., "Race Relations in Territorial Florida, 1821–1845," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 73 (January 1995): 287–307; Daniel L. Schafer, "Class of People neither Freeman nor Slaves: From Spanish to American Race Relations in Florida, 1821–1861," *Journal of Social History* 26, no. 3 (March 1993): 587–609. On emigration to Pensacola, see Anna Ruth B. Barr and Modeste Hargis, "The Voluntary Exile of Free Negroes of Pensacola," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (July 1938): 3–14.

<sup>55</sup>Jane Landers, *Atlantic Creoles*, chap. 5.