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THE REVOLUTIONARY BLACK ATLANTIC

From Royalists to Revolutionaries

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The Black Atlantic was born not in the eighteenth century but in the mid-fifteenth century, when Portuguese factors reached the Upper Guinea Coast and began a trade with local rulers for luxury goods, including the enslaved.¹ Free and enslaved Africans had long formed important segments of the urban populations of southern Portugal and Spain and they became cultural brokers in the Upper Guinea trade.² By the early sixteenth century, Africans were also key to the success of Portuguese settlements in the Madeira, Canary, and Cape Verde Islands, where the free worked in urban and domestic labor, small-scale trade and sailing, as they had in Portugal, and the enslaved produced foodstuffs and worked on cotton and sugar plantations.³ Together, Portuguese and Africans would later develop the earliest Atlantic slave trade to the Americas.⁴

While Portugal concentrated on developing trade and colonies in Africa, Spain focused on the Americas and Africans participated in each of Spain's exploratory voyages across the Atlantic and their wars of conquest.⁵ Once the Indian wars on Hispaniola waned and colonization was underway, small groups of battle-tested Africans joined in new Caribbean campaigns and in the spectacular conquest of the Aztec empire. As Frederick Bowser and James Lockhart have shown, free and enslaved Africans participated in even more significant numbers in the conquest of the great Inca empire of Peru and in the subsequent Indian and civil wars which wracked the region.⁶ These engagements allowed "black conquistadors," as Matthew Restall has called them, to petition for rewards for their *meritos y servicio* (merits and services), and thus, leave a documentary trail of their exploits. Spanish chronicles and ecclesiastical records also document the African among the Spanish expeditions and in the earliest Spanish settlements.⁷

Chronically short-handed Spanish officials in the Americas very early began to include both free and enslaved Africans in their military forces. Slaves commonly appeared on militia rolls as drummers and fifes in their owner's units and also served as interpreters on Indian frontiers. They also served as coastal sentinels and sailors on locally organized patrol boats throughout the Spanish Caribbean, as French and English pirates challenged Spanish hegemony in the region.⁸ When France and Spain went to war in 1552 "the Caribbean became for the first time a significant theater of international warfare" and soon Spanish officials were complaining that Caribbean waters were "as full of French as New Rochelle."⁹ During a French pirate attack on Havana in 1555, some 100 blacks (most of whom were probably enslaved) and an equal number of Indians joined 40 Spaniards in an unsuccessful defense of the city. Despite the best efforts of this multiracial force, the city fell, and Havana's governor hastily raised an additional force of

over 200 black slaves from the countryside to help battle the French pirates.¹⁰ Enslaved blacks also helped defend Puerto Rico in 1557, Cartagena in 1560 and 1572, and Santo Domingo in 1583. Cartagena's officials reported in the same period they had 200 to 300 slaves whom they could arm for service and Santo Domingo's officials estimated an available slave force of about 400–500.¹¹ The *pardo* (mulatto) company of Puebla helped defend the Crown's interests repeatedly in Veracruz, Campeche, and Mexico City. In the unhealthy coastal city of Veracruz, New Spain's main Atlantic port, almost the entire military force, the Corps of Lancers, consisted of persons of color.¹²

Despite the efforts of such men, Spain began losing both treasure fleets and territory in the "Spanish lake." The Dutch seized Curaçao in 1634 and by midcentury French smugglers and buccaneers had occupied the western third of Hispaniola and the island of Tortuga off its north coast.¹³ Soon after, in 1655, English forces attacked Jamaica as part of Oliver Cromwell's Western Design. In this contest, many slaves joined the Spanish forces trying to hold the island, and in defeat, many departed with the Spanish to Cuba. Other black warriors stayed behind to join the maroons in Jamaican mountains, from whence they continued to harry the English.¹⁴ By mid-seventeenth century (Spain's century of depression), the Dutch, the French, and the English had established economic and military bases across the Caribbean from which to attack Spanish fleets and settlements.¹⁵

Recognizing that Spain could not respond quickly enough with metropolitan troops to these escalating foreign threats, the King ordered the creation of more black military units, noting that the blacks and mulattoes who defended his realms were "persons of valor" who fought with "vigor and reputation".¹⁶ By mid-seventeenth century then, the Spanish Crown had fully accepted that free men of color could be brave and honorable and this important metropolitan acknowledgment apparently encouraged enlistments. Free *pardo* militias were established in Lima as early as 1615 and in Chile by 1643.¹⁷ Similar units were organized in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama.¹⁸ A Central American roster from 1673 listed almost 2,000 *pardos* serving in infantry units throughout the isthmus.¹⁹ Local units of free black men were also organized in Hispaniola, Vera Cruz, Campeche, Puerto Rico, Panama, Caracas, Cartagena, and Florida, among other locales.²⁰

Other men of African descent took to the Atlantic, serving whatever European power offered them the best opportunities. The interrogation of a black corsair captured in a raid on St. Augustine in 1687 adds to our understanding of this little known black experience. Diego testified he was born in Tortuga, the infamous pirate haven off the northern coast of Hispaniola. As a young man he grew tobacco that he sold to the buccaneers and he later joined the French corsair named "Sanbo" who sailed for the Mosquito Coast. Diego caught turtles for the crew and participated in the capture of two Spanish prizes from Cartagena, thereby earning a share of the take. Later he joined a Captain Cahrebon on a second corsairing expedition to Cartagena, where he cut wood for some time before canoeing back to the Mosquito Coast. His last captain, the Frenchman, Nicholas Grammont, sacked Campeche, capturing black slaves whom he sold at San Jorge (present-day Charleston), before heading for Florida, where Diego and a mulatto translator named Thomas joined Grammont in attacking St. Augustine. After several days of pitched battles against the Spaniards and their black and Indian militias, Diego was finally captured, being one of only two pirates to have survived the attack.²¹

In his circum-Atlantic travels, Diego may have met another, more famous, black corsair, Capitán Diego Martín (alias Diego el Mulatto). Born a slave in Havana, he escaped to join Dutch privateers, capturing many prizes and prisoners in raids on Campeche and Veracruz. In 1638 Diego Martín offered his service to Spain in a letter delivered to Spanish officials. Martín expressed his great desire to serve as a "valiant soldier of the King, our lord" (Valeroso

Soldado del Rey nuestro Señor), making appropriate references to the King's championship of the Catholic faith. He promised that if the King agreed, no Dutch ship or any other enemy would any longer stop along Cuba's coasts, "especially knowing that I am here very few would dare pass on to the Indies, for they certainly fear me." Captain Martín's boast must have been well founded for Havana officials sent the offer to Spain with a recommendation of royal pardon and a salary equivalent to that of an admiral, making no derogatory mention of his color or class.²² The testimony of the first Diego and the boast of the second confirm the geopolitical, economic, and military capital that accrued to at least some black men in the Atlantic world of the seventeenth century.

For their service to Spain, black men across the Atlantic also won grants of land (which the Crown had to spare). Former maroons and free blacks across the Spanish empire were also rewarded with land and formally recognized and self-governing towns of their own, in return for peace and military service. Thus were born free black towns like Nirgua, in modern Venezuela, San Lorenzo de Cerralvo (also known as San Lorenzo de los Negros) outside Orizaba, New Spain and Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose, outside San Agustín, Florida, among others. By establishing, and defending, "well-governed" towns, freed blacks earned another corporate identity and at least a measure of respectability as *vecinos* (townspeople) and *pobladores* (settlers) who lived a *vida política* (civil life).²³

The Black Atlantic was almost three centuries in the making when Bourbon Reformers won the Spanish Crown in the War of Spanish Succession (1700–1713) and created formal Disciplined Militias across the Atlantic. Military men of African descent now elected their own officers, designed their own unit's uniforms and received the *fuero militar*, a corporate charter that exempted them from tribute and prosecution in civilian courts and granted them equal juridical status with white militiamen. The *fuero* also granted black soldiers military, hospitalization, retirement, and death benefits, all major protections never before available to them.²⁴ Formal membership in the military corporation also granted these men and their families higher status in a status-obsessed world. The juridical and social benefits of militia membership were clearly appreciated by men of African descent across Spain's Atlantic holdings and they developed traditions of multigenerational service.²⁵ The military service of free men of color also redounded to the benefit of their wives and children who could inherit pensions and property, as well as a certain social status, from their husbands and fathers.²⁶

The Bourbon creation of black battalions was not met with universal acclaim across the Spanish Atlantic. Christon Archer and Ben Vinson have analyzed the racist attitudes of the Conde de Revillagigedo, Viceroy of New Spain (Mexico). Alan Kuethe found similar resistance and resentment among Spanish officials in New Granada (Colombia) as well as in Cuba where Captain General Luis de las Casas allowed Spanish units to change their uniform so as not to wear the same as black and mulatto troops.²⁷ At the same time, recognizing his need, the Spanish King enjoined his subjects not to disparage or insult Havana's black troops, "because it is my royal will that they be treated well and with love and that they not suffer the least outrage or insult."²⁸ The men of the Pardo and Moreno Battalions of Cuba, in turn, seized every opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty, their service to the Crown and the community, their devotion to the Catholic Church and their civility. During drills and for public occasions, they marched on the Plaza dressed in uniforms of their own design and led by their own elected officers, under banners such as that of the Pardo battalion that read "Always Onward to Glory."²⁹

Spain needed every hand it could take during the seemingly endless wars of the eighteenth century—the Spanish War of Succession or Queen Anne's War (1700–13), the War of Jenkins' Ear (1739–43) which became the War of Austrian Succession (1739–48), King George's War (1744–48) and the Seven Years' War (1759–63)—and its new Disciplined Militias served around

the Atlantic as needed. Meanwhile, free black civilians continued to serve in local militias and as sailors and corsairs on Spanish ships, attacking English ships and settlements across the Atlantic. These chronic conflicts further connected the black Atlantic.

Men of African descent formed a significant part of Spain's military forces during the War of Jenkins' Ear (1739–43). England imagined that it would easily trounce the Spaniards when Admiral Edward Vernon commanded a fleet of English warships attacking Spanish ports around the Atlantic but Porto Bello (Panama) was Vernon's only success and free black militias helped Spain hold all the others.³⁰ In 1740 the free blacks of Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose also helped Spain hold Florida when a Royal Fleet from Jamaica bombarded Spanish St. Augustine for a month and Georgia's Governor James Oglethorpe and a combined force of Georgians, Carolinians, and allied Indians besieged the colony by land. Governor Manuel de Montiano formally commended the black troops to the Crown and Mose's Captain Francisco Menéndez also wrote several letters to the King detailing his service in the siege and asking for a promotion. When the King failed to respond to his two written requests, Menéndez decided to become a corsair and make his way to "old Spain" to speak to the King in person.³¹

As Julius Scott's important work showed, black sailors and corsairs like Menéndez formed critical social networks across key Atlantic ports and served as conduits of political news. Scholars such as Marcus Rediker and Jeffrey Bolster have argued that even the English maritime culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, "while by no means either color-blind or without internal prejudice" created its own institutions and its own stratifications, which could work to the relative advantage of black men." Bolster contends that merchants judged crews based on their strength, ability, and experience rather than skin color, with black and white crewmen earning equal pay for equal jobs, and many sailors, in fact, earning more than whites.³²

Reduced social distinctions and hoped-for pay may well have been reasons for Spanish blacks to take to the sea, just as they had to the militias, but when captured by the English they were presumed by their color to be slaves, and thus fair prizes of war. In 1746 New York's Admiralty Court considered the fate of 20 "Indians Mollattoes & Negroes" captured aboard two Spanish prizes the year before. Although Spanish officials from Havana presented proof that 17 were, in fact, free men, by the time the New York court finally met and ordered freedom for 4 of the men, only 3 could be located.³³ Nor was this an isolated incident. On August 16, 1748, the British corsair, *Ester*, captained by Robert Troup, seized the *Nuestra Señora del Carmen* after it left Havana and claimed as part of the prize 45 black corsairs. Of the 45 captives, 20 were members of the *Batallones de Pardos y Morenos Libres de Havana* and carried certificates from their commander. The recently concluded Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle guaranteed that all men captured after August 9 of that year would be returned.³⁴ Despite the treaty provisions, repeated efforts by the Spanish governors to recover their black subjects met with failure and Florida's governor, Fulgencio García de Solís, warned "without those of 'broken' color (*color quebrado*, a term for anyone of mixed race, usually meaning mulatto), blacks and Indians, which abound in our towns in America, I do not know if we could arm a single corsair with Spaniards alone."³⁵

Despite such dangers, the juridical and social benefits of militia membership were clearly appreciated by men of African descent in the Spanish circum-Caribbean who developed traditions of long-term family service.³⁶ The military service of free men of color also redounded to the benefit of their wives and children who could inherit pensions and property, as well as a certain social status, from their husbands and fathers.³⁷

It is not surprising then, that many blacks adopted a royalist position, ardently supporting in word and deed the monarchs who rewarded and honored them. During the Seven Years' War (1759–63) the British captured Havana in a surprise attack, despite the bravery of both free and enslaved black Cubans.³⁸ The British gave no quarter to those black men they captured

but despite that knowledge a group of 20 Cuban slaves, armed only with machetes and acting totally independently, launched their own offensive against a superior English force at Cuba's great Morro Castle, killing some of the English enemy and capturing seven more. The "ladies of Havana" described the slaves' heroism in a letter to the King who freed them and awarded their leader, Andrés Gutiérrez, the title of Captain. The compensation claims of their owners document other slaves who fought and died fighting the British.³⁹ During the English invasion, free Cubans of color, like the barber Gabriel Dorotea Barba, spent their own funds to raise units of volunteers to defend their "homeland."⁴⁰ By the terms of the 1763 Treaty of Paris that ended this conflict, Spain recovered Havana but it also had to cede Florida to the British. In the exodus that followed, black militiamen from Pensacola and St. Augustine evacuated with the Spanish and made new lives for themselves and their families in Cuba and New Spain. There they were integrated into the local black militia networks. By 1770 Cuba's Disciplined Black militias numbered more than 3,000 men and they constituted more than one-fourth of the island's armed forces.⁴¹

Men of African descent, of different ethnic backgrounds, languages, and loyalties served in all of the Atlantic Revolutions. As an ally of the French and an enemy of Great Britain, Spain supported the Patriots in the American Revolution, the first to erupt in the so-called Age of Revolutions. Cuba's black militiamen fought in the Gulf and Mississippi River campaigns, serving with distinction in Manchac, Baton Rouge, Mobile, and Pensacola.⁴² Governor Bernardo de Gálvez nominated a number of his black troops for royal commendations and the Crown acknowledged the importance of their contribution with silver medals and promotions. Some of these troops later went on to fight the English again at Providence in the Bahamas. Most of these men had at least some infantry training but, as already noted, they also equipped themselves well as corsairs in naval campaigns in Atlantic and Caribbean waters.⁴³

In 1779 another group of black troops also crossed the Atlantic to fight in the American Revolution. The service of the Chasseurs-Volontaires de Saint-Domingue who left Le Cap to assist American Patriots in Savannah is acknowledged today by a sculpture in the city square.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, other men of African descent joined the British as Black Loyalists. Captain Tye, formerly Titus Corlies, gained fame attacking Patriot planters and their forces in Monmouth New Jersey.⁴⁵ In South Carolina, one of the bloodiest of the American theaters, enslaved men fought on both Patriot and Loyalist sides. Some former slaves fought alongside the famed "Swamp Fox," Francis Marion, while others like Thomas Johnston joined the Loyalists and departed with them for London at war's end.⁴⁶ Others who survived the carnage in South Carolina ended up escaping across the southern border to claim religious sanctuary in Spanish Florida, where the men joined the colony's black militia. In that unit, African fugitives from Carolina slavery like Big Prince (Juan Bautista Whitten) later rose to positions of relative status in the Spanish community, defending St. Augustine from a series of enemies, including Georgian forces recruited by Citizen Edmund Genêt (1795), Seminole Indians (1800), and US Marines (1812). Fighting alongside Witten in St. Augustine's polyglot and multiethnic black militia were former slaves like the Congo man Felipe Edimboro, who had earned his freedom through self-purchase (*coartación*).⁴⁷

Ironically, Spain's dependence upon former slaves reached new heights as a result of the slave revolt that erupted in Saint Domingue in 1791. The former slaves who led the revolution in Saint Domingue and made themselves and their followers free were simultaneously feared and courted by France, Spain, and Britain.⁴⁸ After more than two hard years of fighting and low on supplies, in 1793 the three main leaders of the revolt Georges Biassou, Jean-François Papillon, and Toussaint Louverture decided to accept the Spanish offer of alliance, declaring in a rhetorical flourish that they would "rather be slaves of the Spaniards than free with the French."⁴⁹ In fact,

they never intended to return to slavery under any regime and were determined to cut the best deal possible for themselves, their kin, and their troops.

Spain designated its newly recruited armies of risen slaves the “Black Auxiliaries of Charles IV,” a much more formal title and affiliation than any earlier or later black militias ever received. To celebrate the new alliance, Captain General Joaquín García, Governor of Santo Domingo, ceremoniously decorated Jean-François, Georges Biassou, and Toussaint with gold medals bearing the likeness of the king, and presented them with documents expressing the gratitude and confidence of the Spanish government. Twelve other subchiefs also received silver medals and documents attesting to their meritorious service.⁵⁰ Jean-François later decorated himself with the Cross of Saint Louis, and Biassou titled himself the “Viceroy of the Conquered Territories” while the subsequently more famous Toussaint Louverture more modestly and came on board as aide and physician to Biassou’s large army.⁵¹ While Toussaint later switched his allegiance to the French Republic, Jean-François and Biassou and large numbers of their troops remained committed to Spain.⁵²

The alliance Spain struck with Saint Domingue’s black rebels was an uneasy one, marked by distrust on both sides. Although Spanish officials generally complied with the Crown’s promises of freedom and support, they also watched the former slaves with fear and suspicion and tried to isolate them and the dangerous ideas they represented. And although it is clear that Spain’s black allies were later embittered by the graceless way some Spanish officials treated them and never anticipated the diaspora they would experience at the end of the war, Jean-François and George Biassou did not die betrayed in a French jail as did Toussaint.

In 1795 Spain and the Directory of the French Republic finally concluded the Treaty of Basle and Spain agreed to cede western Hispaniola to the French and to disband the Black Auxiliaries of Carlos IV. David Geggus, Jorge Victor Ojeda, Matt Childs, and I have all written about the diaspora of Spain’s Black Auxiliaries following their trails to Florida, Cuba, Mexico, and Spain and Miriam Martin Erickson is now tracking the large group of “Negros franceses” commanded by Jean François’s lieutenant, Jean Jacques (Juan Santiago), that were finally resettled in the Kingdom of Guatemala. She has found a letter Jean François wrote Juan Santiago from exile in Cádiz in which he shows he hoped to reunite the Black Auxiliaries that had been dispersed across the Atlantic.⁵³

Meanwhile, in Florida, Generalissimo Jorge Biassou, as he now called himself, was also struggling to maintain intact his “family” of relatives and troops, as well as the military status and authority granted him by King Carlos IV.⁵⁴ Biassou’s group of revolutionaries turned royalists expanded their “family” when only three months after arriving in Florida, Biassou’s brother-in-law and military heir, Sergeant Juan Jorge Jacobo, married Rafaela Witten in St. Augustine’s cathedral.⁵⁵ This union had important political implications for the bride was the daughter of Juan Bautista (Big Prince) Witten, who only the year before had served with distinction against an invasion mounted by the French radical and Minister Plenipotentiary to the United States, Citizen Genêt. The marriage of Biassou’s heir, Jorge, and Witten’s daughter, Rafaela, thus united the leading families of both groups of blacks who had allied with the cause of the Spanish king against the forces of French republicanism. Subsequent marriages and baptisms added new layers of connection, as the refugees from Saint Domingue and the Anglo South used the structures of the Catholic Church to strengthen their blended community. The overlapping military and personal relationships and creation of extended fictive families among these Atlantic figures can be traced up to 1821 when, once again, Spain evacuated Florida, this time having sold the colony to the young American nation it helped create. And they continued in Cuba.⁵⁶

Cuba prided itself on being “the ever faithful Isle” and it was the most important, and most heavily fortified, of Spain’s Atlantic holdings.⁵⁷ But with the destruction of sugar plantations

in Saint Domingue, Cuban planters invested heavily in that crop and in the African slave trade on which it depended. With the rise of a so-called second slavery in Cuba (which American capital helped) came the “Africanization” of Cuba. Neither the British embargo of 1807, nor the US embargo of 1808, nor the Mixed Commissions for the Suppression of the Slave Trade Britain—established in Havana, Rio de Janeiro, Suriname, and Sierra Leone to decide whether captured ships were illegally slaving—deterred Cuban slave traders. Between 1790 and 1820 Cuban planters imported approximately 325,000 slaves, a three-fold increase in slave imports in only 30 years.⁵⁸ In the same period, the social position of Cuba’s free black population declined and Cuba was wracked by a series of slave revolts and by conspiracies plotted jointly by free and enslaved Cubans. The terrible repressions that followed such events largely destroyed Cuba’s free black class and in a new Atlantic Diaspora, many free people of color fled the island for Mexico, Brazil, Europe, Jamaica, and the United States, once again to remake lives in new locales.⁵⁹

Meanwhile, the revolutionary principles and examples emanating from the United States, France, and Saint Domingue triggered a series of independence movements across the Atlantic World: in the French colonies of Guadeloupe and Martinique and in Spanish colonies such as New Granada and La Plata, among others. In each of these examples, persons of African descent had to decide whether to remain loyal subjects of the metropole or to risk all to become citizens of new nations. Royal black militias were deployed across the Atlantic again, to some of the bloodiest battlegrounds of South America, while black revolutionaries also took to the seas as corsairs for ephemeral new states.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, in a better-known diaspora, large groups of Black Loyalists from the American Revolution were also scattered across the Atlantic to such disparate locales as the Bahamas, Nova Scotia, Sierra Leone, and Liberia.⁶¹ As this essay has demonstrated, the Revolutionary Black Atlantic was created over three centuries by persons of many diverse African ethnicities and their descendants, who found themselves dispersed across at least four continents, and many of whom reshaped their lives multiple times in course of their Atlantic crossings.

Notes

- 1 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Peter Mark and José da Silva Horta, “Trade and Trading Networks in the Greater Senegambia: An Introductory Essay,” *Trade, Traders and Cross-Cultural Relationships in Greater Senegambia*, *Mande Studies* (2007): 1–8.
- 2 Toby Green, *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300–1599* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012); A.C. de C.M. Saunders, *A Social history of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal, 1441–1555* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1982), Ch. 1.
- 3 Toby Green, “Building Slavery in the Atlantic World: Atlantic Connections and the Changing Slavery in Cabo Verde, Fifteenth–Sixteenth Centuries,” *Slavery & Abolition* 32, 2 (2011): 227–245; Alberto Vieira, “Sugar Islands: The Sugar Economy of Madeira and the Canary Islands, 1455–1650,” *Tropical Babels: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450–1680*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 42–84.
- 4 David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 1570–1640* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); *Before Middle Passage: Translated Portuguese Manuscripts of Atlantic Slave Trading from West Africa to Iberian Territories, 1513–26*, trans. and ed. Trevor P. Hall (Farnham, Surrey: Routledge, 2015); Marc Eagle, “Chasing the Avença: An Investigation of Illicit Slave Trading in Santo Domingo at the End of the Portuguese Asiento Period,” *Slavery & Abolition* 35, 1 (2014): 99–120; Maria Manuel Ferraz Torráo, “Os portugueses e o trato de escravos de Cabo Verde com a América Espanhola,” *Portugal na Monarquia Hispânica. Dinâmicas de integração e conflito*, eds. Pedro Cardim, Leonor Freire Costa, and Mafalda Soares da Cunha (Lisbon: CHAM-Red Columnaria, 2013), 93–106.
- 5 Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), Ch. 1. The West African Juan Garrido sailed from Seville to help conquer Hispaniola in 1496 and thereafter participated in the conquest of Puerto Rico, the exploration of Florida, and the conquest of the Aztec

- empire. Ricardo E. Alegría, *Juan Garrido, el Conquistador Negro en Las Antillas, Florida, México y California, C. 1503–1540* (San Juan de Puerto Rico, 1990), 17, 20, 30. Several Aztec codices depict Juan Garrido at Cortes' side and the African joined his patron on one final, and unsuccessful, expedition in search of black Amazons in what came to be California. Peter Gerhard, "A Black Conquistador in Mexico," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 58 (1978): 451–59; Alegría, *Juan Garrido*, 114, 116, 119, 127–38.
- 6 With promises of freedom, the rebel Francisco Hernández Girón raised an army of 300–400 slaves for his unsuccessful bid to wrest Peru from Spain in 1554. Frederick P. Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru, 1524–1650* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974); James Lockhart, *Spanish Peru, 1532–1560: A Social History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 193–224.
 - 7 Matthew Restall, "Black Conquistadors: Armed Africans in Early Spanish America," *The Americas*, 57, 2 (200): 171–205.
 - 8 Landers, *Black Society*, Ch. 1.
 - 9 Kenneth Andrews, *The Spanish Caribbean: Trade and Plunder, 1530–1630* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 82.
 - 10 Información hecha por Diego de Mazariegos sobre la toma de La Habana por Jacques de Sores, 1555, Patronato 267, Archivo General de Indias (hereafter cited as AGI), cited in *Documentos para la historia colonial de Cuba: Siglos XVI, XVII, XVIII, XIX*, ed. César García del Pino and Alicia Melis Cappa (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1988), 4–40; Alejandro De la Fuente, *Havana and the Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Irene A. Wright, *Historia documentada de San Cristóbal de La Habana en el siglo XVI* (Havana: Impresora El Siglo XX, 1927).
 - 11 Paul E. Hoffman, *The Spanish Crown and the Defense of the Caribbean, 1535–1585: Precedent, Patrimonialism and Royal Parsimony* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), appendix II.
 - 12 Christon I. Archer, "Pardos, Indians and the Army of New Spain: Inter-Relationships and Conflicts, 1780–1810," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 6, 2 (November 1974): 231–55 and "Militares," *Ciudades y Sociedad en Latinoamérica colonial*, eds. Louisa S. Hoberman and Susan Socolow (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993).
 - 13 Kris E. Lane, *Pillaging the Empire: Piracy in the Americas, 1500–1750* (Armonk, NY: Me. E. Sharpe, 1998).
 - 14 Francisco Morales Padrón, *Spanish Jamaica* (Kingston: Ian Randall Publishers, 2003); Irene Aloha Wright, trans., Julian de Castilla, *The English conquest of Jamaica; an account of what happened in the island of Jamaica, from May 20 of the year 1655, when the English laid siege to it, up to July 3 of the year 1656* (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1923).
 - 15 Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*, 103–05.
 - 16 Royal order to the Viceroy of New Spain, July 6, 1663, México 1070, AGI, cited in *Colección de documentos para la historia de la formación social de hispanoamérica 1493–1810*, ed. Richard Konetzke (3 vols. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1953–1962), Vol., III, 510–1.
 - 17 Hugo Contreras Cruces, "Las milicias de pardos y morenos libres de Santiago de Chile en el siglo XVIII, 1760–1800," *Cuadernos de Historia*, 25 (Santiago: Universidad de Chile, 2006): 93–117.
 - 18 Rina Cáceres, *Negros, mulatos, esclavos y libertos en la Costa Rica del siglo XVII* (Mexico City: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 2000).
 - 19 Stephen Weber, "Las compañías de milicia y la defensa del istmo centroamericano en el siglo XVII: el alistamiento general de 1673," *Mesoamérica* 14 (December 1987): 511–528; Santiago Gerardo Suarez, *Las milicias: instituciones militares hispanoamericanas* (Caracas: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 1984), 90–5; Paul Lokken, "Useful Enemies: Seventeenth-Century Piracy and the Rise of Pardo Militias in Spanish Central America," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 5, 2 (2004).
 - 20 Herbert S. Klein, "The Colored Militia of Cuba: 1568–1868," *Caribbean Studies* 6 (July 1966): 17–27; Pedro Deschamps Chapeaux, *Los Batallones de Pardos y Morenos Libres* (La Habana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1978); Allan J. Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753–1815, Crown, Military and Society* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1957), *Military Reform and Society in New Granada, 1773–1808* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1978) and "The Status of the Free Pardo in the Disciplined Militia of New Granada," *Journal of Negro History* 56 (April 1971): 105–15. On Santo Domingo see Margarita Gascon, "The Military in Santo Domingo, 1720–1764," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 73 (August 1993): 431–452 and Christine Rivas, "The Santo Domingo Militia, 1701–1770," *The Americas* 60:2 (October 2003): 249–272. Pardo and Moreno Militia of St. Augustine, 1683, Santo Domingo (hereafter SD) 226, AGI, cited in Landers, *Black Society*, appendix 1; Jane Landers, "Transforming Bondsmen into Vassals: Arming the Slaves in Colonial Spanish America," *Arming Slaves in World History*, ed. Philip Morgan and Christopher Brown (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 120–45.

- 21 Interrogation of the black corsair, Diego, by Governor Don Juan Márques Cabrera, St. Augustine, Florida, 1686, in the John Tate Lanning papers, 13–18. The mulatto translator, Thomas, had also participated in the 1683 attack on St. Augustine. I am indebted to John H. Hann, of the San Luis Archaeological and Historical Site, in Tallahassee, Florida, for this reference and his generosity. For more see Luis Arana, “Grammont’s Landing at Little Matanzas Inlet, 1686,” *El Escribano*, 107–112.
- 22 Documentos relacionado con el ofrecimiento del Capitán Diego Martín, Diego El Mulato, de pasar al servicio de España, in García del Pino, et al., *Documentos*, 139–140.
- 23 Jane Landers, “Cimarrón and Citizen: African Ethnicity, Corporate Identity and the Evolution of Free Black Towns in the Spanish Circum-Caribbean,” *Slaves, Subjects and Subversives: Blacks in Colonial Latin America*, eds. Jane G. Landers and Barry M. Robinson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 111–145.
- 24 Scholars such as Lyle N. McAlister and Christon I. Archer analyzed how Spaniards in New Spain protested these changes and the resulting blurring of racial boundaries in Spain’s oldest viceroyalty. Lyle N. McAlister, *El fuero militar en la Nueva España (1764–1800)* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1982); Christon I. Archer, *The Army in Bourbon Mexico, 1760–1810* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1977) and “Pardos, Indians and the Army of New Spain.” Also see Joseph P. Sánchez, “African Freedmen and the Fuero Militar: A Historical Overview of Pardo and Moreno Militias in the Late Spanish Empire,” *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 3, 2, (Spring, 1994) and Leon Campbell, “The Changing Racial and Administrative Structure of the Peruvian Military under the Later Bourbons,” *Americas* 32 (1975): 117–33. Ben Vinson’s more recent study confirms that officials in New Spain resisted the social advancement of black militiamen and sought to abridge the benefits of their fuero, generally limiting its enjoyment to officers in active service. Ben Vinson III, *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 25.
- 25 Scholars working on other Spanish colonies have found similar patterns of social advancement, family linkages, and multigenerational patterns of service among free black militiamen. María del Carmen Bárcia, *Los ilustres apellidos: Negros en la Habana colonial* (La Habana: Ediciones Boloña, 2009); George Reid Andrews, “The Afro-Argentine Officers of Buenos Aires Province, 1800–1860,” *Journal of Negro History* 64 (1979): 85–100 and Deschamps Chapeaux, *Batallones de pardos y morenos libres* 56–62.
- 26 Jane G. Landers, “Free Black Plantations and Economy in East Florida, 1784–1821,” *Colonial Plantation and Economy in Florida*, ed. Jane G. Landers (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 200), 121–135 and “Acquisition and Loss on a Spanish Frontier: the Free Black Homesteaders of Florida, 1784–1821,” *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 17, 1 (1996): 85–101.
- 27 Luis de las Casas to Campo de Alange, Cuba, 1487, AGI, cited in Archer, “Pardos, Indians and the Army of New Spain.”
- 28 Philip V to the royal officials of Havana, May 20, 1714, SD 337, AGI, cited in Klein, “Colored Militia of Cuba,” 18.
- 29 Jane Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), Ch. 6. The colorful and diverse uniforms of black units posted around the Spanish Empire, from the Philippines to Santo Domingo, can be accessed via the Mapas y Planos section of PARES, Spain’s online digital archive. Available online at <http://pares.mcu.es/>
- 30 Spanish forces defeated the English at La Guaira and Cartagena de Indias (Colombia) and Cuba.
- 31 Manuel de Montiano to Juan Francisco Gúemes y Horcasitas, March 31, 1742, SD2593, AGI; Memorial of Francisco Menéndez, November 21, 1740, SD 2658, AGI; Jane Landers, “The Atlantic Transformations of Francisco Menéndez,” *Biography and the Black Atlantic*, eds. Lisa A. Lindsay and John Wood Sweet (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 209–223.
- 32 Julius Sherrard Scott, III, “The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution,” PhD Thesis, Duke University, 1986 and “Criss-Crossing Empires: Ships, Sailors and Resistance in the Lesser Antilles in the Eighteenth Century,” *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Empires*, eds. Stanley Engerman and Robert Paquette (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 280–301; Markuss Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 286; W. Jeffrey Bolster, “To Feel like a Man: Black Seamen in the Northern States, 1800–1860,” *Journal of American History* 76 (March 1990): 79, 83 and *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
- 33 “Ex Parte Seventeen Indians Molattos & Negroes,” *Report of Cases in the Vice Admiralty of the Province of New York and in the Court of Admiralty of the State of New York, 1717–1788*, ed. Charles Merrill Hough (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1925), 29–31.

- 34 Florida's governor, Melchor de Navarrete, permitted the *Carmen's* captain, Francisco de Laguna, to travel to New York and try to recover his ship and crew. Report of Captain Fernando Laguna, Oct. 7, 1752, SD 2584, AGI.
- 35 Florida's Governor, Fulgencio García de Solís, wrote letters to the governors of Havana, Cartagena, Santa Marta, and Margarita, and to the lieutenant of the Cuban village of Bayamo, asking their prompt assistance in determining the free status of the black captives. Fulgencio García de Solís to Ferdinand VI, August 25, 1752, SD 845 Melchor de Navarrete to Francisco Cagigal, July 7, 1750, SD 2584, AGI.
- 36 Scholars working on other Spanish colonies have found similar patterns of social advancement, family linkages, and multigenerational patterns of service among free black militiamen. María del Carmen Bárcia, *Los ilustres apellidos*; George Reid Andrews, "The Afro-Argentine Officers of Buenos Aires Province, 1800-1860," *Journal of Negro History* 64 (1979): 85-100 and Deschamps Chapeaux, *Batallones de pardos*, 56-62.
- 37 Jane G. Landers, "Free Black Plantations and Economy in East Florida, 1784-1821," *Colonial Plantation and Economy in Florida*, ed. Jane G. Landers (Gainesville: University Press of Florida 200), 121-135 and "Acquisition and Loss on a Spanish Frontier: the Free Black Homesteaders of Florida, 1784-1821, *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 17, 1 (1996): 85-101.
- 38 Elena Schneider, "African Slavery and Spanish Empire: Imperial Imaginings and Bourbon Reform in Eighteenth-century Cuba and Beyond," *The Journal of Early American History* 5, 1 (2015): 3-29.
- 39 Deschamps Chapeaux, *Los Batallones de Pardos*, 29-30.
- 40 Landers, *Atlantic Creoles*, Ch. 6.
- 41 The *Reglamento para las milicias de infantería y caballería de la Isla de Cuba* governed these new units as well as military reorganizations in Florida, Puerto Rico, Louisiana, and Panama, where blacks also enlisted in large numbers. Klein, "Colored Militia of Cuba."
- 42 Landers, *Atlantic Creoles*; Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial Louisiana, 1769-1803* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 119-21.
- 43 Again, their service records detail where black servicemen served, their merits and services, the battles in which they engaged and the ships they seized as Spanish corsairs. Landers, *Black Society*, 61-8, 246-8.
- 44 French officials had followed the Spanish example and organized black troops on Saint Domingue whose main function was to track maroons. In 1695 several hundred enslaved and free men in these black militias accompanied French buccaneers that assaulted Cartagena. Stewart R. King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), Ch. 4; John Garrigus, "Vincent Ogé Jeune (1757-91): Social Class and Free Colored Mobilization on the Eve of the Haitian Revolution," *The Americas* 68, 1 (July 2011): 33-62.
- 45 Graham Russell Gao Hodges, "African Americans in the Revolution," *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution: Library of Military History*, ed. Harold E. Selesky (Detroit: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2006), 10-15.
- 46 Claims and Memorial Petition of Thomas Johnston, London, July 21, 1786, British Public Records Office (hereafter BPRO), Audit Office, Class 13, Vol. 70b, Part 1, Folios 301-302 cited in *The On-Line Institute for Advanced Loyalist Studies*, www.royalprovincial.com/military/mems/sc/clmjohnston.htm and Black Dragoons Abstract of Pay, 1782, cited in *ibid.* <http://www.royalprovincial.com/military/rhist/scmil/scmpay.htm> (accessed 6/1/2016); Landers, *Atlantic Creoles*, 29, 31-32.
- 47 Landers, *Atlantic Creoles*, Ch. 1 and Appendix 2.
- 48 Madison Smartt Bell, *Toussaint Louverture: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007). King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig*; Graham Nessler, *Islandwide Struggle for Freedom: Revolution, Emancipation and Reenslavement on Hispaniola. 1789-1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Ada Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
- 49 The three chiefs swore submission and vassalage to the Spanish king in the house of Don Matias de Armona on November 8, 1793. Estado (hereafter cited as ES) 13, AGI; Captain General Joaquín García to the Duque de la Alcudia, February 18, 1794, ES 14, doc. 86, AGI; Captain General Joaquín García to the Duque de Alcudia, December 12, 1795, cited in Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi, *Cesión de Santo Domingo a Francia* (Ciudad Trujillo, 1958), 46-48.
- 50 Landers, *Atlantic Creoles*, 51-55.
- 51 C. L. R. James, *Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York, 1963), 103-106; David Patrick Geggus and Norman Fiering, eds. *The World of the Haitian Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009) and David Patrick Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

- 52 Landers, *Atlantic Creoles*, Ch. 2.
- 53 Landers, *Atlantic Creoles*, Ch. 6.
- 54 Biassou sought to return to Saint Domingue to search for his mother left behind, but Spanish officials rejected his petition. Biassou finally sent his wife and sisters to the more important port of Havana, perhaps hoping to join them there since his offer to go to Spain to fight for his king had been rejected. Landers, *Atlantic Creoles*, Ch. 4.
- 55 Witnesses at the marriage of Jorge Jacobo and María Rafaela Kenty included the groom's sister and Biassou's wife, Romana, and the bride's brother, Francisco. Marriage of Jorge Jacobo and María Rafaela Kenty, April 12, 1796, Black Marriages, Catholic Parish Registers (hereafter CPR), microfilm reel 284 L, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL. (hereafter PKY). When the couple's children were born, the maternal grandfather, Juan Bautista (Prince) Witten, and the paternal grandmother, Ana Gran Pres, served as godparents for María del Carmen and the maternal uncle, Francisco Witten, and the paternal aunt, Barbara Gran Pres, served as godparents for the next child, Julian. Another militiaman from Saint Domingue, Benjamín Seguí, was Catalina Melchora Jacobo's godfather. Black Baptisms, vol. 2, CPR, microfilm reel 284 J, entries no. 176, 563, 670, 799, and Vol. 3, microfilm reel 284 J, entry no. 31, PKY. When Francisco Witten married on January 26, 1799, his marriage sponsors were Felipe Edimboro and Romana Jacobo (aka Biassou), who had also served the same roles at his parents' wedding the previous year. Marriage of Juan Bautista Witten and María Rafaela Kenty, July 7, 1798, Black Marriages, CPR, microfilm reel 284, PKY.
- 56 Jane Landers, "An Eighteenth-Century Community in Exile: the Floridanos of Cuba," *New West Indian Guide* 70, 1 and 2 (Spring 1996): 39–58 and *Atlantic Creoles*, Ch. 4.
- 57 Sherry Johnson, *The Social Transformation of Eighteenth-Century Cuba* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001). David Sartorius, *Ever Faithful: Race, Loyalty, and the Ends of Empire in Spanish Cuba* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).
- 58 Jane Landers, "Slavery in the Spanish Caribbean and the Failure of Abolition," *REVIEW, A Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center*, special issue, "The Second Slavery: Mass Slavery, World-Economy, and Comparative Microhistories, Part II", eds. Dale Tomich & Michael Zeuske (XXXI-3-2008); David Murray, *Odious Commerce: Britain, Spain and the Abolition of the Cuban Slave Trade* (Cambridge, 1980); Robert Francis Jameson, *Letters from the Havana: During the Year 1820, Containing an Account of the Present State of the Island of Cuba* (London, 1821), 23–37; Luis Martínez-Fernández, *Fighting Slavery in the Caribbean: the Life and Times of a British Family in Nineteenth-Century Cuba* (Armonk, NY, 1998); Laird W. Bergad, Fe Iglesias García, and María del Carmen Barcia, *The Cuban Slave Market, 1790–1880* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 23–37.
- 59 Matt D. Childs, *The Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle against Atlantic Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Manuel Bárcia, *The Great African Slave Revolt of 1825: Cuba and the Fight for Freedom in Matanzas* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012) and *Seeds of Insurrection: Domination and Slave Resistance on Cuban Plantations* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008); Michele Reid-Vazquez, *The Year of the Lash: Free People of Color and the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011); Aisha Finch, *Rethinking Slave Rebellion in Cuba: La Escalera and the Insurgencies of 1841–1844* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Jane Landers, "Catholic Conspirators? Religious Rebels in Nineteenth-Century Cuba," Special Issue, *New Sources and New Findings: Slavery and Abolition in the Atlantic World, Slavery and Abolition*, 36, 3 (September 2015): 495–520; Landers, *Atlantic Creoles*, Ch. 6 and Epilogue.
- 60 Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean 1787–1804* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Sartorius, *Ever Faithful*; Aline Helg, *Liberty and Equality in Caribbean Colombia, 1779–1835* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Marixa Lasso, *Myths of Harmony: Race and Republicanism during the Age of Revolution, Colombia, 1795–1831* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007); Marcela Echeverri, "Race, Citizenship, and the Cádiz Constitution in Popayán (New Granada)" *The Rise of Constitutional Government in the Iberian Atlantic World: The Impact of the Cádiz Constitution of 1812*, eds. Scott Eastman and Natalia Sobrevilla Perea (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2015) 91–110; Lyman L. Johnson, *Workshop of Revolution: Plebeian Buenos Aires and the Atlantic World, 1776–1810* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).
- 61 Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and their Global Quest for Liberty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006); Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves, and the American Revolution* (London: BBC Books, 2005); *Slavery, Abolition and the Transition to Colonialism in Sierra Leone*, eds. Paul E. Lovejoy and Suzanne Schwartz (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2014).

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