

Rebellion and Anti-colonial Struggle in Hispaniola: From Indigenous Agitators to African Rebels

by

Ana Ozuna, Ph.D.

aozuna@hostos.cuny.edu

Eugenio María de Hostos Community College

The City University of New York

Abstract

From the inception of the colonial enterprise on Hispaniola, Tainos and Africans challenged the body politic of coloniality by implementing resistance tactics to contest enslavement and assert their autonomy. My research uses a range of archival evidence and works of revisionist historians to examine the sustained rebellious activity by indigenous and Black rebels up to the end of the eighteenth century. Enslaved Tainos, ladinós, and bozales engaged in guerrilla warfare, plundered Spanish strongholds, established maroon enclaves, and constituted alternative identities and socio-political realities to assert their freedom. Hence, this essay demonstrates how these resistance tactics debilitated plantation slavery and consequently tempered the violent apparatus of control established by the Spanish colonial regime. Thus, this exercise intends to fill the gap in the understanding of a three century long generational saga of anti-colonial struggle that adeptly disrupted the matrix of colonial power.

Keywords: Dominican Republic, Caribbean History, Slavery, Rebellion, Marronage, Tainos, and African

Ana Ozuna earned her Ph. D. from University at Buffalo in Spanish Literature and currently serves as Assistant Professor at Hostos Community College, and teaches Black and Caribbean Studies courses. Her current research and publications examines racial identity politics in the Dominican Republic and maroonage throughout the Caribbean.

The long-standing campaigns against Moorish rulers in the Iberian Peninsula fostered a crusading zeal that legitimized the persecution of Muslims, Jews, and other non-Christians for over seven centuries and continued after Spanish monarchs toppled the last Moorish stronghold in 1492. Enamored by this triumph, the Spanish Crown granted Christopher Columbus the necessary funding to explore lands west of the Iberian Peninsula with the objective of enriching Spanish coffers and extending their genocidal campaign in lands across the sea. The Bull Inter Caetera, one of three bulls issued in 1493 by Pope Alexander VI, sanctioned the imperial extension of Portugal and Spain, and laid out an agenda of territorial domination, the acquisition of precious metals, and the subjugation of non-Europeans. In the document, the Pope boasts of the “recovery of the kingdom of Granada from the yoke of the Saracens,” denoting it as the final campaign that eradicated Moorish rule from the Iberian Peninsula, and mandates the Iberian monarchs to extend their geopolitical power and dominate non-Europeans in the name of the Christendom.

The indigenous inhabitants of Hispaniola, the Tainos, originally numbering 1 million on the island according to Spanish census of 1496, initiated a legacy of resistance in defense of their autonomy against the Spanish that attracted the participation of enslaved African collaborators upon their arrival during the first decades of the sixteenth century (Roorda, Eric, Lauren Hutchinson 2). Christopher Columbus evinced his awe of the island’s natural environment during his first voyage noting, “that the best land of Castile could not be compared with it” and, furthermore regarding it as “the most pleasant place in the world” in his December 13th journal entry (Columbus 178). Columbus likewise lauded the magnanimity of the Tainos during this first encounter, particularly after cacique Guacanagarí of the northwestern region of the island, Marien, and his people collectively wept for the loss of the Spanish flagship Santa Maria, and assisted the Spanish crew in storing salvaged goods in Taino homesteads. Directly addressing the Spanish Crown in his December 25th entry, Columbus exalted their compassion, generosity, and naivete: “They are a loving people, without covetousness, and fit for anything; and I assure your Highnesses that there is no better land nor people” (Columbus 201).

In his ensuing December 26 account, Columbus again lauded Guacanagarí for graciously safeguarding their possessions from the Santa Maria vessel, bestowing gifts of gold, and preparing a lavish meal of indigenous fare “three or four kinds of ajes, with shrimp and game, the other viands they have, besides the bread which they call cazavi” (Columbus 202). During this meeting, Guacanagarí confirmed the location of gold mines in the Cibao region to Columbus’ extreme satisfaction since he promised the Spanish Crown the extensive acquisition of this valuable commodity. The Admiral ordered the construction of La Navidad fort and settlement, and confidently left 39 men, asserting that upon his return, they would have gathered “a tun of gold collected by barter [...] would have found the mine, and spices in such quantities that the Sovereigns would in three years, be able to undertake and fit an expedition to go conquer the Holy Sepulchre” (Columbus 205).

After a ten-day stay as a guest of Guacanagarí, Columbus and his men headed east to reconnoiter the island before departing to Spain, and experienced their first instance of indigenous defiance and resistance. According to Columbus' account, island natives attacked his crew on January 13th after they persistently demanded indigenous bows, arrows, and other weapons (Columbus 224). Nonetheless, Columbus dismissed this initial act of self defense, stating "They [the Tainos] would have fear of the Christians, and they were no doubt an ill-conditioned people, probably Caribs, who eat men" (Columbus 224). Evidently, Columbus underestimated the Hispaniola natives and left the island three days later on January 16 with an idyllic vision of his New World hosts.

Indigenous Resistance to Spanish Colonization

During Columbus departure, Taino chief Caonabo and his brother, Mayreni of the Maguana kingdom in the Cibao region, ordered the destruction of La Navidad settlement and death of the 39 men in 1493 by "ritually mutilating them to ensure that they would be sent back to Coaybay, the land of the dead, where they thought these evil men originally [came] from" for unrelentingly demanding gold, raping Taino women, and committing other truculent acts (Roget 175). A letter written by the ship's physician, Dr. Diego Álvarez Chanca, expressed the disillusionment and utter shock experienced by Columbus and the Spanish crew as they surveyed the destroyed fort and dismembered bodies upon their returned to the island in November 1493.¹ While Taino monarch Guacanagarí pledged his continued allegiance to Columbus other native cacique rulers formed an alliance to protect the Taino body politic against the foreign sojourners (Deagan and Cruxent 59).

Taino leaders actively contested the Spanish conquest on several levels. In 1495, Guatiguará evaded capture after he attacked Spanish soldiers at the fortress of Magdalena; nonetheless, over a thousand Tainos were captured and enslaved, "initiating the first open enslavement of Caribbean Indians" (Deagan and Cruxent 60). Caonabo retaliated by attacking the fortresses of Magdalena and Santo Tomas, waging a month long attack at the Santo Tomas fort, which resulted in his capture and eventual death en route to Spain (Francisco 64-65; Deagan and Cruxent 61). That same year, Tainos took flight to the mountains when forced to "cultivate large cassava plantations to feed the Spaniards" (Moya Pons 31). Concomitantly, Magicatex, the cacique of the Bahoruco, and his brother Guaroa formed the first maroon community in the Bahoruco Mountains to escape Spanish subjugation.

With the objective of destroying the Taino alliance, Columbus waged war in the Maguá and the Maguana chiefdoms aided by Columbus' brother, Bartholomew, and approximately 3000 of Guacanagarí subjects, as well as two hundred heavily armed Spanish troops with horses and dogs in March 1495 (Francisco 65; Guitar 119). Taino forces aggressively combated Columbus' army, although Spanish military capability undermined Taino warriors.

When both sides retreated after the Santo Cerro Battle, Taino caciques considered this mutual act an unofficial concession and end to the war since, “[f]ighting to the death was not the indigenous way” (Guitar 119). Nonetheless, the treaty agreed upon by Guarionex, Taíno cacique from Maguá, declared the Spaniard victors of the war and required a punitive periodic tribute in gold from all Tainos over the age of 14 (Guitar 119; Rouse 152). Although Taino monarchs agreed to enforce the tribute payment among their subjects, insurrections and other acts of recalcitrance ensued. In 1497, Taino monarchs, led by Guarionex, planned to attack Spanish forces but were subdued during a clandestine Spanish night raid (Deagan and Cruxent 68). Another cacique leader, Cotubanamá of Higüey, repelled Captain Juan de Esquivál’s army for two months before being ambushed on Saona Island in 1504.

Pre-colonial Presence of African People in Hispaniola

Early Taino resistance galvanized Black people to join them in combating the Colombian project and asserting their freedom. Forced to mutually toil side by side in mines, farms, construction projects, and private homes, Tainos and Black people formed tightknit alliances throughout the first half of the sixteenth century.

Interestingly, although Dominican historiography dates African and Amerindian contact to the fifteenth century owing to the Columbian enterprise, scholarship signals prior interaction. Historian Ivan Van Sertima corroborates ancient African trans-oceanic voyages achieved by Egyptians and Nubians as early as 1200BCE with botanical, metallurgical, navigational, skeletal, and linguistic evidence. These successful transatlantic travels prompted European mariners, geographers and cartographers to study the nautical knowledge generated by African navigators and shipbuilders (Van Sertima 14). In the fifteenth century, Iberian monarchs launch their colonial expansion in the Americas employing African navigational knowledge.

According to Van Sertima, Portuguese King Juan II enthusiastically received Columbus in his court curious to learn about his undertakings abroad after his first return voyage from the Americas in 1493. During this meeting, Columbus confirmed encountering islands inhabited by natives after more than two months of travel. King Juan II expressed disappointment “recognizing clearly the greatness of the lands discovered and their riches” and consequently urged Columbus to sway the Spanish Crown to partition the new lands (Van Sertima 5). The King also related his knowledge of African transatlantic travel to the Americas: “Africans, he said, had traveled to that world. It could be found just below the equinoctial line, roughly on the same parallel as the latitudes of his domain in Guinea” (Van Sertima 8). When Columbus, returned to Hispaniola during his second voyage, the Tainos corroborated the monarch’s account of African travel to the Americas. Tainos related their commercial interactions with African people and demonstrated the spears made of “guanin” composed of gold, silver, and copper (Van Sertima 13).²

Seeking verification, Columbus sent samples of the “guanin” to Spanish metallurgists who affirmed that the spears “were not just identical to spear in African Guinea; [but] the words used by the Caribbean people for the spears were similar to the words used in Africa by Africans” (Van Sertima 2006, 9). The writing of Spanish Friar Román, furthermore, documents the actual presence of African people in Hispaniola that Tainos referred to as Black guanin as their spears (Lawrence 84). These pre-Colombian indigenous and African interactions aided the formation of multiracial African and aboriginal anticolonial coalitions during the initial decades of the Spanish conquest.

Indigenous and African Resistance in Early Hispaniola

Less than two decades after Spanish colonization, continuous military encounters, sadistic punishments under the *encomienda* system, and Old World diseases radically reduced the Taino population. In response, the Spanish Crown sanctioned the capture and enslavement of indigenous natives in neighboring islands and other newly conquered territories to increase the gold-mining labor force in Hispaniola (Stone 202). The Spanish Crown also authorized the importation and enslavement of *ladinos*, acculturated African people from the Iberian Peninsula, after 1501. Local Spanish officials and the Spanish Crown preferred *ladino* laborers due to their familiarity with Iberian cultural mores, language, and Christianity; and hence, considered them more likely to submit to their enslavers. African Iberian Muslims and African people born in Africa were perceived as more apt to rebel and banned them from entering Spanish territories.³ These assumptions were ill conceived since in 1503 all enslaved *ladinos* fled from their colonial masters and joined rebel Tainos escaping from the *encomienda* system.⁴ Governor of Hispaniola, Nicolás de Ovando corresponded with the Spanish Crown and expressed his concern on this subject: “... muchos se huían a los montes y no podían ser detenidos y los negros se refugiaban entre los indio y les enseñaban malas costumbres [many fled to the mountains and avoided capture; and the Black people hid among the natives and taught them bad habits]” (CEDEE 10). In response, the Spanish Crown and Nicolás de Ovando aired their willingness to halt the importation of *ladinos* due to their propensity to flee, yet they retracted their stance a year later in 1504 to appease Spanish settlers demanding more enslaved laborers.

The most notable example of African and aboriginal resistance occurred in the Bahoruco Mountains from 1519 to 1533 under the leadership of cacique Guarocuya, son of cacique Magicatex, referred to by most historians by the Spanish diminutive of Enrique as Enriquillo. Orphaned at an early age, Enriquillo spent his formative years under the care of Franciscan friars and received their religious tutelage. In 1514, reforms referred to as the *Repartimiento* of Albuquerque, partially emancipated enslaved Tainos, granting them residence in “25-30 ‘free’ villages” (Altman 594).

However, Enriquillo and his constituency were denied freedom and instead mandated to relocate away from their ancestral land to San Juan de la Maguana and comply to the demands of their enslavers, Francisco de Valenzuela and Francisco Hernandez (Altman 594; Stone 206). After encomendero, Andrés de Valenzuela sexually assaulted Enriquillo's wife, Mencia, and stole his mare Enriquillo aired his grievances to the local town lieutenant governor, Pedro de Vadillo. In response, Vadillo reprimanded Enriquillo for making a complaint against Valenzuela and also refused to comply with the directives issued in his favor by the Spanish Audiencia of Santo Domingo (Altman 595). In 1519, Enriquillo openly contested the body politic that blatantly disregarded his chiefly status and oppressed his constituency, and fled to the Bahoruco Mountains where he established the first permanent maroon community comprised of "...volunteers, mostly runaway Indians and Africans from throughout the island" (Buscaglia-Salgado 101).

Enriquillo and his multiracial maroon constituency formed a self-sufficient community with an effective defense system. Bahoruco maroons established farms, raised small livestock animals, and supplemented their diets by raiding local Spanish settlements. Spaniards feared maroon raiders since colonial patrols failed to subdue the internal maroon militia that safeguarded the insurgents from their incursions. In 1523, the Spanish authorities officially declared war on the Bahoruco maroons yet Spanish militias faltered in the unfamiliar and harsh terrain (Altman 598, 602-603).

In 1521, enslaved Wolofs, African Muslims from the Senegambia region, contested their enslavement seeking to band with Bahoruco maroons. The Wolofs constituted the majority group sold in Valencia, Spain by end of the fifteen century and arrived in the Hispaniola along with ladinos, possibly as early as 1505, in spite of the many prohibitions banning all non-Christian foreigners from Spanish territories in the Americas (Diouf 35).⁵ The smallpox epidemic reduced the Taino population to "less than 3,000" and by 1519 further exacerbated the need for *bozales*, enslaved African people directly from the African continent, since the "trade in ladinos could not meet the demand" for laborers for the emerging sugar plantation economy (Pons 37; Diouf 36; Guitar 2006, 42). By 1520, over twenty sugar mills operated throughout the island in Rio Nigua, La Vega, Haina, Nizao, Ocoa, Azua, San Juan, Cazuy, Puerto Plata, Bonao, Arbol Gordo, and Santo Domingo (Franco 10-11). In 1520, the enslaved workforce consisted of "a few hundred of remaining Indians and several hundred newly arrived African slaves" (Pons 40).

In 1521 on Christmas Eve, twenty mostly Wolof launched the first major Black insurrection in the Atlantic world on the sugar estate, La Isabela, owned by the colonial governor, Diego Columbus (Franco 14-15; Andújar 69; Guitar 49). According to official documents, during this weeklong revolt, approximately 20 Wolof rebels killed Spanish residents, raided estates, stole gold and other valuable items, and recruited other enslaved insurgents on their way to Azua (Guitar 2006, 49; Pichardo 25).⁶ Although most scholars characterize the Wolof revolt as an isolated incident recent works associate the revolt with the Enriquillo uprising.

In *The Social Composition of the Dominican Republic*, Juan Bosch describes the Wolof rebellion as “an escape”, and asserts that the Wolof insurgents intended to join Bahoruco maroons (42). Erin Woodruff Stone’s article, *America’s First Slave Revolt: Indians and African Slaves in Española, 1500-1534* points to archeological evidence and Spanish administrative documents to affirm that some Wolof insurgents succeeded in absconding the Spanish militia and united with Enriquillo’s band in the Bahoruco mountains (Andújar 69; Stone 209). Furthermore, Stone suggests that although Spanish authorities promulgated slave ordinances after the Wolof rebellion, the enslaved population continued to rebel since “the governor of Espanola declared official war against rebels on 19 October 1523, specifically stating that the Spanish were fighting both Indians and Africans together” (209).⁷ Additionally, Spanish King Charles V vehemently asserted the necessity of establishing harsher punishments to temper rebellious activity in a letter written in December of that same year.⁸ Even in 1526, Hispaniola resident, María de Toledo corresponds with King Charles V to notify him of an uprising led by Black people and natives and stress the need to address this ongoing threat.⁹

In spite of the ceaseless insurrections, Spanish authorities and residents on the island ceaselessly requested increased numbers of enslaved African people to meet the labor demands in the emerging sugar plantations and other locales throughout the colony. In a desperate attempt to increase the African labor force and deter insubordinate activity, King Charles V mandated the introduction of African women in 1527. According to the Spanish monarch this measure would promote the formation of Black families, and consequently prompt Black men to relinquish their rebellious aspirations to safeguard their wives, family and kinfolk.¹⁰ Moreover, a letter written in 1528 by Spanish officials, Espinosa and Zuazo, in Santo Domingo advocated for the increased presence of enslaved African people to halt the exodus of Spanish residents leaving the island to pursue wealth and more favorable conditions in newly conquered territories throughout the Americas.¹¹

Free Black People in Early Hispaniola

While Spanish officials stipulated for the arrival of more enslaved African people, the Spanish Crown approved a ban on the entry of free Black people in the island accused by the City Council of Santo Domingo of inciting insurgent activity in 1528.¹² Free Black people, referred to as free *ladinos* or *libertos* were the first African-descended residents to arrive in the Hispaniola during the colonial period. Many free Black people held the same rank as “poor” Spaniards and thus served similar roles within colonial society compared to their white counterparts (Sue-Badillo 108). Juan Portugués, a free Black sailor, sailed with Columbus during his first and second transatlantic voyages and subsequently served as Columbus’ servant.¹³ A Black laborer, Pedro travelled to Hispaniola and obliged his employer, a Seville police chief, Juan de Saravia to provide him with food, shelter and a salary as noted in their 1501 contract:

meals and beverages, and lodging and bed in accordance to the food that may be available and given to other/ workers in the said island. And that he be obliged to give him the said food and beverage /from the day he may embark from this said city. And that the said Juan de Saravia must give him as salary six thousand maravedís for each of these said two years and the/ tithe of the gold that the said Pedro may extract, after one half is taken for their highnesses.¹⁴

As Pedro, other free Black people ventured to the Hispaniola during these early years of the Columbian project to escape systematic oppression and pursue greater cultural autonomy. For instance, a free Black woman between the years 1497-1501 employed her medicinal knowledge and voluntarily established the first healing site in the Americas in her home where she, “sheltered all the poor people she could and cured them as far as she was able to, for there were no [...] hospitals in this city”.¹⁵ Scholarship on African-descended healers in the Americas, point to their pivotal role as community doctors and for successfully generating cures for New World illnesses (Washington 49). Apart from being master herbalists, Black doctors implemented holistic curative methods by integrating: “African healing philosophies and techniques, including strong psychological, social and spiritual components” and “enlisting the help of departed spirits, especially the intercession of ancestors [...]” (Washington 48). The home-based practice of Santo Domingo’s first recognized Black doctor in all likelihood featured herbal medicines and traditional African healing techniques. Thus, her home as hospital served as a site of subversion and cultural affirmation since as Dominican historian, Carlos Esteban Deive, points out:

free blacks’ houses were meeting places where those gathered dedicated themselves to their rituals and ceremonies in a carefree fashion [and] African derived traits and complexes became established and perpetuated themselves, though not in the pure form of course, since the dominant presence of the Spanish culture slowly but inexorably modified them (2009; 97).

Antebellum free Black people, nonetheless, are integral to creating syncretic beliefs and practices that offered cultural affirmation, and challenged marginality in spite of the imposition of Spanish norms and practices.

African and Indigenous Resistance in the 1530-1540s

Sebastian Lemba, a skilled fighter originally from the Congo, Central Africa arrived in Hispaniola in the 1520s and soon after joined Enriquillo as other African people seeking freedom in the Bahoruco Mountains. In spite of their years of collaboration, in 1534 Enriquillo finalized a peace deal that “guaranteed freedom only for a few members of his immediate family” passing over all other maroon rebels and splintering the 15 year old multiracial mostly African community (Thompson 304). Moreover, the treaty required pardoned rebels to abandon their maroon outpost, and relocate to Sabana Buey and also capture new runaways. (Altman 602, 607; Guitar 41; Landers 123). These circumstances prompted Lemba and other African descended rebels, including “local Indians” brake ranks with Enriquillo and continue their maroon activity (Altman 611; Andújar 70; Cambeira 73; Guitar 41).¹⁶

By 1540, Lemba and other maroon leaders, such as Diego Guzman, Diego de Ocampo, Juan Vaquero constituted rebel communities of two or three thousand maroons among the “25,000 or 30,000” African descended residents on the island (Castro 65). In a court document published in 1540, the Archbishop of Santo Domingo, Álvaro de Castro expressed the state of consternation experienced by Spaniards since Black maroons not only pillaged Spanish settlements but also generated economic power by participating in illicit smuggling with foreigners and free Black people. According to Castro, free Black females referred to as *ganadoras* also achieved economic independence by traveling “all over the island stealing, transporting and secreting their merchandise. These Negroes are so richly dressed with gold that, in my opinion, they have more freedom than we have [Spaniards]” (65). While *ganadoras* moved freely throughout the island, Spaniard residents feared maroon attacks and for this reason travelled in groups of no less than fifteen since maroon enclaves existed in San Juan de la Maguana, Sierra de Bahoruco, Azua, Puerto Plata, La Vega, Higuëy, Río de San Juan and Nagua-Samaná (Cambeira 76-77; Franco 39).

In 1545, colonial authorities proposed a peace deal with the maroons but they rejected the treaty (Ferguson 55). Consequently, Governor Cerrato declared war on the maroon constituencies in 1547 and succeeded subduing a number of maroon factions. That same year, a Spanish expedition infiltrate the fifteen-year-old maroon enclave in Higuëy occupied by Sebastian Lemba and his followers (Franco 41). Although, Lemba died at the hands of an African soldier and Spanish troops kill many of Lemba’s men several of his followers escaped and joined maroons in La Vega (Franco 40-41; Guitar 41). By the end of the maroon war in 1548, over twenty sugar cane refineries closed and only ten remained operational as a direct result of the sustain maroon activity island wide during the first half of the sixteenth century.

Maroons, Buccaneers and Pirates in Seventeenth Century Hispaniola

At the close of the sixteenth century, the constant maroon attacks, the exodus of Spanish residents to other Spanish New World territories, and the continuous onslaughts by English and French corsairs further suppressed sugar production. Economically challenged Spaniards opted to establish cattle ranches and small farms responding to the growing demand for cowhide in Europe. Dominican historian, Juan Bosch explains, “Europe needed hides in order to make chairs, hats, screens, shoes, boots, bedbottoms, harnesses, scabbards, shields, chests, and book-covers” (Bosch 45). By 1590, cattle husbandry constituted the primary economic activity on the island (Francisco 131). This economic shift drastically altered the master/slave racialized categories since more than half of the enslaved population labored in open fields as herders and thus experienced a greater degree of autonomy compared to enslaved counterparts on sugar plantations, small farms, private homes and urban centers (Francisco 131-132).

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, enslaved livestock herders and their masters, particularly in the northern and western regions of the island, lived on the margins of colonial control by forming culturally dynamic multi-ethnic communities alongside local monteros (hunters), Black runaways, foreign corsairs and renegades. This confluence of local and foreign uncontrolled people compounded by the illicit contraband activity prompted Governor Antonio Osorio to order the forced depopulation of western and northern towns including Neiba, San Juan de la Maguana, La Yaguna, Bayajá, Montecristi, and Puerto Plata in 1605 (Pons 44, 47; Francisco 136). Pons explains, Osorio obligated “[...] people to gather their personal belongings livestock, and slaves and to move to designated areas near Santo Domingo” (47). During the trek to the southeastern region of the island, thousands of Black people escaped from their enslavers and established autonomous enclaves in the abandoned areas (Francisco 141). Other enslaved Black people, achieved freedom when resentful expelled masters manumitted them before abandoning the island. As in the past, many runaways fled to the Bahoruco region (Thompson 113).

In the 1630s, Black maroons intensified their alliance with English and French buccaneers on northwestern regions of Hispaniola and the Tortuga Island. Collectively, they formed part of a larger buccaneer community “of maritime outlaws of all nations” with extensive connections throughout and beyond the Caribbean region (Thompson 113). In 1634, Spanish authorities sent out a military expedition of four hundred men to mollify the Black maroons and foreign agents. Although Spanish troops killed and imprisoned approximately two hundred Black and European mutineers others escaped and ultimately returned to previously occupied areas (Thompson 113). By the 1650s, colonial authorities feared a maroon takeover of the island and dreaded the persistent incursions orchestrated by pirates and buccaneers (Cassá and Morel 125).

of the seventeenth century. In 1665, the appointed French governor, Bertrán D'Ogeron, claimed Tortuga and the western regions of Hispaniola, and concretely set in motion the enduring French presence on the island and the establishment of a labor-intensive plantation economy. As scholars indicate, French enslavers implemented dehumanizing brutality to subjugate enslaved African people seeking to extract as much labor as possible and maintain a rigid social order. According to James Ferguson, "[o]ne in three slaves died within three years of arriving in Saint Domingue" (105). In his pivotal work, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, C.L.R. James explicitly delineates the sadistic violence experienced by the enslaved population under French rule:

Mutilations were common, limbs, ears, and sometimes private parts, to deprive them of the pleasures which they could indulge in without expense. Their masters poured burning wax on their arms and hands and shoulders, emptied the boiling cane sugar over the heads, burned them alive, roasted them on slow fires, filled them with gunpowder and blew them up with a match [...]

In defiance of this ritual violence, enslaved inhabitants of Saint Domingue contested their enslavement by implementing a myriad of day-to-day and large-scale resistance tactics.

In 1677, fifty enslaved African people, mostly Angolans, fled from western Hispaniola to the Spanish capital, Santo Domingo seeking freedom (Moya Pons 64-65; Lundahl 112). Spanish authorities willingly harbored and offered emancipated status to runaways from the French territory as a way to disrupt the flourishing French plantation economy. A year later, a local Spanish militia amalgamated the runaways and relocated them to east of the Ozama River, in an area designated San Lorenzo de los Minas after the Angolan Mina ethnic group (Cambeira 108). At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Spaniards similarly aided enslaved Black people in defying their French enslavers in the frontier maroon stronghold of Le Maniel.

Black Resistance in Saint Domingue and Spanish Santo Domingo

Lasting more than eighty-five years, Le Maniel, a fugitive community bordering French and Spanish territories in the mountainous region in proximity to the Neiba Valley, harbored maroons primarily from Saint Domingue while only a few runaways originated from the Spanish territory (Moreau de Saint-Méry 135). This fugitive stronghold defied the power dynamics of coloniality with its complex security system, African inspired governance, and economic interactions with buccaneers and local subversives. The Spanish supported Le Maniel maroons by providing them with dogs, arms and military equipment for their guards (Moreau de Saint-Méry 141).

In Le Maniel, a good many of its residents resided in the maroon enclave their entire life. According to Moreau de Saint-Méry, the Le Maniel site harbored men “sixty years old who never lived anywhere but in these forests where they were born” (140).¹⁷ Hence, although the Le Maniel maroons interacted with Europeans, their relative autonomous existence permitted them to recreate African based value systems and cultures.¹⁸ After deflecting decades of French military attacks, Le Maniel rebels, one hundred and thirty in total of which “125 were either French or the descendants of French Negroes” put down their arms and agreed to a treaty in 1785. However, the following year they annulled this agreement refusing to resettle in the French territory and only agreeing to halt their attacks in the surrounding areas (Moreau de Saint-Méry 140).

The struggle against enslavement in Hispaniola climaxed in 1791 with the beginning of the most dynamic and radical fight for freedom in the Atlantic world, the Haitian Revolution. Although often conceptualized as a struggle waged by mulattoes and Black people of Saint Domingue against their French colonial masters, Graham T. Nessler asserts that it was in fact “an island wide struggle over the meaning and boundaries of liberty, citizenship and racial equality” (2). The Boca Nigua rebellion of 1796 in Spanish Santo Domingo embodies this insuppressible revolutionary ardor spreading among the enslaved across the island.

Eager to join the fight for freedom as their western counterparts, enslaved Black people Francisco Sopó and Antonio of the Boca Nigua sugar plantation near the city of Santo Domingo consulted with three former soldiers of Jean-François Papillon, the second commander-in-chief during the initial years of the Haitian Revolution (Geggus 110). After gaining valuable tactical information, approximately 200 enslaved Black people commenced their revolt on a Sunday evening. They attacked their masters, set fire to cane fields, ransacked the plantation house, and appropriated their masters’ weapons. However, before moving on to assaulting neighboring plantations, the insurgents celebrated their victory with an elaborate feast with drumming and dancing. Black rebels nominated Antonio and his wife, Ana María to preside as king and queen (Geggus 113). During the gathering, two Black spies abandoned the celebratory scene and travelled to Santo Domingo to inform local Spanish authorities. Spanish authorities hurriedly dispatched a militia to quell the rebellion. After a weeklong struggle, Spanish troops captured the Black insurgents and sadistically punished the participants to provoke fear in Black residents both enslaved and free. The leaders of the revolt, Francisco Sopó, Antonio, Ana María, Papa Pier, and Tomás Congo Anguirre were “hanged, beheaded and quartered” while other participants received lashes and were sentenced to ten years of hard labor (Geggus 114).

Spanish authorities feared the insatiable ardor for freedom exhibited by the Boca Nigua rebels and the Black freedom fighters of Saint Domingue; especially since Black residents and “French migrants from Saint Domingue” surpassed the number of Spaniards in Santo Domingo (114).¹⁹

Moreover, the free African-descended population constituted the largest group in eastern Hispaniola and formed part of the free peasantry while some upper class Black people held important religious and military appointments within the colonial government (Nessler 15-16). For the rest of the century, the power dynamics of coloniality continued to drastically shift as Black revolutionaries of Saint Domingue waged war and transmitted their anti-colonial fervor throughout the Black Atlantic world.

Conclusion

The enslaved people of Hispaniola severed the power dynamics of the Spanish colonial regime from the time Taino monarch, Caonabo, instructed his constituency to attack shipwrecked Spanish conquistadores in the fifteenth century and Black insurgents joined the fight for freedom in the first decades of the 1500s. By the mid sixteenth century, primarily African descended maroons, not only created a state of consternation for Spaniards fearful of constant attacks, but they also affirmed economic, social, cultural, and political agency by constituting independent polities throughout the island. During the second half of the seventeenth century, enslaved Africans fled from French dominated western Hispaniola to seek emancipated status in eastern Spanish Santo Domingo status and concomitantly formed alliances with maroons in borderland territories. In the eighteenth century, the Boca Nigua rebellion attests to the commitment of enslaved African descended people on the island to contest the colonial regime during the height of the Haitian Revolution. Therefore, the above demonstrates how centuries of sustained subversive activity prompted colonial authorities to rethink their relationship to the enslaved, and often times, make concessions to preserve the body politic of coloniality.

Works Cited

- Bosch, Juan. *The Social Composition of the Dominican Republic*. 2016. Print. Classic Knowledge in Dominican Studies.
- Buscaglia-Salgado, José F. *Undoing Empire: Race and Nation in the Mulatto Caribbean*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2003. Print.
- Cambeira, Alan. *Quisqueya la Bella: The Dominican Republic in Historical and Cultural Perspective*. New York: M.E. Sharpe. 1997. Print.

- Candelario, Ginetta E. B. *Black behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops*. Durham: Duke UP, 2007. Print.
- Carrington, Selwyn H. H. and Ronald C. Noel. "Slaves and Tropical Commodities." *The Caribbean, a History of the Region and Its Peoples*. Eds. Palmié, S., & Scarano, F. A. Chicago: UP Chicago, 2011. 97-113. Print.
- Cassá, Roberto, and Genaro Rodríguez Morel. "Consideraciones alternativas acerca de las rebeliones de esclavos en Santo Domingo." *Anuario de la escuela de Estudios Hispanoamericanos* 50 (1): 1993, 103-131.
- Castro, Álvaro de. "The Slave Problem in Santo Domingo." *The Dominican Republic Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Ed. Eric Paul. Roorda. Durham: Duke U, 2014. 65. Print.
- Centro Dominicano de Estudios de la Educación, Social y Política de Santo Domingo. Tema viii. Santo Domingo: UASD, Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Sociales, 1970. Print.
- Columbus, Christopher. "Journal of the First Voyage of Columbus." *American Journeys: Journal of the First Voyage of Columbus*. Wisconsin Historical Society, 2003. Web. 04 Jan. 2018.
- Deagan, Kathleen A., and José María Cruxent. *Columbus's Outpost among the Taínos Spain and America at La Isabela, 1493-1498*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2002. Print.
- Dieve, Carlos Esteban. *Los guerrilleros negros: Esclavos fugitivos y cimarrones en Santo Domingo*. Santo Domingo: Fundación Cultural Dominicana, 1989. Print.
- Ferguson, James. *A Traveller's History of the Caribbean*. 2nd ed. Northampton: Interlink, 2008. Print.
- Francisco, Martínez Almánzar Juan. *Manual de historia crítica dominicana*. 8th ed. Santo Domingo: Centro de Adiestramiento e Investigación Social, 1992. Print.
- Franco, José L. "Maroons and Slave Rebellions in the Spanish Territories." *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*. Ed. Richard Price. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996. 35-48. Print.
- Franco, Pichardo Franklin. *Historia del pueblo dominicano*. 2d edition. Santo Domingo: Sociedad Editorial Dominicana. 1993. Print.
- . *Los negros, los mulatos, y la nación dominicana*. 8th Edition. Santo Domingo: Editora Nacional. 1989. Print.

- Galván, Manuel De Jesús. *Enriquillo*. La Habana: Casa De Las Américas, 1977. Print.
- Geggus, David Patrick. "The Boca Nigua Revolt ." *The Dominican Republic Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, edited by Eric Paul Roorda et al., Duke Univ. Press, 2014, pp. 109–114.
- Guitar, Lynne. "Boiling It Down: Slavery on the First Commercial Sugarcane Ingenios in the Americas (Hispaniola, 1530-45)." *Slaves, Subjects, and Subversives: Blacks in Colonial Latin America*. Eds. Landers, Jane, and Barry Robinson. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico, 2006. Print.
- . "Hispaniola Slave Revolt." *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery*, edited by Junius P. Rodriguez, ABC-CLIO, 1997, p. 344. Print.
- James, C. L. R. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989. Print.
- Landers, Jane G. "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*, edited by Jane G Landers and Barry M Robinson, University of New Mexico Press, 2006, pp. 111–145.
- Lawrence, Harold G. *African Explorers of the New World*. Los Angeles, CA: John Henry and Mary Louisa Dunn Bryant Foundation, 1962. Print.
- Lundahl, Mats. *The Haitian Economy: Man, Land and Markets*. Routledge, 2015. Print.
- Moreau de Saint-Méry, M.L.E. "The Border Maroons of Saint-Domingue: Le Maniel." *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, edited by Richard Price, The John Hopkins University Press, 1996, pp. 135–142.
- Muhammad, Khalil Gibran. *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2010. Print.
- Nessler, Graham Townsend. *An Islandwide Struggle for Freedom: Revolution, Emancipation, and Reenslavement in Hispaniola, 1789-1809*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 2016. Print.

- Oviedo y Valdés, Gonzálo Fernández de. *Historia general de las Indias*. Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1959. Print.
- Pons, Frank Moya. "La primera abolición de la esclavitud en Santo Domingo." *eme eme: Estudios Dominicanos* 3 (13): 3-28. Print.
- . *The Dominican Republic: A National History*. Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 2010. Print.
- Carlos Andújar Persinal, La presencia negra en Santo Domingo: Un enfoque etnohistórico. Santo Domingo: Impresora Búho, 1997. Print.
- Roget, Henry Petitjean. "The Taino Vision: A Study in the Exchange of Misunderstanding." *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean*. Ed. Samuel M. Wilson. Gainesville: U of Florida, 1999. 175. Print.
- Blas R. Jiménez Afrodominicano por elección negro por nacimiento: Seudoensayos. Primera edición. Santo Domingo: Editora Manatí, 2008. Print.
- Rogers, J. A. *Africa's Gift to America: The Afro-American in the Making and Saving of the United States*. New York: J.A. Rogers, 1959. Print.
- Roorda, Eric, Lauren Hutchinson. Derby, and Raymundo González. *The Dominican Republic Reader: History, Culture, and Politics*. Durham: Duke UP, 2014. Print.
- Saco, José A. *Historia de la esclavitud*. Sevilla: Espuela de Plata, 2009. Print.
- Sommer, Doris. "El otro Enriquillo." *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*. 9.17 (1983): 117-145. Print.
- Stone, Erin Woodruff. "America's First Slave Revolt: Indians and African Slaves in Española, 1500-1534." *Ethnohistory* 60.2 (2013): 195-217. Web.
- Sue-Badillo, Jalil. "From Tainos to Africans in the Caribbean." *The Caribbean, a History of the Region and Its Peoples*. Eds. Palmié, S., & Scarano, F. A. Chicago: UP Chicago, 2011. 97-113. Print.
- Torres-Saillant, Silvio. "The Tribulations of Blackness: Stages in Dominican Racial Identity." *Callaloo* 23.3 (2000): 1086-111. JSTOR. Web. 31 Jan. 2015.

¹ Cited in Roorda, Eric, Lauren Hutchinson. Derby, and Raymundo González. *The Dominican Republic Reader: History, Culture, and Politics*. Durham: Duke UP, 2014. Print, 33-35. See: Chanca, Diego Álvarez. “The Letter of Dr. Diego Álvarez Chanca, Dated 1494, Relating to the Second Voyage of Columbus to America,” translated by A. M. Fernández de Ybarra, *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections* 48, no. 3 (July 1905), 428-458.

² Historian Harold G. Lawrence also affirms the pre-Colombian contact between West Africans and indigenous natives of the Hispaniola: According to Lawrence, “[...]Christopher Columbus was further informed by the Indians that they had been able to obtain gold from black men who had come from across the sea from the south and the east...” (6).

³ See “Manuscript No. 004” First Blacks in the Americas: The African Presence In The Dominican Republic-A Project of the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute. September 5, 1501, <http://www.firstblacks.org/resistance/manuscripts/fb-primary-004-manuscript/>. Web. Accessed 12 August 2018. Also review “Manuscript No. 005.” First Blacks in the Americas: The African Presence In The Dominican Republic-A Project of the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute. September 16, 1501, <http://firstblacks.org/en/manuscripts/fb-primary-005-manuscript/>. Web. Accessed 12 August 2018.

⁴ See “Manuscript No. 007.” First Blacks in the Americas: The African Presence In The Dominican Republic-A Project of the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute. March 29, 1503, <http://firstblacks.org/login/manuscripts/fb-primary-007-manuscript/>. Web. Accessed 12 August 2018.

⁵ See Miguel Angel Ladero Quesada, *Las Indias de Castilla en sus primeros años. Cuentas de la Casa de la Contratación (1503-1521)*, p. 270-271, Item No. 136.

⁶ See “Manuscript No. 019.” First Blacks in the Americas: The African Presence In The Dominican Republic-A Project of the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute. January 6, 1522, <http://firstblacks.org/en/manuscripts/fb-primary-manuscript-019/>. Web. Accessed 12 August 2018.

⁷ “Manuscript No. 021.” First Blacks in the Americas: The African Presence In The Dominican Republic-A Project of the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute. March 29, 1503. <http://firstblacks.org/en/manuscripts/fb-primary-021-manuscript/>. Web. Accessed 14 August 2017.

⁸ “Manuscript No. 021.” First Blacks in the Americas: The African Presence In The Dominican Republic: A Project of the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute. July 20, 1527, <http://firstblacks.org/en/manuscripts/fb-primary-061-manuscript/>, Accessed 12 August 2018.

⁹ “Manuscript No. 061.” First Blacks in the Americas: The African Presence In The Dominican Republic: A Project of the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute. July 20, 1527, <http://firstblacks.org/en/manuscripts/fb-primary-061-manuscript/>, Accessed 12 August 2018.

¹⁰ “Manuscript No. 022.” First Blacks in the Americas: The African Presence In The Dominican Republic: A Project of the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute. June 28, 1527. <http://firstblacks.org/en/manuscripts/fb-primary-022-manuscript/> Web. Accessed 12 August 2018.

¹¹ “Manuscript No. 025.” First Blacks in the Americas: The African Presence In The Dominican Republic: A Project of the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute. March 30, 1528. <http://firstblacks.org/en/manuscripts/fb-primary-025-manuscript/>. Web. Accessed 12 August 2018.

¹² “Manuscript No. 045.” First Blacks in the Americas: The African Presence In The Dominican Republic: A Project of the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute. February 15, 1528. <http://firstblacks.org/en/manuscripts/fb-primary-045-manuscript/>. Web. Accessed 12 August 2018.

¹³ See ‘Probanza del Fiscal, Santa María de la Antigua, 30 de octubre de 1515,’ in *Pleitos Colombinos. IV- Probanzas del Fiscal (1512-1515)*, Ed. by Antonio Muro Orejón. Seville: Escuela de Estudios Hispanoamericanos, 1989, p. 287-308. Also see “Commentary No. 071.” First Blacks in the Americas: The African Presence In The Dominican Republic: A Project of the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute. 1492. <http://www.firstblacks.org/en/manuscripts/fb-primary-071-manuscript/commentary/>. Web. Accessed 12 August 2018.

¹⁴ See “Manuscript No. 068.” First Blacks in the Americas: The African Presence In The Dominican Republic-A Project of the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute. October 16, 1501. <http://www.firstblacks.org/economy/manuscripts/fb-primary-068-manuscript/>. Web. Accessed 12 August 2018.

¹⁵ “Manuscript No. 060.” First Blacks in the Americas: The African Presence In The Dominican Republic- A Project of the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute. 1497-1501. <http://firstblacks.org/en/manuscripts/fb-primary-060-manuscript/>. Web. Accessed 12 August 2018.

¹⁶ According to Dominican historian Carlos Andújar, scholars provide differing accounts on the size of Sebastian Lemba’s band, proposing numbers between 150 and 400 (70). Also see Saco, J.A., *Historia de la Esclavitud*, p.164.

¹⁷ Richard Price cites from: M. L. E. Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'isle Saint-Domingue* (1797-98). Philadelphie:chez l’auteur. Translated from Vol. 2, pp. 497-503.

¹⁸ Dominican historian Alan Cambiera describes maroon communities as distinct sites of pan-ethnic African identities: “Cimarrón society was purposely molded to replicate the ancestral communes and villages of an Africa prior to transatlantic slave trade. The residents of the alternative community –a society within a hostile and noninclusive larger society--were attempting to reconstruct the values and patterns of their forebears, who had come from a number of different African ethnicities” (74).

¹⁹ Already by 1789, African-descended people in the colony constituted ninety percent of the approximately 120,000 inhabitants: sixty percent mulattos, ten percent free Black people, twenty percent enslaved Black people and ten percent whites (Cassá 241, 252-253).