

# Franco/Spanish Entanglements in Florida and the Circumatlantic

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JANE LANDERS

The rich histories of the French Atlantic and of French Florida are intimately linked to those of the Spanish Atlantic and Spanish Florida, and yet the two have often been studied separately. However, in studying Spanish St. Augustine and that Atlantic port's multiple connections to Santo Domingo, Cuba, Mexico and beyond, I found repeated instances of contestation with the French and an entangled history that dated to the sixteenth century. My article draws on my archival research in Spain and various Caribbean sites to offer an overview of some of the key Franco/Spanish contests in Florida focusing on territorial disputes, piracy, and revolution.

Competing European powers had never recognized the Spanish-born pope's bull of donation granting Spain exclusive sovereignty in the Americas (1493) nor the bilateral Treaty of Tordesillas between Portugal and Spain, which ratified Spanish claims (1494). France's King Francis I purportedly asked to see the will that made Spain's monarchs Adam's sole heirs and both Francis and Elizabeth I, of England, supported profitable privateering campaigns against the Spaniards.<sup>1</sup> Soon Spain faced what one scholar called an "epidemic of piracy" growing out of depressed European economies and the religious and political dissent sweeping the continent. The intermittent Franco/Spanish wars of the sixteenth century meant French privateers (and contraband traders) plagued Spanish coasts on both sides of the Atlantic, even during periods of ostensible peace. Hostilities escalated in mid-century when France launched royal attacks against Spain's most important Caribbean ports, culminating in the 1555 occupation and plunder of Havana by the Huguenot Captain, Jacques de Sores.<sup>2</sup>

As Sores was pillaging the Caribbean, his Spanish Catholic counterpart, Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, was clearing French pirates from the northern coast of Spain, the Madeiras, Canaries, and Azores. To reward his service, Emperor Charles V named Menéndez Captain General of the Spanish *Armada de la carrera* assigned to protect Spain's American treasure fleets, which he did successfully on several crossings.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, in 1562 French Huguenots under Jean Ribault made a failed attempt at settlement at Charlesfort (modern-day Parris Island, South Carolina) on La Florida's Atlantic coast, and in 1565 René Goulaine de Laudonnière attempted a second settlement called Fort Caroline near present-day Jacksonville, Florida. In a fatal irony, Philip III had almost at the same moment sent Menéndez to investigate the strategic threat posed by French interest in the region.<sup>4</sup> Jean Ribault arrived to reinforce the beleaguered settlement only days before Menéndez arrived determined to undo it. In this well-known episode, a hurricane scattered Ribault's ships and the unlucky French Huguenot survivors surrendered to Menéndez, who promptly massacred them on the beach commemorated as Matanzas. French Huguenots later repaid this religious violence in kind.<sup>5</sup>

With his actions at Matanzas, Menéndez had convinced the Spanish Crown that he would ruthlessly defend its territorial claims as well as its Atlantic waters. After 1567 he served simultaneously as Governor and Captain General of Cuba and Florida, and in that joint capacity he was responsible for the defense of the entire Caribbean. The waters near Puerto Rico were then said to be "as full of French as Rochelle" and French and English pirates attacked Spanish ships and Caribbean settlements with impunity, becoming rich on *rescate*, the practice of holding persons or towns hostage for a ransom. Menéndez mounted and led a major naval expedition against a large French fleet in 1566-67, but with little effect.<sup>6</sup>

In surveying the region and planning his military strategy, however, Menéndez became increasingly concerned about the large and growing racial imbalance in the circum-Caribbean.<sup>7</sup> He informed King Philip II that Hispaniola was populated by 30,000 blacks and less than 2,000 Spaniards while Puerto Rico held 15,000 blacks and only 500 Spaniards. Menéndez claimed the same racial disparity held true in Cuba, Vera Cruz, Puerto Cavallos, Cartagena, and Venezuela. He warned that because neither England nor France then allowed slavery, any corsair might with a few thousand men take over all Spain's possessions by freeing and arming the grateful slaves, whom he alleged would then slay their Spanish masters.<sup>8</sup>

By the mid-seventeenth century, Spain's silver fleets and thinly populated territories became the frequent targets of French, Dutch, and English competitors who all denied the legitimacy of the "Spanish Lake."<sup>9</sup> In this period, the Dutch West Indies Company conquered Curaçao and the English took Jamaica, while French smugglers and buccaneers had converted the western portion of Hispaniola and the island of Tortuga off the north coast into virtual French colonies.<sup>10</sup>

On Hispaniola French planters established what became a flourishing, if killing, sugar regime. Unknown numbers of their imported Central African slaves escaped across the new, but ill-patrolled international border to nearby Spanish territory. As their counterparts had one year earlier in Spanish St. Augustine, some of the escaping slaves claimed religious sanctuary in the Spanish capital of Santo Domingo. After some deliberation, in 1679 the Spaniards established the runaways in a satellite town of their own across the Ozama River from the Spanish city, which they named

San Lorenzo de los Negros de Mina.<sup>11</sup> Spanish officials were no doubt motivated in part by their religious obligation to grant sanctuary to those seeking baptism in the “True Faith,” but they were also short-handed and this new town of new Catholics bearing military titles served multiple functions, chief among them defending Spanish settlements from incursions and attacks.

To the north and west French Saint-Domingue and Tortuga served as launching bases for pirate attacks against Spanish galleons and critical Spanish ports and French pirates, like the Spanish and the Dutch, employed Africans and their descendants in their crews. One example was Diego. Born in Tortuga, as a young man Diego grew tobacco, which he traded to the buccaneers frequenting the island. Diego also took up a career in piracy, joining 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 Diego 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 Parisian-born, Nicolas Grammont, Monsieur de Agramón, had been ravaging Spanish ports along the Venezuelan and Mexican coast since at least 1678, becoming rich after sacking Veracruz in 1683.<sup>12</sup> Diego and a mulatto translator named Thomas were with Grammont in 1685 when he sacked Campeche and captured black slaves he then sold at San Jorge (present-day Charleston). When Grammont launched an ill-fated attack on St. Augustine in 1686, the black pirate Diego was finally captured and interrogated by the Spaniards in St. Augustine to leave us his story.<sup>13</sup> The French captain, Grammont, escaped the St. Augustine debacle and gave up the pirate life to become a district administrator in Saint-Domingue.<sup>14</sup>

By the eighteenth century one-third of the island had become the “Pearl of the Antilles” and France’s most lucrative colony. Over 400,000 enslaved Africans labored on the island’s plantations producing 40% of the Atlantic world’s sugar, 50% of its coffee, and 40% of France’s overseas trade.<sup>15</sup> Spanish settlers in Santo Domingo feared the African influx into Saint-Domingue and patrolled the border in search of runaways whom they would take into the capital for interrogation. One group of thirteen men questioned in 1770 included six men who identified themselves as Central Africans who could speak neither French or Spanish, forcing the Spanish to use African interpreters. One of the men questioned was unable to say how long he had been on the run but reported that as soon as he got off the slave ship he ran for the Spanish side—which suggests that the enslaved quickly learned to read the geopolitics of their day. Several other of the captured runaways had already been branded by their French owners and were able to give the Spanish some information about their Christian names, those of the owners, and the names of the sugar mills from which they had escaped. Several reported they had been fugitives for up to four years before being captured by the Spanish.<sup>16</sup>

Within two decades the slaves still sweltering in the sugar fields of the Northern plains of Saint-Domingue rose in a massive revolt. The uprising was plotted on August 14, 1791 by 200 *commandeurs* from 100 nearby estates who met at the Lenormand de Mézy plantation. On August 22, at the place called Bois Caïman on the Choiseul plantation in Petite-Anse, the plotters met again and their leader, Boukman Dutty, launched the full-blown revolt. Among the other slave leaders were Georges Biassou, Jeannot Bullet, and Jean-François Papillon, but the freedman Toussaint waited at the Bréda plantation to see how events would transpire. Within hours several thousand risen slaves attacked the surprised and outnumbered whites, set fire to the great houses and the cane fields, and smashed the sugar refining equipment and tools associated with their brutal labor. Soon, more than 1,000 plantations across the northern plain were reduced to ash.<sup>17</sup>

Alarmed by the violence and the republican ideology emanating from Saint-Domingue, Spain attempted to quarantine its colonies by forbidding the introduction of French ideas, books, citizens, or slaves originating from French possessions.<sup>18</sup> Florida's governor, Juan Nepomuceno de Quesada, did his best to comply, however, Florida was a difficult area to monitor. Long stretches of coastline lay beyond the control of the government located in St. Augustine and even the sparsely populated areas surrounding the capitol were laced with waterways, which provided easy access into the province. St. Augustine was the largest Atlantic port south of Charleston and had many trade connections with the United States and Great Britain. News as dramatic as the French Revolution and the largest slave revolt in the history of the Americas could not be contained.<sup>19</sup> Refugees from the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue who passed through or remained in Spanish Florida provided first-hand accounts of the uprising. In addition, Florida merchants, ship captains, and crews traveled frequently to ports such as Guarico (Cap Français) and Charleston where the latest news was traded along with goods.<sup>20</sup>

In the spring of 1793 Floridians learned that Spain and France were at war and that Edmond-Charles Genêt, first Minister Plenipotentiary of the French Republic to the United States, had arrived in Charleston. Before heading to Philadelphia to present his credentials to Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, Genêt enlisted the French consul to North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, Michel Ange Bernard de Mangourit, in a grand scheme to liberate American colonies from Canada to Mexico. Part of Genêt's plan included financing an army, "The Revolutionary Legion of the Floridas," to free Florida from Spain's monarchical rule. Genêt also issued almost 300 letters of marque with which to enlist American privateers to attack Spanish vessels, which Jefferson later forbade.<sup>21</sup>

Despite Jefferson's prohibition and Spain's protests, French warships repeatedly sailed from American ports to attack Spanish vessels. Such blatant violations of President Washington's neutrality orders alienated the last of Genêt's supporters, and finally Thomas Jefferson was forced to request his recall. Georgia and South Carolina officials who had once assisted Genêt became alarmed at their possible culpability and

tried to stop the planned invasion of Florida.<sup>22</sup> South Carolina officials seized documents, which required commanders and officers of the Florida invasion force to become French citizens. The proposals for enlistment further stated

East Florida will be considered as a part of the French Republic during the continuation of the war, and as such remains under its immediate protection. At the conclusion of the war, the said country is to become independent to all intents and purposes, with the proviso of adopting a strictly democratical republican government, and the Rights of Man to form the basis of their constitution.

From Charleston, Mangourit wrote Genêt's successor, Jean Fauchet, that "We wait only for the fleet and Florida is ours, and the tree of liberty will grow everywhere."<sup>23</sup> Charleston's *City Gazette and Daily Advertiser* featured a long letter addressed to the "Citizens of America" and signed "Republican" which made references to "just and natural rights" and encouraged enlistment in the Florida invasion. It read in part, "Spain, that proud, that jealous, that indolent nation is very sensible that she must soon lose the Floridas" and the author assured the readers "the service you will render posterity by assisting the French in their struggle for liberty, will animate the latter and the former will erect eternal monuments to your praise."<sup>24</sup> By this time, even the French had become alarmed at the rashness of the Florida venture and attempted to squash it, but the plot had acquired a momentum of its own.<sup>25</sup>

Spain's consul in Charleston kept Governor Quesada apprised of all the rumors of invasion and Quesada, in turn, informed Spain's representatives in Philadelphia and his immediate superior, the Captain General of Cuba, Luis de Las Casas. The governor had reason to be alarmed. Florida's garrison was chronically undermanned and the Spanish Third Battalion, which provided detachments for Florida consisted largely of deserters, incorrigibles, and other ne'er-do-wells. Quesada graphically depicted his dilemma when he wrote to the Captain General of Cuba, Luis de Las Casas:

Half of the soldiers of the Third Battalion are capable of lending a hand to any misdeed and of uniting to flee the province ... and this together with the Negro fugitives from the United States, which are very detrimental here, and many discontented slaves, converts the province into a theater of horrors.<sup>26</sup>

The troops were not only less-than-first rate, they had also gone over a year without pay and desertions were common. Las Casas, however, was at first reluctant to commit to any costly assistance to Florida. Forced to rely on the means at hand, Governor Quesada rushed to strengthen provincial defenses and called on all male citizens over the age of

fourteen to report for military duty. All citizens owning slaves were required to present them for paid labor on the needed fortifications and a unit of these slaves was organized and trained to man the canons and relieve the Spanish artillery in case of attack.<sup>27</sup>

Despite Governor Quesada's stated horror of "detrimental" fugitive slaves and "discontented" slaves, he needed all hands in this emergency, and so required free blacks to report for paid militia service or be sentenced to three months of shackled and unpaid labor on public works. One propertied member of Florida's free black community, the mulatto merchant, Juan Bautista Collins, whose father hailed from Nagitoches and whose mother was African, failed to report on time and even though he was the first Sergeant of the free black militia, the governor had him imprisoned. Collins' mother appealed to the governor's mercy, saying her son had been absent and did not read the notice to report. Although the imprisoned Collins asked permission to enlist, the governor instead sentenced him to hard (and menial) labor on the fortifications as an example for the "rest of his class."<sup>28</sup>

Most of the free blacks who reported for military duty were former slaves from Anglo colonies to the north who had been granted religious sanctuary in Spanish Florida upon their conversion to Catholicism. Florida's free black militia of about fifty men operated land and river patrols on the northern frontier and proved to be a most effective force.<sup>29</sup> Community connections and Spain's sanctuary policy deprived the invaders of support that French Jacobins successfully employed in other areas of the Caribbean, such as Guadeloupe and St. Lucia.<sup>30</sup>

Early in 1794 Governor Quesada arrested a group of Genêt's recruits, several of whom carried French commissions, recruitment guidelines, and other incriminating evidence. He promptly sent them to imprisonment in Havana's Morro Castle. Captain General Las Casas finally took the threat of French invasion seriously and sent troops from Catalonia, Mexico, and Cuba to reinforce the Florida garrison, some of which had been destined for Saint-Domingue.<sup>31</sup>

Governor Quesada, meanwhile, interrogated members of the community to ferret out the disloyal. The Revolutionary Legion of the Floridas finally attacked in 1795, capturing two outlying batteries north of St. Augustine. With resources stretched thin, Governor Quesada ordered all citizens to remove south of the St. Johns River. Then, to the citizenry's great dismay and anger, and against the recommendations of his advisors, the governor resorted to a scorched earth policy, ordering all the plantations north of that perimeter burned. Not only did he alienate Florida's most important landowners, but Quesada ruined the most productive plantations in the colony.<sup>32</sup>

As Florida's earlier governors had discovered, their freed black allies, who had the most to lose should an invasion of unhappy slaveholders succeed, proved among Spain's most effective troops. In his final reports Governor Quesada commended all the militias and even noted the contributions of "the excellent company of free Negroes."<sup>33</sup> Although Spanish officials throughout the Caribbean frequently disparaged blacks, they depended upon them to maintain a tenuous sovereignty, which was under almost

constant attack. Faced with a chronic shortage of worthy regular troops and inadequate financial and material resources, governors in Spanish Florida, like Quesada, repeatedly relied on their black forces.<sup>34</sup>

The 1795 invasion proved a short-lived fiasco. After a series of trials some of the leaders were imprisoned in St. Augustine's Castillo de San Marcos. Others served time in Cuba's Morro Castle. All were ultimately pardoned. Despite its comic opera overtones, however, this episode left lasting scars on Florida. The community had endured almost two years of tense anticipation. In that highly-charged atmosphere suspicion and distrust flourished. Neighbor turned on neighbor; race relations were poisoned; the government suffered a leadership crisis mid-invasion; flourishing plantations were burned; pitiful gangs of slaves belonging to sentenced rebels languished and died in embargo; embittered Anglos departed the province with everything they could take; and misery and hardship were widespread. A series of investigations and sedition trials went on for three more years, during which the government confiscated and sold at public auction ten plantations and much property seized from sentenced rebels. While this enabled some Spanish citizens to acquire holdings they may not otherwise have been able to afford, it also discouraged any further capital investment in the colony, and Florida's recovery from the debacle would be painfully slow.<sup>35</sup>

In 1795 Spain and the Directory of the French Republic concluded a peace treaty by which Spain ceded Saint-Domingue to the French and agreed to disband the Black Auxiliaries of Carlos IV.<sup>36</sup> These former rebels were seasoned by war against French planters, French and British troops, and their own countrymen and well-acquainted with "dangerous notions" of liberty, equality, and fraternity.<sup>37</sup> Santo Domingo's governor Casa Calvo informed Jorge Biassou, Jean-François Papillon, and the other military leaders who had been honored by the Spanish king and served for three long years they would have to evacuate Saint-Domingue because the French Republic did not find their presence "compatible."<sup>38</sup> On the last day of December, 1795, Spanish officials carefully recorded the exodus of the Black Auxiliaries of Carlos IV from Hispaniola.<sup>39</sup>

As the dispersed black veterans travelled throughout the Spanish Atlantic world they spread conflicting images and messages. Planters of every nation throughout the Atlantic feared their influence as a plague. They were successful slave rebels who had fought a bloody war and freed themselves and large numbers of their families and troops by force of arms. Despite their monarchical rhetoric, these men became objects of fear throughout the Atlantic world. Some were, in fact, involved in later revolutionary actions and slave conspiracies.<sup>40</sup> But the veterans also wore the uniforms and medals of Spain and bore titles and documents testifying to the King's gratitude and detailing the privileges he granted his black allies. Although displaced from their homes, these former slaves used their honors, and Spanish institutions, social and religious systems to some advantage, reporting grievances and communicating directly with their King, paying little deference to lesser Spanish officials.<sup>41</sup>

In January 1796, the black general Jorge Biassou, his immediate household of five, his slave, and seventeen other dependents sailed northward to St. Augustine to begin their lives anew in an unfamiliar locale.<sup>42</sup> The haughty demeanor of the Black Auxiliary who had enjoyed a position of command for five years before he settled in Florida immediately alienated Governor Juan Nepomuceno de Quesada, who was still trying to restore order in the aftermath of invasion. Quesada wrote the Captain General of Cuba, “I very much fear the proud and vain character he displays... it is a great problem to decide how to deal with him.”<sup>43</sup> Biassou strolled through the streets of St. Augustine in fine clothes trimmed in gold, wearing the gold medal of Charles IV, a silver-trimmed saber, and a fancy ivory and silver dagger.<sup>44</sup> The garrison soldiers, attracted by the novelty, took to gathering at Biassou’s house to ogle him.<sup>45</sup> According to Quesada, who may have been projecting his own concerns, “The slaveowners have viewed his arrival with great disgust, for they fear he will set a bad example for the rest of his class” (Quesada to Captain General Luis de Las Casas).

The governor had implied that Biassou was a wastrel, but much of his salary actually went to pay the “salary” of dependents for whom he was responsible, such as his brother-in-law and military heir, Juan Jorge Jacobo. Jacobo had been Biassou’s sergeant and adjutant in Saint-Domingue and he fought for the Spaniards against the French at Prus, Plegarias, San Rafael, Plaza Chica de San Miguel, and Barica. Biassou supported Jacobo as long as he could, but eventually Jacobo asked the governor to assume that responsibility arguing the single ration he was allowed was insufficient to support his large family.<sup>46</sup>

Meanwhile, Biassou had not forgotten his own family and relations in Saint-Domingue. Before the year was out, he petitioned to be allowed to return to Saint-Domingue to search for his “beloved mother” and for other members of his “family” still there. Spanish authorities on that island had promised Biassou that any of his dependents left behind would soon be sent to join him, but when he asked them to honor that pledge, the bureaucrats stalled, noting that Biassou’s petition did not specify how many “troops” he sought to recover or exactly where they might be located.<sup>47</sup>

After having known the relative splendor of Le Cap and experienced the power he once commanded, Biassou chafed at being relegated to such a small stage as Florida. Return to Saint-Domingue was not possible, so he looked for other alternatives. Spain and England were still at war, and in 1799 Biassou asked to be allowed to go to Spain and fight for his king. Florida’s Governor Enrique White supported Biassou’s petition but the Crown did not accept Biassou’s offer.<sup>48</sup>

Two years later, his dreams of grandeur and a return to the global arena unrealized, Biassou died suddenly and almost unnoticed on the Florida frontier. Biassou’s bereaved family and followers arranged a wake and buried him the following day with full honors. Despite his bloody past and allegations of heretical religious practices in Saint-Domingue, he was given a full Catholic burial in St. Augustine. After an elaborate mass which included songs, tolling bells, candles, and

burning incense Governor Enrique White and other persons of distinction accompanied Biassou's cortege to the graveyard. They were accompanied by drummers and an honor guard of twenty members of Biassou's black troops, who discharged a volley at the gravesite. The public notary attested that "every effort was made to accord him the decency due an officer Spain had recognized for military heroism."<sup>49</sup> The parish priest entered Biassou in the death register as "the renowned caudillo of the black royalists of Santo Domingo."<sup>50</sup>

French-inspired efforts to "plan the tree of liberty" in 1795 and liberate Florida from the "tyranny" of the Spanish monarchy had failed, but in 1817 another revolutionary inspired by the French Revolution and slave revolt in Saint-Domingue sailed into Fernandina on the ship *América Libre*. Although commonly depicted as nothing more than a pirate in US sources, Luis Aury, a native of Saint-Domingue served with distinction in Simón Bolívar's revolutionary army in New Granada (modern Colombia) and is treated in Spanish sources as a hero. After the wars went badly in New Granada, Aury embarked on a privateering career in New Orleans, Galveston, and Matagorda. Next, he supported the Spanish liberal Francisco Xavier Mina's unsuccessful attempts to liberate Mexico. From that failed revolt Aury sailed on to Florida. Raising the Mexican flag at Fernandina, Aury proclaimed the Republic of the Floridas in September, 1817. An elected legislature (which included representatives from modern Venezuela and Bolivia, Baltimore, Connecticut, and Saint-Domingue), wrote and approved a republican constitution that made no reference to race or gender and allowed every free inhabitant who had resided on the island for at least fifteen days to vote after swearing to "truly and faithfully ... support the cause of the Republic of the Floridas..." and "renounce all allegiance to any State not actually struggling for the emancipation of South America."<sup>51</sup> Aury proclaimed to the residents of Fernandina, "Citizens, we are Republicans from principle... We have come here to plant the tree of liberty, to foster free institutions, and to wage war against the tyrant of Spain, the oppressor of America, and the enemy of the rights of man." His proclamation was dated "November 5, 1817, and year one of independence."<sup>52</sup>

During Aury's short-lived Republic of the Floridas, US newspapers focused obsessively on Aury's force of some 130 black Haitians described by the *Savannah Republican* as "brigands who had participated in the horrors of St. Domingo."<sup>53</sup> The *Baltimore Patriot* decried the general equality that reigned among Aury's troops, "Yes! Seated at the same table, eating the same food, drinking from the same cups and wearing the same insignias."<sup>54</sup>

Georgia planter John Houston McIntosh, called them "a set of desperate bloody dogs" and warned "if they are nor expelled from that place [Fernandina] some unhappy consequence might fall on our country.... I am told the language of the slaves is already such as to be extremely alarming."<sup>55</sup> Another resident of St. Marys, Georgia wrote, "we expect daily to see a guillotine erected in Washington

Square, Fernandina and some Mexican chief holding up the reeking head of an American citizen, exclaiming ‘behold the head of a traitor.’”<sup>56</sup>

Rather than flock to Aury’s standard, on September 9, 1817, “about 350 Spanish troops, principally negroes” attacked the “republicans” of Fernandina. An unidentified British officer, recently arrived at Fernandina, described the courage of the black troops who “reluctantly obeyed” their Spanish commanders’ order to retreat after two battles went badly, although “it is well known [they] may be perfectly relied upon for steadiness and courage.”<sup>57</sup>

But it was not the Spanish military that undid Aury. Although a committed revolutionary Aury had to finance his cash-strapped republic, and like others before him, he resorted to slave trading to do it. Planters from all over the lower South defied the US slave trade ban of 1808 by purchasing newly imported Africans in still nominally Spanish Florida. Belton A. Copp, the US customs agent posted at the port of St. Marys, just across the Florida border, estimated that Aury sold more than 1,000 Africans in less than two months, most of whom were “spirited” northward to Georgia or other southern states.<sup>58</sup>

President Monroe reported to Congress that Fernandina had become “a channel for the illicit introduction of slaves from Africa into the United States, an asylum for fugitive slaves from the neighboring States, and a port for smuggling of every kind.” After satisfying himself that Aury acted independently of “any organized government whatever,” Monroe ordered a small US naval force southward to end the illicit trade.<sup>59</sup> Then, in late December, 1817, American forces arrived to take possession of Amelia Island, by force, if necessary. Although Aury and his fellow republicans eloquently protested the illegality of the action, Aury knew better than to resist and on December 23, 1817 the United States flag was hoisted over Fernandina.<sup>60</sup> Two years later, badly weakened by wars in Europe and many of its American colonies, Spain “sold” Florida to the United States in the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819.

This last transfer effectively ended the Franco-Spanish contests for Florida that had erupted periodically for over two and a half centuries. But as the preceding examples illustrate, the French and Spanish empires were long entangled in the circum-Caribbean, as in Europe, and our historical production can only be enriched by taking this into consideration as we write.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Información hecha por Diego de Mazariegos sobre la toma de La Habana por Jacques de Sores, 1555,” Patronato 267, AGI, cited in *Documentos para la historia colonial de Cuba, Siglos XVI, XVII, XVIII, XIX*, ed. Cesar García del Pino and Alicia Melis Cappa (La Habana, 1988), 186-199.

<sup>2</sup> This was no mere pirate raid, but a full-blown military assault by over 200 men. Kenneth R. Andrews, *The Spanish Caribbean: Trade and Plunder, 1530-1630* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 65, 67, 74-87, 136; Kris E. Lane, *Pillaging the Empire: Piracy in the Americas, 1500-1750* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 25-26.

<sup>3</sup> Eugene Lyon, *The Enterprise of Florida: Pedro Menéndez de Avilés and the Spanish Conquest of 1565-1568* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1974), 11-17; Andrews, *The Spanish Caribbean*, 90-99.

<sup>4</sup> Laudonnière had been second-in-command to Jean Ribault during his 1562 exploration of the Florida coast. Paul E. Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 41-52.

<sup>5</sup> Lyon, *The Enterprise of Florida*, 22, 35, 119-127.

<sup>6</sup> Irene Wright, *The Early History of Cuba, 1492-1586* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 315, 346; Verne E. Chatelain, *The Defenses of Spanish Florida 1565-1763* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution, 1941), 49, 62-63.

<sup>7</sup> Chatelain, *The Defenses of Spanish Florida*, 49; Amy Turner Bushnell, *Situado and Sabana: Spain's Support System for the Presidio and Mission Provinces of Florida* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 29-30, 44-46, 136-137, 161-169.

<sup>8</sup> Lyon, *The Enterprise of Florida*, 191. Memorial of Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, undated (1561-62) in E. Ruidíaz Y Caravia, *La Florida* (Madrid, 1893), tomo ii, 322, cited in Woodbury Lowery, *The Spanish Settlements in The Present Limits of the United States, Florida* (New York, 1959), 14-15, 96. This document also appears in the collection of the St. Augustine Foundation and is identified as from the Archivo del Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan Madrid, Envío 25-H, no. 162, Council of the Indies, n.d. probably Nov. 1569. Menéndez's demographic estimates appear to be reasonably accurate for in 1542 after a tour of the island, Hispaniola's archdeacon, Alvaro de Castro, estimated the black population at 25,000-30,000 and the white population at only 200. Castro also estimated that 6,000 maroons lived on the island. Franklin J. Franco, *Los negros, los mulatos, y la Nación Dominicana* (Santo Domingo, 1976), 27.

<sup>9</sup> In 1628 Dutch corsair, Piet Heyn, captured the New Spain treasure fleet (which transported the government payroll of Florida and Cuba) and with the proceeds from this haul, the Dutch West

India Company financed the conquest of Curaçao in 1634. The Dutch had already occupied St. Eustatius in 1630. Cornelius C. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and on the Coast, 1580-1689* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1971).

<sup>10</sup> The English seized St. Kitts and Nevis in 1624, Barbados in 1627, and Antigua and Montserrat in 1632. In 1655 they took the bigger prize of Jamaica and the French occupied the western portion of Hispaniola. Kris Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*, 67, 96; Francisco Morales Padrón, *Spanish Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica: 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); Violet Barbour, "Privateers and Pirates of the West Indies," *American Historical Review*, 16 (April 1911), 538-39.

<sup>11</sup> Marriage of free blacks, Simon and Juana on May 31, 1682, Archivo General de la Arquidiocesis de Santo Domingo, Matrimoniales, 1674-1719.

<sup>12</sup> Luis Arana, "Grammont's Landing at Little Matanzas Inlet, 1686," *El Escribano*, 107-112; Maurice Besson, *The Scourge of the Indies—Buccaneers, Corsairs and Filibusters*, trans. Edward Thornton (New York: Random House, 1929).

<sup>13</sup> Royal Officials of Florida to the Crown, St. Augustine, September 30, 1685, cited in Arana, "Grammont's Landing."

<sup>14</sup> Interrogation of the black corsair, Diego, by Governor Don Juan Marques de Cabrera, St. Augustine, Florida, 1686, in the John Tate Lanning papers, p. 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.

<sup>15</sup> David Geggus, *Slavery, War, and Revolution: The British Occupation of Saint-Domingue 1793-1798* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 6. The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database documents that most of those slaves were Central Africans and John Thornton argues that at least some of them may have had military training that they could employ in their subsequent American battles. *Voyages: The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*, <http://slavevoyages.org/tast/database>; John K. Thornton, "African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution," *The Journal of Caribbean History* 25, nos. 1 & 2 (1991): 58-80.

<sup>16</sup> David Geggus, "On the Eve of the Haitian Revolution: Slave Runaways in Saint Domingue in the year 1790," 6, no. 3 (December 1985), 113; Interrogation by royal notary Francisco Rendon Sarmiento and Don Juan Tomati, July 2, 1770, Santo Domingo, (hereafter cited as SD) 1101, AGI; Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999). ch. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: the Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), ch.4.

<sup>18</sup> C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins, Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York, 1963); Geggus, *Slavery, War and Revolution*; Alfred N. Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University

Press 1979); Julius S. Scott, *The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution* (PhD Dissertation, Duke University, 1986).

<sup>19</sup> David Geggus has shown that less than a month after the slave uprising in Saint-Domingue, Jamaican slaves had created songs about the event. David Geggus, "The Enigma of Jamaica in the 1790s: New Light on The Causes of Slave Rebellions," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 44 (April 1987): 274-299.

<sup>20</sup> Among those Florida merchants conducting business in Guarico were Miguel Ysnardy, Santos Rodriguez, Joseph Guillen, Pedro Cosifacio, Lorenzo Coll, Isaac Wickes, and Francis Fatio. Memorials, 1784-1821, East Florida Papers (hereafter EFP), on microfilm reels 76-78, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL (hereafter PKY). In 1792, Don Juan Fatton petitioned the governor of Florida to be allowed to return to Guarico, where he owned a commercial house, to attempt to retrieve 2400 pesos deposited with Porkins Bourlen and Company. Petition of Juan Fatton, May 4 1792, Memorials 1784-1821, EFP, on microfilm reel 78, PKY. Other trading ventures with Guarico, such as those of Jose Saby and Sebastian Ortegas, appear in import lists in the EFP.

<sup>21</sup> Richard K. Murdoch, *The Georgia-Florida Frontier, 1793-1796: Spanish Reaction to French Intrigue and American Designs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 9-15; Michael Morris, "Dreams of Glory, Schemes of Empire: the Plan to Liberate Spanish Florida," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 87, No. 1 (Spring 2003): 1-21; Charles E. Bennett, *Florida's "French" Revolution, 1793-1795* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1981); Robert J. Alderson, Jr. "Entangled Borderlands: The 1794 Projected French Invasion of Spanish East Florida and Atlantic History," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (Summer 2009): 54-82.

<sup>22</sup> Report of Sebastian Kindelán to Captain General Las Casas, October 15 1795, enclosing Letter and Proclamation of Governor George Mathews to Governor Bartolome Morales, Cuba 1439, Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Spain (hereafter AGI).

<sup>23</sup> Murdock, *Georgia-Florida Frontier*; Morris, "Dreams of Glory."

<sup>24</sup> *The City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, Charleston, vol. XII, no. 2445, March 25, 1795. This paper had been sent to Spain by officials in Cuba.

<sup>25</sup> President Washington had already warned Georgia that federal troops would intervene in the Creek War in which Samuel Hammond also participated. Murdoch, *The Georgia-Florida Frontier*, 12-25.

<sup>26</sup> Juan Nepomuceno de Quesada to Luis de Las Casas, December 10, 1792, Cuba 1439, AGI.

<sup>27</sup> Juan Nepomuceno de Quesada to Luis de Las Casas, April 12 1794, Cuba 1439, AGI. Janice B. Miller, *Juan Nepomuceno de Quesada: Governor of Spanish East Florida, 1790-1795* (Washington, D.C. 1981).

<sup>28</sup> Collins was the son of a white planter from Louisiana which may have also made him suspect. Quesada later approved his license for travel to Havana when Collins presented a letter from his creditors attesting to his “well-known good character.” Memorial of J.B. Collins, October 24, 1792, EFP, on microfilm reel 78, PKY.

<sup>29</sup> The former slaves had their own sergeants, but ultimate command was the responsibility of white officers who were linked to the African community in a number of ways, including kinship. Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 205-209.

<sup>30</sup> Geggus, “The Enigma of Jamaica”.

<sup>31</sup> Murdoch, *The Georgia-Florida Frontier*, 42; Morris, “Dreams of Glory”; Inspections of the Commissary of the Army, 1789-1821, EFP, on microfilm reel 31, PKY.

<sup>32</sup> Letters to and from the Spanish Ministers and Consuls in the United States, 1785-1821, June 1795, EFP, on microfilm reels 39-41, PKY.

<sup>33</sup> Juan Nepomuceno de Quesada to Luis de las Casas, October 26 1795, EFP, on microfilm reel 10, PKY.

<sup>34</sup> Landers, *Black Society*, Ch. 9.

<sup>35</sup> Records of Criminal Proceedings: Rebellion of 1795, EFP, reels 128-9, PKY.

<sup>36</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 123-51; Memorial of Jean François, January 14, 1796, ES 5-A, doc. 28, AGI; The Marqués of Casa Calvo to Captain General Luis de Las Casas, December 31, 1795, ES 5-A, doc. 23, AGI.

<sup>37</sup> David Geggus, “Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession during the Constituent Assembly,” *American Historical Review* 94 (December 1989): 1290-1308; Jane Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), ch. 2.

<sup>38</sup> Marqués de Casa Calvo to Captain General Luis de Las Casas, December 31, 1795, ES 5-A, doc. 23, AGI.

<sup>39</sup> Jean-François led the largest group which consisted of seventy military officials, 282 soldiers, 334 women, and ninety-four children. Report by Captain General Luis de las Casas, January 13, 1796, Estado 5-A, doc. 28, AGI. Jorge Biassou had already departed for Havana from Ocoa with his wife and twenty-three dependents. Luis de Las Casas to Duque de Alcudia, January 8, 1796, Estado 5-A, doc. 24, AGI. Historians following the trails of other black exiles include David Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Renée Souldre-La France, “The King’s Soldiers: Black Auxiliaries in the Spanish and British Empires,” paper delivered at the American Historical Association, NY, 2009; and Jorge Victoria Ojeda, *Las tropas auxiliares de Carlos IV de Saint Domingue al mundo hispano* (Castelló de la Plana, Spain: Universitat Jaume, 2011).

<sup>40</sup> White fears of such men and their “notions” are described in Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995). See also David Geggus, “Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession” and “Slavery, War, and Revolution” and Landers, *Atlantic Creoles*, ch. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Landers, *Atlantic Creoles*, ch.2.

<sup>42</sup> Although only related to a small core of the group, Biassou referred to all as his “family” because they paid him allegiance and because he claimed responsibility for them Accounts of the Royal Treasury, 1796-1814, Account of 1796, SD 2636, AGI.

<sup>43</sup> Governor Juan Nepomuceno de Quesada to Captain General Luis de Las Casas, January 25, 1796, Cuba 1439, AGI.

<sup>44</sup> Testamentary Proceedings of Jorge Viassou [sic], July 15, 1801, EFP, microfilm reel 138, PKY.

<sup>45</sup> Governor Quesada maintained that the soldiers expressed disgust but Biassou must have been equally displeased because he petitioned that the soldiers be forbidden this pastime. Governor Juan Nepomuceno de Quesada to Captain General Luis de Las Casas, March 5, 1796, Cuba 1439, AGI.

<sup>46</sup> There is no record of the captain general’s response. Petition of Jorge, November 20, 1798, EFP, microfilm reel 10, PKY.

<sup>47</sup> Governor Enrique White to Captain General Luis de Las Casas, October 1796, Cuba 1439, AGI.

<sup>48</sup> Governor White’s cover letter assured Cuba’s captain general of Biassou’s good conduct and “total obedience to the government although at times he has been harassed by some Frenchmen, and even by those of his own color, he has endured it without requiring any other justice than that he asked of me.” Governor Enrique White to Conde de Santa Clara, May 24, 1799, Guerra Moderna, 6921, Archivo General de Simancas (hereafter AGS).

<sup>49</sup> Although he was given an impressive military funeral, Biassou died deeply in debt and his many creditors began clamoring to be paid so the governor ordered Biassou’s gold medal melted and the proceeds applied toward his debts. Testamentary Proceedings of Jorge Biassou, EFP, microfilm reel 138, PKY.

<sup>50</sup> Biassou’s burial entry noted he was a native of Guarico and the son of the negroes, Carlos and Diana. He received no sacraments “due to the unexpectedly rapid death which overtook him.” Burial of Jorge Biassou, July 14, 1801, Black Burials, Catholic Parish Registers, microfilm reel 284 L, PKY.

<sup>51</sup> Resolution on Elections for Amelia Island, November 16, 1817 cited in Tulio Arends, *La República de las Floridas, 1817-1818* (Caracas, 1986), 170-172.

<sup>52</sup> *Charleston Courier*, April 14, 1817 cited in Charles H. Bowman, Jr., "Amelia Island and Vicente Pazos of Upper Peru," in *La República de las Floridas: Texts and Documents*, compiled by David Bushnell (México, 1986), 7-18, 39-50.

<sup>53</sup> Rufus Kay Wyllis, "The Filibusters of Amelia Island," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 12 (December 1928): 297-325.

<sup>54</sup> *Baltimore Patriot*, December 12, 1817, cited in Arends, *La República de las Floridas*, 95.

<sup>55</sup> John Houston McIntosh to Secretary of the Treasury William. H. Crawford, July 10, 1817, *Savannah Republican*, November 8, 1817.

<sup>56</sup> *Columbia Museum and Savannah Daily Gazette*, December 1, 1817, cited in Bowman, op.cit.

<sup>57</sup> *Narrative of a Voyage to the Spanish Main in the Ship "Two Friends,"* facsimile reproduction of the 1819 edition, introduction and index by John H. Griffin (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1978), 94.

<sup>58</sup> *Niles Weekly Register*, November 29, 1817; T. Frederick Davis, "MacGregor's Invasion of Florida, 1817," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (July 1928), 2-71.

<sup>59</sup> James Monroe, December 2, 1817, *Message from the President of the United States to Both Houses of Congress at the Commencement of the First Session of the Fifteenth Congress*. The naval force consisted of the *USS John Adams, Saranac, Enterprise, Prometheus, Lynx*, and *Gunboat 168*. War Department Orders, November 12, 1817, and Navy Department Orders, November 14, 1817, cited in Davis, "MacGregor's Invasion," 39-42; Bowman, "Amelia Island," op.cit.

<sup>60</sup> Protest by Vicente Pasos to Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, February 7, 1818 in Arends, *La República de las Floridas*, 200-218. Commodore Henley reported the peaceful possession of Amelia Island and that he had quarantined Aury's black troops on board one of the ships in the harbor. Bowman, "Amelia Island," op.cit.

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