

**“State Slavery in the Atlantic Economy:  
The Case of Cuba in the late Eighteenth Century”**

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This paper takes up the themes of African slavery and imperial warfare, both of which are at the center of research on the growth and development of an Atlantic economy in the revolutionary era between 1750 and 1820. Much of the historiography on these topics, however, treats the roles of imperial warfare and enslavement in Atlantic economic development as two separate phenomena. What is proposed here is the examination of a European colonial power’s resort to state slavery in wartime as an important factor in the transformation of the colony’s economy and its integration into the wider Atlantic economy.<sup>1</sup> A number of works in Atlantic history have shown that by the eighteenth century all the major European colonial powers were faced with the challenge of waging war and defending territory on a trans-Atlantic (an often global) scale.<sup>2</sup> Much of this work has focused on the empires of Britain and France and the fiscal innovations necessary to conduct war on this scale.<sup>3</sup> Yet, Spain, of all the powers with American colonies, had the most to defend and, arguably, the most to lose as other European powers, particularly Britain, challenged Spanish wealth and rule in the Americas. Along with the fiscal and commercial reforms needed to better defend its American empire, Spain also called upon its long history of state enslavement for economic and military purposes again in the eighteenth century to defend Cuba.

The scale of state slavery in the Spanish empire, however, expanded to unprecedented proportions after the British siege and occupation of Havana from 1762 to 1763. The fact of British success in occupying the “key to the empire” in Havana sparked a wide-

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<sup>1</sup> The bibliography on state slavery in the Atlantic world is short. One very recent work looks at the use of Crown slaves in Guyana after its wartime acquisition by Britain in 1803 as an economic failure. Alvin O. Thompson, *Unprofitable Servants. Crown Slaves in Berbice, Guyana, 1803-1831* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2002). Two other full-length treatments discuss state enslavement as a political and military issue rather than an economic one. See for instance, Roger N. Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats. The British West India Regiments, 1795-1815*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979) and Peter M. Voelz, *Slave and Soldier, the Military Impact of Blacks in the Colonial Americas*, (New York and London: Garland, 1993). Two recent exceptions giving some attention to the impact of state slavery on economic development both deal with Cuba, Francisco Pérez Guzmán, *La Habana clave de un imperio*, (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1997) and María Elena Díaz, *The Virgin, the King, and the Royal Slaves of El Cobre*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> For instance, Peggy K. Liss, *Atlantic Empires: The Networks of Trade and Revolution, 1713-1826*, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 18 and Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, (London and New York: Verso), 373-400 and 495.

<sup>3</sup> Most notably John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989).

ranging program of colonial reform to improve colonial defense and to increase the colonies' share of their own protection. In many ways these Bourbon reforms were successful in their objectives. Most of the empire was saved from outright invasion by European rivals and the Crown increased the amount and its share of colonial revenues. In the mainland Spanish American empire the Bourbon reforms generally had adverse effects on the colonial bond. Cuba was, perhaps, the Bourbons' greatest success story as the island became a prosperous plantation colony and remained loyal well into the nineteenth century.

This paper is concerned with the factors most important in explaining this transformation of the Cuban economy from one based on imperial service and trade through Havana, which employed slaves, to a slave plantation colony, specifically the state's role in that transformation.<sup>4</sup> A general understanding of Cuba's economy before the sugar boom includes some scholarly consensus on the importance of imperial defense and services to Cuban development before the mid-eighteenth century. The prosperity brought to Havana by the infusion of imperial funds for defense projects is sometimes mentioned as a factor in the formation of the capital necessary for sugar plantation expansion after 1790.<sup>5</sup> There is some debate, however, among scholars about the economic importance of the British occupation itself, especially the policy of free trade, to later development in Cuba.<sup>6</sup> Regarding the Bourbon reforms more generally, several works have examined the political, military, and social transformations they brought about in Cuba.<sup>7</sup> But none of these works explores the role of the state as a slave owner and employer as part of the transformation of Cuba into a plantation colony reliant on enslaved labor. It will be argued here that the Bourbon's efforts to secure Havana after 1763 reinforced imperial defense as a leading economic sector for decades after the British occupation while simultaneously creating the economic framework for the plantation revolution after 1790.

One aspect of this new framework was the institution of slavery as practiced in Cuba before the 1760s. The first order of business for Bourbon reformers was not to reform the practice of enslavement in Cuba. Charles III and his ministers were most concerned to improve defenses in the port of Havana itself, with a massive program of fort repair and construction. But to mobilize labor for these projects the Spanish state was forced to change the terms under which enslaved Africans were imported into Cuba and the scale and conditions under which they were employed. In the process the state also became the

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<sup>4</sup> The most complete treatment of the plantation revolution in Cuba remains Manuel Moreno Fraginals, *El ingenio complejo económico social cubano del azúcar*, (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 2001[1978]), but Moreno credits the Creole bourgeoisie with the economic initiative and disparages the colonial state as an obstacle. This new edition combines in one volume the three volumes published in Havana in 1978 and all references in this paper will be from the new edition.

<sup>5</sup> Moreno Fraginals, *El ingenio*, 52; Moreno Fraginals, "Peculiaridades de la esclavitud en Cuba," *Islas*, 85 (1986), 3-12.

<sup>6</sup> For a review of the debate and a more restrained view of the occupation's importance see J. R. McNeill, *Atlantic Empires of France and Spain, Louisbourg and Havana 1700-1763*, (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1985) 190-191, and footnote #55, p.283.

<sup>7</sup> Allan Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753-1815, Crown, Military, and Society*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986) and Sherry Johnson, *The Social Transformation of Eighteenth Century Cuba*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001).

largest slaveholder on the island with close to 2,000 slaves employed in fort repair and construction alone. These changes in the organization of slave trading and employment, along with more favorable terms for sugar production and marketing within the empire, set the stage for Cuba's emergence as a major world producer of sugar in the nineteenth century. By the time the defense works had been completed in the early 1790s two of the main obstacles to the rapid expansion of sugar production in Cuba – a shortage of enslaved laborers and competition from the French colony of Saint Domingue -- had been eliminated, both as a result of reform and revolutionary warfare in the Caribbean.

To illustrate the centrality of state slavery to the transformation of the Cuban economy in the second half of the eighteenth century this paper will briefly discuss the Spanish state's earlier use of state slavery as part of its program of imperial defense with particular attention to the development of an imperial navy and the ship yard in Havana before and after the British occupation. The state's relatively restricted use of royal slaves in its program of naval defense will then be contrasted with the unprecedented resort to the use of royal slaves in the fort repair and construction projects in Havana in the 1760s in response to the threat of renewed warfare with Great Britain. The last section of the paper will consider some of the ways in which the case of Cuba suggests new questions through which to examine the history of African slavery and warfare in Atlantic economic history.

The Spanish Crown was able to obtain an American empire without a major commitment of state funds but the defense of that empire proved to be an increasingly expensive enterprise. The early conquerors sought their rewards for the risks of conquest in booty and grants of land and labor in conquered areas. The Crown authorized these grants along with titles and sinecures, but it did not provide large outlays of its own funds to outfit expeditions or to reward the conquerors. The initial defense of the Spanish American colonies also remained largely in the hands of and at the expense of the Spanish residents of those colonies and their African and indigenous auxiliaries. The Crown extended extra resources only in moments of crisis and such moments multiplied as the sixteenth century.

The conquest of Cuba was undertaken in 1511 and economic development on the island enjoyed a brief post-conquest boom based on some modest deposits of gold and on the provisioning of the expeditions of conquest to mainland Central and South America. By 1524 the King had granted permission to introduce enslaved Africans to the island to supplement the Indian laborers working in farming and livestock rearing, in the port, and in placer mining. Shortly thereafter both the mineral and human resources of the island were severely reduced, especially compared to the mainland colonies of Mexico and Peru, leaving Cuba as a colonial backwater by the middle of the sixteenth century.

The key to Cuba's eventual economic recovery was the fact that the royal portion of the wealth generated in the mainland empire had to be transported back to the metropolis. News of this growing wealth of the Americas also enticed Spain's European rivals to

challenge its monopoly in the western Atlantic. Geography protected the mainland centers of the empire from pirate activity through most of the sixteenth century (although no area was immune to illegal trading) leaving the Caribbean to bear the brunt of pirate predations against the Spanish empire. The occupation of Havana by a French fleet in 1537 induced the King to authorize greater direct investment of royal monies in American defense, specifically the fortification of the port of Havana.<sup>8</sup> As with other defense projects in the sixteenth century circum-Caribbean the labor of enslaved Africans was part of the costs of construction. In some cases they were hired out or “donated” (it is not always clear how willingly) by residents or purchased outright by the Crown.<sup>9</sup> Still this first royal attempt at fortifying Havana was modest and further measures had to be taken to secure the wealth of the Americas for Spain.

One method of securing this wealth was to concentrate its transport and defense across the Atlantic. The confluence of geography and wind and current patterns in the Caribbean and the Atlantic put Havana’s port at the center of plans to consolidate the remittances of American wealth to Spain in a yearly convoy of treasure ships. The convoy system was instituted in 1543, but not fully functional until the 1560s. The proposed centralization of trans-Atlantic shipping, unfortunately, made Havana ever more attractive to pirates. Most serious was the attack of the French corsair, Jacques de Sores, who sacked and torched the town in 1555. Again responding to a crisis, in 1558 the Spanish Crown authorized the building of a second fort to guard the entrance to Havana’s harbor and assigned a special subsidy of funds from the coffers of New Spain (Mexico) to speed its construction. Workers for the fort project were largely slaves furnished by city residents and supplemented by an assortment of other workers, forced and free – some wage laborers, vagrants “of various colors” pressed into service, a few Indians, and even fourteen French pirates captured off the coast of Matanzas.<sup>10</sup> Still, for more than twenty years, the project was dogged by shortages of funds and labor, problems that would plague state projects on the island in varying degrees throughout the colonial period.<sup>11</sup>

The French attempt to colonize Florida in 1564 inspired a new round of measures to improve Caribbean defenses, and the Crown realized that a more comprehensive system of defense was needed now that larger scale invasion forces had been added to the threat represented by corsair raiding. The convoy system was reinvigorated in the 1560s and to protect the port of Havana a fleet of ships was outfitted to patrol the ports of the Antilles and the circum-Caribbean. A number of permanent garrisons were also assigned to the key areas along the treasure fleets’ convoy route (Florida, Havana, San Juan de Ulúa in

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Hoffman, *The Spanish Crown and the Defense of the Caribbean, 1535-1585*, (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1980) table #2, 22, for mean yearly costs between 1535 and 1547; Francisco Pérez Guzmán, *La Habana*, 6, for the royal order to fortify Havana.

<sup>9</sup> Hoffman, 56-57.

<sup>10</sup> Renée Méndez Capote, *Fortalezas de la Habana colonial*, (La Habana: Editorial Gente Nueva, 1974), 15-16.

<sup>11</sup> The period of 20 odd years necessary to complete the Havana fort was not particularly unusual even for fort building in Europe a century later, see Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996 [1988]), 166.

Veracruz, and San Juan de Puerto Rico).<sup>12</sup> In addition to these land-based initiatives, the Crown was moved to allow timber cutting in royal forests for the building of patrol and transport ships and to repair the ships of the trans-Atlantic fleets. The stunning defeat of the Spanish Armada by the English in 1588 decimated the Spanish navy and, in 1589, inspired the Crown to directly invest royal funds in Havana's shipyard. With a substantial infusion of funds from New Spain's silver subsidy the Havana yard produced six frigates by 1591.<sup>13</sup>

The English also exploited weaknesses in Spanish and American defenses, most notably with Francis Drake's pirate attacks from the Mediterranean to the Pacific, which prompted another round of fort building in Havana. Construction began in 1589 of the forts Castillo de los Tres Reyes del Morro to the east and San Salvador de la Punta to the west, both of which still guard the entrance to Havana's harbor. These fortification projects were carried out with a similar blend of workers to those of the 1560s –hired slaves, vagrants, and free skilled workers, often imported from Spain. Crown slaves from elsewhere in the empire were also employed.<sup>14</sup>

This more comprehensive effort at defense brought economic growth back to Cuba and Havana began to grow at an astonishing rate. In the 1570s Cuba's population had reached approximately 17,500 persons, the majority of whom were of African descent. G. Douglas Inglis' work on the demography of colonial Cuba shows Havana as the most dynamic town on the island with an 8.6% rate of population growth between 1570 and 1598. The town's population could swell by an additional several thousand persons when the fleet was in port. Slave imports in the 1590s reached over 1,000 persons legally entered through Havana, while smuggling probably brought even more.<sup>15</sup> Imperial service stimulated growth outside the port area as well. The necessity of provisioning the fleet encouraged the growth of ranching and truck farming in the hinterland around Havana. The specialized needs of the ships themselves for repairs and outfitting brought skilled laborers from around the empire for the months the ships were in port. Also the crews of those ships had to be fed, clothed, housed, and entertained.<sup>16</sup>

Cuban historian Julio Le Riverend contends that this wave of fort and naval construction in the late 1500s was an important element in the first real spurt of growth in the city after half a century of decline relative to the mainland centers of the empire. He also credits this construction with introducing to Cuba the practice of renting out enslaved workers as day laborers (although this practice would not have been unknown in

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<sup>12</sup> Hoffman, 158.

<sup>13</sup> Levi Marrero, *Cuba: Economía y sociedad*, tomo II, (Madrid: Editorial Playor, 1974), 200-201.

<sup>14</sup> José Félix Martín de Arrate, *Llave del Nuevo Mundo antemural de las Indias occidentales*, (La Habana: Comisión Nacional Cubana de UNESCO, 1964 [1761]), 55; Méndez Capote, 10, 23-24; Pérez Guzmán, *La Habana*, 15.

<sup>15</sup> Alejandro de la Fuente García, "El mercado esclavista habanera, 1580-1699: las armazones de esclavos," *REvista de Indias*, L, 189 (1990), 377.

<sup>16</sup> G. Douglas Inglis, "Historical Demography of Colonial Cuba, 1492-1780," Ph.D. Dissertation, (Texas Christian University, 1979), 85. Inglis estimates for 1570 a total island population of approximately 17,550 persons of whom 1,200 were Spanish, 1,350 indigenous, and 15,000 black and mulatto, Appendix 1, p. 159.

Spain of the sixteenth century).<sup>17</sup> The practice of renting out slaves has been cited by numerous scholars as the foundation of the custom of *coartación*, the Cuban variant of the slave's purchase of his or her freedom prevalent in other places. The medieval Castilian law code, the *Siete Partidas*, had made provisions for a slave to give a portion of his/her price to a third party toward the slave's eventual freedom. In Cuba the practice of self-purchase evolved to include other customary features that created a group of enslaved people that had something of an intermediate status between enslaved and free status. Once the slave had made the initial payment on freedom, his/her price could not be changed. His/her new status as a *coartado* (one whose enslaved status had been "cut" by a payment toward freedom) allowed the slave to look for a new owner with or without cause. A slave had the right to demand to be sold if a buyer could be found. In an urban setting like Havana where skilled labor in many occupations was almost always at a premium, the practice of hiring out the enslaved seems to have provided some benefit, although unequal, to both the enslaved and their owners. Unfortunately there is little detailed study of this customary practice in sixteenth and seventeenth century Cuba.<sup>18</sup> The evidence does suggest, however, that as an owner and hirer of the enslaved the Spanish state had an active role in the relatively open and fluid enslavement regime that developed in Havana over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>19</sup> Settlements in less well defended islands in the Caribbean but Dutch, English and French, however, brought very different slave regimes to the non-Spanish Caribbean. Hence, the practice of slavery in Cuba evolved in sharp contrast to the slave regimes developing in the sugar islands of the Caribbean into the eighteenth century.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Julio Le Riverend Brusone, *La Habana, espacio y vida*, (Madrid: MAPFRE, 1992), 67.

<sup>18</sup> One article does deal with blacks, both enslaved and free, in sixteenth century Havana using data from Cuban archives, María Teresa de Rojas, "Algunos datos sobre los negros esclavos y horros en la Habana del siglo XVI," in *Miscelánea de estudios dedicados a Fernando Ortiz por sus discípulos, colegas y amigos*. . . , (La Habana: Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País, 1956), 1275-1287. The article contains a number of examples of slaves who hired out, lived apart from their owners, retained part of their earnings and purchased their freedom. It also documents the local cabildo's many attempts to regulate these practices to avoid the growth of a black population, both free and enslaved, that would not be subject to close supervision by their present or former owners. Rojas concludes that in spite of a chronic shortage of enslaved labor in the city, slaveowners generally did not try to impede the slaves' attainment of their freedom. In fact owners seemed to have encouraged and facilitated it (p. 1282). Perhaps with the beginnings of a much needed surge in the city's economy in the 1560s, hiring out became a particularly attractive way to maintain one's enslaved workers.

<sup>19</sup> The classic work on the subject is Hubert H. S. Aimes, "Coartación: A Spanish Institution for the Advancement of Slaves into Freedom," *Yale Review*, XVII (February 1909) 412-429. although the evidence presented drawn mostly from the eighteenth and nineteenth century after the practice had been codified into law. For more recent work on *coartación* in eighteenth and nineteenth century Cuba see Herbert Klein, *Slavery in the Americas*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), especially 196-200 and Laird Bergad, Fe Iglesias García, and María del Carmen Barcia, *The Cuban Slave Market, 1790-1880* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 133-141. These authors have argued that the practice of *coartación* was unique to Cuba, but some recent studies have found evidence that it existed in other American slave societies. See for instance, Douglas Cole Libby and Clothilde Andrade Paiva, "Manumission Practices in Late Eighteenth Century Brazilian Slave Parish: São José d'El Rey in 1795," *Slavery & Abolition*, 21:1 (April 2000) 96-127.

<sup>20</sup> For a good introduction to plantation development in the Caribbean in an Atlantic context see Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, especially pp. 217-306.

The seventeenth century produced the first real losses of territory in the Americas to Spain's European rivals. With the formation of the Dutch West India Company in 1621, the Dutch embarked on outright invasion and colonization in areas of Spain's empire (the Crowns of Spain and Portugal being united under Philip II in 1580), invading Brazil in 1624. Although a joint Spanish and Portuguese response repelled this attack, by 1630 the Dutch had returned and captured the sugar region of Pernambuco and the island of Curaçao. The Spanish suffered the further humiliation of having the silver fleet of 1628 captured by Piet Heyn off the coast of Cuba.

The English, too, had encroached on Spanish territory by taking and holding the Caribbean islands of Barbados, Bermuda, and St. Kitts' and Nevis. By the middle of the seventeenth century Dutch naval power had begun to wane, but the English navy now presented the greatest threat to the Spanish Empire. Although the English failed in their attempt to attack Santo Domingo in 1654, they were successful in taking the relatively undefended island of Jamaica. This conquest gave them an ideal base from which to harass the Spanish and carry on smuggling operations around the Caribbean. As further proof of the threat England represented, they captured the silver fleet off the coast of Cádiz in 1656.

In Cuba these threats produced a new round of defense constructions in the 1630s and 1640s, especially along the northern coast to the east and west of Havana.<sup>21</sup> The fortifications of the late 1500s had made the sea approaches to the bay itself reasonably secure. But with the English presence on neighboring Jamaica, the first proposals were made for a city wall to shore up the western land approaches to Havana in 1656. Construction finally commenced in the winter of 1674.<sup>22</sup> As with the other major fortification projects undertaken in the city to that date, financing was partially provided by a subsidy from Mexico and a local tax levied on wine. The townspeople contributed by offering to donate laborers.<sup>23</sup> A wall that encircled the landward side of the city was completed in 1683.

The sixteenth and seventeenth century fortification projects in Havana spared the city any further direct attacks by Spain's European rivals. But Spanish resources were stretched to the limit fighting land wars on the European continent. By the 1660s Spain's ministers had come to give land forces the higher priority, leaving virtually nothing for naval costs.<sup>24</sup> By the end of the seventeenth century the peninsula was debilitated by chronic warfare and repeated fiscal crisis, leaving its navy seriously weakened. The shipyards of northern Spain were attacked by English corsairs. Peninsular shipbuilding

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<sup>21</sup> Pérez Guzmán, *La Habana*, 16.

<sup>22</sup> Pérez Guzmán, *La Habana*, 19-23.

<sup>23</sup> Arrate, *Llave del Nuevo Mundo*, 60. Arrate states that the townspeople offered 9,000 peones (day laborers) for the wall construction. The number seems quite inflated being that estimates of the town's population in the mid seventeenth century do not exceed 15,000 to 20,000 (See Inglis, "Historical Demography," 160.) Perhaps the sources Arrate was using were referring to jornales or workdays rather than actual workers. The status of those workers is not clear from his account either. The householders could have been offering their own labor or that of their slaves or some combination thereof.

<sup>24</sup> David Goodman, *Spanish Naval Power, 1589-1665. Reconstruction and Defeat*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 46.

contractors had been ruined by successive Crown bankruptcies. The Crown's unreliability as an employer also made recruiting free laborers to shipbuilding and naval service ever more difficult. As the seventeenth century advanced the Crown increasingly used its power to coerce even free individuals to build and man its fleets to defend the empire. The impressment of sailors was not unique to the Spanish navy, however, as all early modern powers had difficulties maintaining a navy. But none had as extensive a world-wide empire to defend and the concomitant drain on royal resources that brought the Spanish Crown to bankruptcy eight times between 1557 and 1680.<sup>25</sup>

Spain faced the dawn of the eighteenth century at war with much of Europe over who would succeed the Hapsburgs on the Spanish throne. It was not until that warfare had ended that the new Bourbon monarchy could begin a program to rehabilitate Spanish imperial power. One of Philip V's early initiatives was a revival of the American fleet that had deteriorated so badly over the previous century of neglect and crisis. The appointment of José Patiño as general intendant of the navy in 1717 proved crucial to the Spanish navy's rehabilitation in the eighteenth century. True to that century's sensibilities, he standardized and codified such things as ordinances, measures, and even wages. He oversaw plans to introduce new, more agile types of warships. A crucial component of the naval revival was access to shipyards capable of building and repairing the large vessels necessary for Atlantic transport and defense. Although Patiño increased the number of shipyards on the Spanish peninsula, the shipyard of Havana was a primary candidate in the empire for such activities, principally for its capacious harbor and the ample supply of suitable timber in its hinterlands. Renewed royal attention brought heartening results. From 1700-1716 only nine ships of the line had been built in royal shipyards, three of them in Havana. During Patiño's twenty-year tenure, of the 58 ships of the line and 6 frigates that were built in royal yards, 22 ships of the line and 2 frigates were built in Havana. As historian G. Douglas Inglis has noted, at Patiño's death in 1736 "Spain possessed a professional navy of considerable strength with its own independent systems of construction, supply, and maintenance."<sup>26</sup>

The Crown's plan for rebuilding and sustaining the American fleet relied on the time-honored practice of contracting out all the major steps in the process while the Crown retained ownership of the shipyard, materials, and the technical direction of construction. Neither did the Crown provide the financing for the bulk of the projects. Instead a financier was sought who would, in essence, loan the Crown the funds necessary to construct a ship, often in return for some kind of royal favor – a trade concession, exemption, or monopoly, for instance. Upon completion of the vessel, the Crown would purchase the ship from the contractor.<sup>27</sup> But the Crown's poor record as an investment partner, particularly in ship building, meant that financiers did not always present themselves as needed.

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<sup>25</sup> On the royal bankruptcies, J. H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain, 1469-1716*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1963) 197-361, and their effects on naval policy, Goodman, *Spanish Naval Power*, 258-259.

<sup>26</sup> This paragraph relies on information in G. D. Inglis, "The Spanish Naval Shipyard at Havana in the Eighteenth Century," in *New Aspects of Naval History*, (Baltimore: Nautical and Aviation Publishing Co. of America, 1985) 47-49. The quote appears on p. 49.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51.

The Crown surmounted this obstacle in the case of the Havana shipyard in 1739 by negotiating a charter for a trading company with a group of wealthy Cubans that guaranteed financing and production of imperial vessels for the next decade. The contract of the Royal Company of Havana obligated its directors to the building of three or four ships per year and the manufacture of cannons and other necessary iron work in Havana's arsenal. The Company was responsible for procuring the necessary funding and materials and maintaining the shipyard itself. The contract fixed the prices that the Crown would pay for cannons and ships, and assigned monies from the New Spain subsidy for payment. The Company also agreed to send the new ships to Spain and give passage to returning officials and troops at its own expense. In return for this service to king and empire the Company was granted a contract to provision the ships passing through Havana, the local hospitals, and the presidios of Florida. The Company was also given control of the commerce of the state's monopoly of tobacco, purchasing Cuban leaf for the state factories in Spain. To aid in carrying out its general charge of increasing commerce on the island (along with its ship construction obligations), the Company was granted certain exemptions from import restrictions and duties, including those on the importation and sale of African slaves.<sup>28</sup>

Although the Company had almost exclusive control of the slave trade to the island between 1740 and 1760, it seems to not to have retained a large portion of those slaves for its ship building projects. An account of company assets from 1748 listed 236 slaves working in the shipyard's sawmill valued at 70,800 pesos, or 300 pesos each.<sup>29</sup> Nearly two-thirds of the approximately 800 workers in the Havana shipyard were free people employed as carpenters, caulkers, masons, ironworkers, etc.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the majority of the roughly 4,000 slaves that the Company imported over this period were most likely sold to private owners.<sup>31</sup> Where the Company and previous contractors had made greatest use of slaves and other coerced workers, such as convicts, was in the cutting and processing of timber. The accounts of shipyard expenses throughout the eighteenth century show that access to timber and the cutting, transport, and working of wood was central to the enterprise. Gangs of slaves and convicts were sent to progressively more remote areas around Havana to cut cedar and other hardwoods for constructing ships. Slaves were the crucial labor force in the milling and preparation of timbers for the ships' carpenters. Since the shipyard was an enterprise of long standing when the Company assumed its administration, patterns of labor recruitment and deployment were well established. Shipbuilding seems to have attracted sufficient numbers of free laborers to

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<sup>28</sup> Archivo General de Indias (hereafter AGI), Ultramar, 995, for the final contract of the Royal Company of Havana approved by the King, 5-VI-1741.

<sup>29</sup> AGI, Ultramar, 995, a representation dated 19-XII-1748 reviewing the Company's losses in ship construction and other grievances.

<sup>30</sup> Marrero, *Cuba economía y sociedad*, tomo VIII, 18.

<sup>31</sup> For a concise discussion of both primary and secondary sources' estimates of slave imports to Cuba between 1740 and 1760 see McNeill, *Atlantic Empires*, 167.

dominate most types of work on these complex projects, except the cutting and processing of timber.<sup>32</sup>

Skilled royal slaves were occasionally recruited for other tasks around the shipyard. For the building of La Machina (a sheers masting machine)<sup>33</sup> in 1747 the Crown purchased slaves skilled in carpentry and brick laying.<sup>34</sup> Skilled King's slaves from other parts of the island were sent to Havana for work in the forts and the naval yard.<sup>35</sup> For the difficult task of dredging the harbor to clear it of debris and silt the Crown allocated funds, and recruited labor outside the island using slaves and *presidarios* (state convicts), all from New Spain.

Given the history of problems in generating a profit as a royal contractor for ship building it is doubtful that the directors of the Royal Company of Havana hoped to do more than break even on that aspect of their contract with the Crown. But even such modest hopes were not realized as the Company consistently posted substantial losses on each ship that it produced.<sup>36</sup> By 1748 the Company's directors began petitioning the Crown for a release from their obligation to produce ships for the Crown due to the tremendous expenses and losses they had suffered in that endeavor. They went so far as to claim that the Company itself was "a slave" to various interests on the island and requested liberation from its rightful owner, the King. They also complained of benefiting from few of the concessions and exemptions given them in the initial contract with the Crown. In spite of this complaint they suggested that another grant of a contract to import slaves might help them offset some of their other losses.<sup>37</sup> The Company was finally able to end its obligation to build ships for the Crown in 1749.<sup>38</sup> The period between 1700 and 1760 saw the production of 63% of the largest ships of the line of the Spanish navy, with the years of greatest reform and royal attention, between 1720 and 1749, launching 50% of the big ships.<sup>39</sup> The state had been quite successful at organizing the expansion of its navy by modifying the contract system through the creation of the Havana Company and it had shifted much of the cost to private entrepreneurs in return for state favors.

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<sup>32</sup> For examples of accounts of shipbuilding expenses see AGI, Ultramar, 995 and AGI, Santo Domingo (hereafter SD), 1862. Marrero, *Cuba economía y sociedad*, tomo VIII, 19 on lumber gangs in Havana's hinterland.

<sup>33</sup> Inglis, "The Spanish Naval Shipyard," 51.

<sup>34</sup> Marrero, *Cuba economía y sociedad*, vol. VIII, 12.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 48. Marrero cites orders from the Governor Cajigal in the 1750s authorizing various esclavos del Rey (royal slaves) to be sent to Havana to serve in the fort works and in naval construction, that they might save sufficient monies to purchase their freedom. One case from 15-III-1755 shows two enslaved blacks from El Cobre purchasing their freedom for 100 reales each. This may have represented their final payment as 100 reales seems a very low total price given the prevailing prices for labor, both free and slave.

<sup>36</sup> AGI, Ultramar, 995 and Inglis, "The Spanish Navy Shipyard," Table 1, 52.

<sup>37</sup> AGI, Ultramar, 995, representation dated 19-XII-1748. The Company claimed to have lost 103,588 pesos on the sales from earlier slave importation contracts due to high costs of organizing their transport and sickness and death among the slaves. Still, in spite of Company protests, they deemed another venture sufficiently attractive as a way of bolstering the Company's balance sheet.

<sup>38</sup> McNeill, *Atlantic Empires of France and Spain*, 133.

<sup>39</sup> Inglis, "The Spanish Naval Shipyard," Table 2, 52.

The period from the 1740s to the early 1760s was also one in which peninsular officials in Cuba and at court expressed concern about the vulnerability of Havana to attack. The earlier fortification projects could not protect the city if an expeditionary force landed down the coast from Havana bypassing the forts at the mouth of the port and threatening the city by land. The escalation of warfare in the Caribbean with the outbreak of the Seven Years' War in 1756 inspired particular concern about the lack of fortification on the heights of La Cabaña, across the bay to the east of Havana, control of which would allow an enemy to shell both the city and the fort of El Morro that was supposed to guard it. Also the seventeenth century wall around the western perimeter of the city had fallen into disrepair in sections and lacked the height and thickness to repel a concentrated attack by land. Plans were made to do the necessary repairs on existing fortifications and to begin a new fort on La Cabaña hill in 1761, but the logistics of these complex and expensive projects proved unmanageable for the new Captain-General Prado Portocarrero.<sup>40</sup>

With Spain's entrance into the Seven Years' War in 1762 Britain moved quickly to send to the Caribbean the largest invasion force ever mounted against a Spanish American colony. On 7 June 1762 a combined force of British army and navy arrived off the coast of Cuba about six miles to the east of Havana. By three o'clock in the afternoon the British had landed their troops and begun a westward advance on the fort of El Morro. By the 10<sup>th</sup> of June the British force controlled the heights of La Cabaña and began a siege of the fort. The siege dragged on into July as tropical diseases and the climate began to take their toll on the British attackers. But with a contingent of reinforcements from their North American colonies, British forces were finally able to storm and subdue El Morro. Shelling of Havana itself finally brought capitulation on 13 August 1762.

One interesting point emerges from the records of the siege of Havana on the relationship between enslavement and colonial warfare in the eighteenth century Caribbean. Both sides had employed blacks, both enslaved and free, in warfare before but this particular engagement encouraged increased resort to enslaved people for military service by the state. Since the British were the offensive force they increased their use of slaves as auxiliaries and as combatants. The British expedition commanders had had orders to purchase slaves in Martinique and some of the smaller islands, along with forming a group of slaves commandeered in Jamaica for the Havana campaign.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Archivo Histórico Nacional (hereafter AHN) Estado, legajo (leg.) 3025, expediente (exp.) 3, "Relación del estado actual de las fortificaciones de . . . la Habana. . . de 1761. . ." and "Relación instructivo de la existencia del Castillo proyectado de San Carlos [on la Cabaña hill]," Havana, 8 julio 1761. On Prado Portocarrero's tenure in Havana see Jaime Delgado, "El Conde de Ricla, Capitán-General de Cuba," *Revista de Historia de América*, vol. 55-56 (enero-diciembre, 1963) 70-74 and Allan Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753-1815, Crown, Military, and Society*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986) 20-23.

<sup>41</sup> *Authentic Journal of the Siege of Havana By an Officer*, (London: Printed for T. Jeffrys, 1762) 42-43. A recent study cites almost 400 slaves purchased in Martinique and Antigua, 100 more hired out from St. Christopher, along with 36 slaves and 50 free colored troops from Jamaica. Thus, there were 200 blacks that accompanied the initial British landing for a total of some 600 blacks with the expedition at the time of the original assault. Walker argues that the reluctance of Jamaican planters to arm their slaves stymied

On the Spanish side, one group of slaves made a valiant but doomed effort to defend El Morro lengthening the siege and allowing disease and the tropical climate to wear down the British forces.<sup>42</sup> In addition to the slaves working in El Morro, another contingent of slaves attached to Havana's local militia corps saved the city from a British attack from the west overcoming the British batteries there, putting the British troops to flight, and taking 18 British prisoners that were sent to the city as trophies of the engagement.<sup>43</sup>

The Spanish had long made modest use of African slaves as auxiliaries and combatants, a practice growing out of the conquest period and the empire's subsequent history of using local militias of both whites and men of color to defend its colonies. Exceptional state service by slaves in the siege of Havana was recognized and rewarded by Spanish officials immediately after the capitulation and after the city was returned to Spanish control in 1763. Prado granted 13 slaves from El Morro and 105 slaves from San Lázaro their full liberty in the King's name, paying 200 pesos 4 reales each for their freedom. On the return of Havana to the Spanish the new Captain-General, the Count of Ricla, granted another 27 slaves full liberty. He also granted a different group of 6 slaves half liberty, entitling their owners to only half their normal labor time. Ricla recognized the service of three more slaves with a cash reward of 30 pesos each and that of three others who had lost limbs in battle, a lifetime maintenance allowance of 1 real per day.<sup>44</sup> A letter from the Intendant in May of 1765 gave notice to the King that some of the slaves had been "restored" to their owners, probably those who were not granted full freedom.<sup>45</sup> These varied rewards highlight another way, besides the practice of hiring out, in which the state's employment of enslaved people contributed to the system *coartación*, or intermediate statuses based on partial payments toward freedom.

Although the Spanish army garrison and local militia regiments bore most of the burden of the Spanish defeat at Havana, the siege and occupation was also a serious setback for the Spanish navy and its Havana shipyard. During the siege the Captain-General Prado had ordered the sinking of several large men-of-war ships in the narrow channel at the entrance to Havana's port trapping 18 serviceable warships within the harbor.<sup>46</sup> The naval commissioner stationed in Havana, Lorenzo de Montalvo, had destroyed or dispersed much of the shipyard's stock of naval stores to deny the British access to them. During the occupation the British then dismantled and sold virtually anything else of value. This destruction ultimately opened the way for improvements both in the design and function of the shipyard and its administration once the city was

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British efforts to recruit large numbers of slaves for service in the expedition. See Daniel E. Walker, "Colony versus Crown: Raising Black Troops for the British Siege on Havana, 1762," *The Journal of Caribbean History*, 3: 1 & 2 (1999) 74-83, pp. 78-79 for the numbers of slaves in the initial expedition.

<sup>42</sup> *Authentic Journal*, 22-25.

<sup>43</sup> Pedro José Guiteras, *Historia de la conquista de la Habana*, (Philadelphia: Parry & McMillan, 1856 [1762]) 132.

<sup>44</sup> AGI, SD, 1212, a letter dated 13 May 1763 by the Conde de Ricla to the Minister Arriaga.

<sup>45</sup> AGI, SD, leg. 1647. The exact number of slaves freed or restored is not mentioned in the letter. Two letters from Altarriba to Conde de Ricla dated 24 mayo de 1765 acknowledge "de haverse reintegrado a sus duenos los negros a quienes se concedio libertad durante el sitio de esta Plaza. . ." [my italics] Another letter mentions the cost to the state of purchasing the freedom of the slaves who fought against the British.

<sup>46</sup> Guiteras, *Historia de la conquista*, 75-83.

returned to Spain in 1763. Montalvo redesigned the shipyard and rerouted the city's freshwater canal to pass through it to power an enormous sawmill. With new docks, slipways, a new arsenal building and sawmill, Montalvo was able to salvage two hulls that had been under construction before the siege and begin the work on a new 94-gun ship.<sup>47</sup>

Naval account records for the period immediately following the British occupation also show administrative reforms designed to ensure greater Crown control over the shipyard rather than leaving naval construction to the interest and good will of private investors. Monies from New Spain's coffers were now assigned directly to a newly established naval treasury opened in Havana in July of 1763. By December of that year Charles III had created a naval intendency in Havana and appointed Lorenzo de Montalvo to the post. Montalvo now had the authority to oversee both the shipyard and the naval squadron stationed in Havana's harbor.<sup>48</sup>

For the rebuilding of the shipyard and the resumption of ship construction the naval intendant recruited labor as the state had been recruiting labor for state projects for centuries. Some slaves were purchased outright by the Crown, although their numbers seem to have been small, mostly purchased singly or in pairs. Other slaves were hired out from private owners as needed. Convicts were also sent from New Spain, sometimes in group as large as 120 men, to advance the projects. But the majority of the workers in the shipyard continued to be free laborers working for wages and their daily ration. Naval officials also tried to return the shipyard to a full labor contingent by hunting down military and naval deserters and slave and convict fugitives.

For the initial clearing of the bay, a group of seamen were paid a wage and daily rations to remove the ships scuttled in the opening of the harbor during the siege. By the beginning of 1764 payouts begin to appear in the accounts to government contractors for the food and clothing rations of the Crown slaves and convicts employed in the shipyard and by the naval squadron. Through the figures given for food and clothing rations it is possible to estimate roughly the numbers of slaves and convicts employed in various types of work around the ship yard.<sup>49</sup> The largest group of royal slaves and convicts seems to have been employed in 1764 with a combined total of some 223 person getting rations from the contractor. Small mixed groups were used in all aspects of the shipyard's operation – clearing channels, in ship construction and repairs, sawing timbers, and in carpentry and stone masonry for new buildings. The largest pay outs in the shipyard accounts went for the wages of carpenters, caulkers, and other skilled workmen involved in ship building and in repairing or rebuilding the shipyard. While each of these groups most likely had slaves working with them in some capacity, the

<sup>47</sup> Inglis, "The Spanish Naval Shipyard," 53-54.

<sup>48</sup> Copies of these records for most of the 1760s are in AGI, SD, 1862. See also Inglis, "The Spanish Naval Shipyard," 54.

<sup>49</sup> AGI, SD, 1862, numbers (nº) 18 and 19. "Cuenta y relación. . ." for the branch of the naval squadron (nº 18) and ship construction (nº 19) dated 7 julio 1763 through 12 maio 1764. The records indicate that slaves and convicts were given rations valued at 1 real/day usually listed at monthly intervals. The rations payouts are an inconsistent measure of the numbers of workers, however, since they are rarely comprehensive and often do not divide out to whole numbers.

overwhelming majority of the laborers in these professions were free.<sup>50</sup> The same pattern appeared in the accounts of the naval squadron.<sup>51</sup>

By the time the accounts for the shipyard and the naval squadron were combined under the supervision of a new Treasurer General in 1765, the numbers of royal slaves and convicts employed in both branches fell to around 100 persons, rising slowly over the months of 1766 to a high of 180 in December.<sup>52</sup> Clearly, though the navy and the shipyard made wide use of royal slaves, even after the devastation of the British siege and occupation the shipyard was able to return to full production without a major reform of its time-honored practices of labor recruitment and deployment.

The rebuilding and extension of Havana's land defenses, however, presented the Spanish Crown with a task for which its earlier practices proved inadequate. Crown representatives in Havana were forced to recruit and employ an unprecedented number of royal slaves to repair and construct land defenses. With the stunning defeat and the possibility of renewed hostilities as a spur, the Crown took immediate action in June of 1763 when the Peace of Paris returned Havana to Spain.<sup>53</sup> As with naval administration Charles III consolidated and centralized ministerial control of the Indies. He established the Junta de Ministros charged with the development of colonial policy and uniting the ministers of State, War, Finance, the Navy, and the Indies in weekly sessions.<sup>54</sup> The general thrust of colonial reform was to shift to the colonies much of the burden for their own defense. For the first urgent task of the reclamation of Cuba, the King moved decisively. In contrast to Spain's former administrative policies that encouraged overlapping jurisdictions and lengthy consultation, the King appointed the Count of Ricla as Captain-General of Cuba with wide-ranging powers to reorganize and improve the island's defenses. One of Ricla's bolder plans called for the better arming and training of the colonists themselves to create a large, effective reserve force at a lower cost. This proposal risked a significant shift in political and military power to the colonials, but Spain's vast commitments and limited resources allowed few other options.<sup>55</sup>

The other urgent necessity was the shoring up of Havana's physical defenses. Charles III and his ministers were acutely aware of the high costs involved in both projects – the

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* For instance, wages for all the carpenters, caulkers, and masons listed in the shipyard's accounts for March of 1764 totaled 85,078 reales, while wages for hired slaves and a small group of free workers and Crown slaves working in carpentry were paid 8,719 reales that month.

<sup>51</sup> AGI, SD, 1862, n° 29, "Cuenta y relación. . ." for the Naval Squadron dated 12 maio 1764 through 15 febrero 1765.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> In exchange for the return of Havana, other provisions of the Peace included ceding Florida and all Spanish territory in North America east of the Mississippi to Britain, tolerating British logwood cutters in Honduras, and the renunciation of any rights to Newfoundland fishing. Spain also had to return Colônia do Sacramento (in the Rio de la Plata) to Portugal. See John Lynch, *Bourbon Spain, 1700-1808*, (Oxford and Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1989) 318.

<sup>54</sup> Allan J. Kuethe and Lowell Blaisdell, "The Esquilache Government and the Reforms of Charles III in Cuba," *Jarbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas*, 19 (Cologne: 1982) 120-129.

<sup>55</sup> For a thorough discussion of the military reforms of the Bourbons in Cuba see Allan Kuethe, *Cuba*. On Ricla's proposals specifically see Chap. 2, pp. 24-49.

militarization and the increased fortification of Cuba. They understood that far reaching commercial and fiscal reforms would be needed to finance the defense initiatives, but military urgency took precedence. The first of Ricla's instructions was to oversee the evacuation of the British from Cuba and that of the Spanish from Florida. Once in possession of the island he was to repair the city's fortifications and to undertake the reorganization of the military forces on the island. While these instructions were similar to those given his predecessors, Ricla was granted extraordinary authority to marshal resources and make decisions about their deployment. The King had approved a general plan for the building and repair of the fortifications, but Ricla was authorized to make adjustments as he saw fit.<sup>56</sup>

Since the shortage of laborers had proven to be a crucial factor in the fall of Havana, Ricla was given the power to determine the number of workers needed and to make contracts and purchase enslaved Africans on royal account. He could import enslaved workers from foreign colonies (something the Crown was usually loath to allow) or transport them directly from Africa, under Spanish or foreign flag, on commission or contract. He was also allowed to include in these contracts the importation of enslaved blacks for the private sector to encourage contractors.<sup>57</sup> To make these contracts even more attractive Ricla was permitted to grant trade concessions. Along with proposals from private slave traders, Royal Company of Havana ultimately imported some 5,645 slaves through Havana between December of 1763 and the end of 1764.<sup>58</sup> Other smaller contracts brought in another 2,300 slaves to the city through 1765. Therefore, legal imports to the city were close to 8,000 slaves, while contraband probably introduced more.<sup>59</sup> Of this group, more than half (4,359) were purchased by the Crown for work in the fortifications. Taking recent estimates that put the number of African slaves imported into Cuba during the British occupation at 4,000 persons, it would seem that, contrary to earlier historiography's emphasis on labor demands in the growing sugar sector, the state's demand for enslaved labor for imperial defense works between 1763 and 1765 was an equal, if not greater, stimulus to imports of enslaved workers than British free trade and sugar expansion under the occupation had been.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, where the Crown had previously employed groups of several hundred enslaved workers on various projects, Ricla signed contracts for thousands of slaves to be delivered between 1763 and 1765. The contractors agreed to sell slaves to the Crown at a

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<sup>56</sup> Interestingly the urgency of Ricla's charge had prompted the King to originally grant Ricla "absolute faculty and jurisdiction." The document was subsequently altered to read "wide [amplia] faculty and jurisdiction." AGI, SD, leg. 1211, Buen Retiro 29 marzo del 1763, in a bundle with the instructions to Ricla.

<sup>57</sup> AGI, SD, leg. 1211 in a bundle with instructions for Ricla on taking possession of the plaza.

<sup>58</sup> Pablo Tornero Tinajero, *Crecimiento económico y transformaciones sociales. Esclavos, hacendados y comerciantes en la Cuba colonial 1760-1840*, (Madrid: Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social, 1996) 37.

<sup>59</sup> García "El mercado de fuerza. . ." 135.

<sup>60</sup> McNeill, *Atlantic Empires*, 167 for the evidence behind the estimate of 4,000 African slaves imported under the British occupation.

discount in return for permission to import such things as flour or to export molasses.<sup>61</sup> This direct resort by the state to the Atlantic slave trade was not new, but the scale of state demand at this moment for enslaved labor was certainly unprecedented.<sup>62</sup> The scale of state demand allowed Ricla to negotiate deals at prices very favorable to the Crown. It also encouraged the state to facilitate the supply of slaves to the private sector.

The general defense plan for the city under Ricla's direction concentrated on the repair of the main existing fort of El Morro, and on the building of two new forts, one on the hill of La Cabaña and another called Atarés, south of the city's arsenal. The repairs and La Cabaña were given priority. Without the successful completion of these two projects all others were deemed superfluous. The work of clearing the trees from La Cabaña was begun immediately with the help of 700 enslaved workers donated by neighboring sugar plantation owners for a period of two months.<sup>63</sup> Once this was completed the next step would be to begin the digging of the foundation and trenches of the fort. Virtually all of the work required for the fort building and repairs in this early phase was arduous, backbreaking labor that required considerable physical strength. These requirements are reflected in the Crown's slave purchases, largely young adult males. The gender ratios were sharply skewed among those destined for state service with estimates of 3,959 enslaved males and 400 females purchased by Ricla.<sup>64</sup>

Because the work was difficult and exhausting, private owners were reluctant to loan or rent their own slaves for those tasks after the initial rush to secure the city in 1763. So Ricla was forced to expand upon earlier labor recruitment practices to quickly marshal labor to get the defense projects under way. The most intense phase of the fortification

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<sup>61</sup> AGI, SD, leg. 1647, bundle dated 1763-1765, expediente sobre contratar. This bundle contains a number of contract proposals with different contractors with a range of prices, concessions and numbers of slaves to be delivered.

<sup>62</sup> For the latest data compiled on the Trans-Atlantic slave trade see, David Eltis, Stephen D. Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert Klein, *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade*, CD-Rom Database (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). For information on the organization of the slave trade to Spanish America dominated by the British in the first third of the eighteenth century see Colin Palmer, *Human Cargoes, The British Slave Trade to Spanish America, 1700-1739* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981). For the period under discussion here, Gloria García, "El mercado de fuerza de trabajo en Cuba: El comercio esclavista (1760-1789)," in *La esclavitud en Cuba* (La Habana: Editorial Academia, 1986).

<sup>63</sup> AGI SD 1212, Carta de Ricla a Arriaga 27 julio 1763, Ricla hoped to obtain 400 to 500 slaves donated by private owners, and also was waiting "con ansia" for a group of Guachinango Indians to be sent from New Spain. In Delgado, "El Conde de Ricla," 90-97, the figure given for the laborers clearing La Cabaña is 700.

<sup>64</sup> The figures for slave purchased by the state vary somewhat. A statement of fort works expenses summarized in December of 1772, gives 4,198 slaves purchased between May of 1763 and the end of 1765, with a credit to the Royal Account for the sale of 283 slaves to the Artillery Company, yielding a total of 4481. AGI, SD 2129, "Estado que manifiesta los gastos, y costos causados en las Reales Obras de Fortificacion proyectadas en la Plaza de la Habana desde 7 de Julio de 1763 que se dio principio al Morro, y Cabaña, y en 25 de Mayo de 1764 al Fuerte de Atarés, hasta 31 de Diciembre de 1772." Francisco Pérez Guzmán, *La Habana clave de un imperio*, 66, gives a figure of 4,400 total purchased for the state. Pablo Tornero cites 4,359 with the gender breakdown. See Tornero, *Crecimiento económico*, 36.

works spanned the years from 1764 through 1769.<sup>65</sup> By the early spring of 1765 there were over 2,000 workers employed in the three main sites of fortification work around Havana. The largest group of workers on these projects was recently arrived, enslaved Africans (*bozales*), who accounted for between 54% and 67% of the total workforce over the year. A much smaller group of Hispanized Crown slaves (*ladinos*) made up 0.5% of the total workforce. Two other groups of slaves were employed on the fortification projects in 1765, a group of slaves that had fled the English, most probably during the occupation, and a smaller group of enslaved workers hired out from private owners. Together they constituted 2.7% of the total workforce. The only other group that came close in numbers to the recently arrived, enslaved Africans was that of the convict laborers who accounted for between 19% and 29% of the total workforce over the year of 1765.

Free workers of color also constituted a very small group of the total workforce in 1765, an average of 1.9%. Native Cubans who were designated by Spanish authorities as white (*paysanos*, as opposed to the free people of color designated as *mulatos* or *negros libres*) were a similar portion of the total workforce for 1765 at 2.0%. Clearly enslaved Africans recently purchased through the Atlantic slave trade were crucial to Ricla's plan to quickly reinforce the battered defenses of Havana. Free workers, black and white, were never more than 5% of the total workforce. They were usually skilled workers hired to do the careful work of stonecutting and masonry. Because the bulk of the work, especially at the beginning of the projects involved heavy, unskilled labor, the state resorted to using a mix of coerced laborers. Since convicts (particularly from Spain, but also New Spain and Cuba) were not numerous in 1763, the urgency of the projects and the difficulty of the labor necessitated the state buying and maintaining a large contingent of enslaved workers in its own name to advance its defense program.

**Table 1**

<b>Workers on Fort Projects, March – October, 1765</b>							
Types of Workers	March	April	May	June	July	August	October
Native Cubans	55	36	44	43	50	52	50
Prisoners	513	446	510	430	616	624	629
Free Mulatos	23	18	20	22	19	20	16
Free Blacks	20	16	21	23	30	31	30
Enslaved Ladinos of the King	13	12	13	13	11	13	13
Bozales of the King	1429	1217	1352	1303	1511	1473	1399
Fugitive Enslaved Blacks	41	46	46	42	49	48	43
Enslaved by Private Owners	16	18	18	18	18	20	12
Workers in Hospital		424	331	378			
	NA				[375]	[375]	[443]
<b>Total Workers</b>	<b>2110</b>	<b>2233</b>	<b>2355</b>	<b>2272</b>	<b>2304</b>	<b>2281</b>	<b>2192</b>

<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately available data on the entire period are not continuous or complete, but good datasets of the workers employed there exist for the years 1765 (7 monthly summaries), late 1767, and 1768 (10 monthly summaries).

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Sources and Notes: AGI, SD, 1647. "Extracto de Revista pasada por Dn. Nicolas Joseph Rapun Cavallero de la orden de Santiago Comisario Real de Guerra de los Extos a los Negros Esclavos del Rey y demas Individuos qye se hallan desterrados en los Travaxos de esta Plaza en los dias cinco, seis, siete, y ocho del corriente mes," 31 marzo 1765. "Estado de la Revista. . ." 24 de abril 1765. "Estado de la Revista. . ." 28 de mayo 1765. "Extracto de Revista. . ." 30 de junio 1765. "Estado de Revista. . ." 31 de julio 1765. "Estado de Revista. . ." 24 de agosto 1765. "Estado de Revista. . ." 27 de octubre 1765. The numbers of worker in hospital in July through October are bracketed here because they were not separated out of the other categories by the compilers of the summary tables in those months. Their numbers were reported in the written summaries.

The summaries list some of the many tasks at which those employed on the fortifications worked. Besides those assigned to the fort sites for digging, hauling and construction; others quarried and cut stone; some made fascines to fill trenches and build batteries. Some worked the ovens and hauled lime and charcoal.<sup>66</sup> The summaries also reveal some specialization among the coerced workers assigned to state defense works. The carting of materials around the fort sites with mules and oxcarts was exclusively the province of prisoners, a group of 60-67 convicts over 1765. After this date the figures for carting were subsumed under one of the fort sites. Carpentry, on the other hand, was carried out by a group of 21 to 25 King's slaves (*bozales del Rey*) whose numbers remained constant throughout the period from 1765 through 1768. Although it was only listed separately for two months of 1765, the making of fascines was done exclusively by 90 of the King's slaves.

Other tasks drew mixed groups of workers. The stone quarries were manned by a handful of *paysanos*, some convicts, and groups of several hundred King's slaves. The lime and charcoal ovens employed both convicts and King's slaves, but the proportion of convicts to enslaved workers grew over the period from March of 1765 to October of 1768. Work in the warehouses (holding foodstuffs, salt, water, etc. for the fort workers) showed a similar progression to greater reliance on convicts over enslaved workers between 1765 and 1768.

Still the vast majority of King's slaves and prisoners were employed at the fort sites themselves. There was a gradual increase in the numbers of free workers employed, especially at the fort works, over the years from 1765 to 1768. The state also increased its use of convict labor both at the forts and at other tasks. But this growing use of free workers and convicts did not offset an overall decline in the total number of workers in all the state's defense works by October of 1768. It was the decline of the use of enslaved workers of all provenances, particularly those enslaved by the King, which accounted for the overall decline in the total workforce.

Besides the heavy work of digging trenches and foundations necessary for fort building, some of the state's slaves were assigned to work with the free skilled workers to learn their trade. The state preferred to use its own enslaved workers for this for several reasons. On the one hand, convict laborers were rarely sentenced to fort works in

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

perpetuity. Some had sentences as short as several months.<sup>67</sup> With Crown slaves the fortification projects could count on benefiting from their training for as long as the project demanded, and the state would benefit from the higher price that an enslaved skilled worker would bring in the always tight market for skilled labor on the island.

The military reorganization of the island after its return from the British prompted the Spanish to reestablish the two artillery companies that had defended Havana before the occupation and a group of Crown slaves was assigned to this company. The summaries for the year 1765 listed a group of 90-99 King's slaves as the only workers under the Artillery Brigade. The earliest summaries list some of the enslaved assigned to the Artillery Brigade as making fascines at a site along the city wall at the Puerta de Tierra. By July of 1765 they were listed at the Atarés fort site south of the Havana arsenal. This group of King's slaves disappears from the general reviews of the forts' workforce but the Royal Commissioner was keeping separate records of the group by the end of 1767. Certain conditions for this particular group of King's slaves seem to have been better than those of their fellows working on the fortifications which suggests that some had acquired skills that made them particularly valuable to the state, perhaps as metalworkers and armorers. During the British siege, slaves skilled in the operation of cannon also had proved very valuable to the defense of El Morro. The number of King's slaves in the artillery company reached around 200 in 1768, but instead of the overwhelmingly male dotation assigned to fort works, the King's slaves in artillery were almost perfectly divided among men and women. They seem to have been allowed to marry and live with their wives and children in the quarters of the Artillery company. There is one mention of an unmarried enslaved man coming to San Isidro from work on the fortifications, but the family groups seem generally to have been maintained. Such accommodations for family life suggest that the state highly valued their skills and planned to keep them as a permanent part of that company.<sup>68</sup>

While state slaves worked at myriad tasks around Havana from the homes of colonial officials, to the Royal Tobacco Factory and the shipyard, conditions for the largest group, the royal slaves on the fort projects were probably the most difficult. For them working in gangs of male laborers, mustered out in groups of 100, under military guard was the rule. Expenses on food rations for all workers on state projects were similar, between 1 real per day for convicts and slaves to 1½ reales per day for free workers. But the housing for the large numbers of recently acquired state slaves was particularly cramped and disagreeable and fort regulations required all workers, enslaved and free to remain on

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<sup>67</sup> AGI, SD, leg. 2136. Free skilled workers were to be given a salary of 8 reales/day and were to be assigned King's slaves "not convicts" to be trained in their trade.

<sup>68</sup> Jacobo de la Pezuela, *Diccionario geográfico, estadístico, histórico de la isla de Cuba*, tomo II (Madrid: Mellado, 1863) 260.

AGI, SD, 2122 contains a series of charts recording the slaves housed in the Cuartel de San Isidro for January-July and September-December of 1768. AGI, SD 1371 contains a document from December of 1784 that lists 58 slave men over 15 years of age 27 of whom were over 60 years of age. 12 males are listed at ages 1 to 15, and 74 women although no age breakdown is given. Unfortunately marital status is not listed either. But the close correspondence in the numbers of men and women may mean that family groups still made up a large portion of the slaves living in the artillery company almost twenty years later.

site during the workweek. Not surprising fort project records indicate that a rising tide of disease, desertions and deaths quickly became a concern for administrators.<sup>69</sup>

Losses of workers to desertions and death certainly reduced the numbers of royal slaves employed at the fort projects and increased officials' worries about the mounting costs of the projects. Other reasons for the state's declining use of its own slaves were varied, but most seem to be related in some measure to the expense of purchasing and maintaining its own force of enslaved laborers. Even though the Crown had been able to purchase thousands of slaves at less than market prices, the expense was still considerable and revenues were short. A summary of expenses in the royal fortification projects compiled in December of 1772 listed the state's purchase of the enslaved at 4,198 individuals. Table 2 shows the state's expenditures in these purchases.

**Table 2**

**State Purchases of Slaves for Fort Works, May 1763 – 1765**

Year	Slaves Purchased	Average Price/pesos	Total/Pesos	Total/Reales
1763	795	150	119,250	954,000
1764	1967	150	295,050	2,362,420
1765	1436	140.8	202,235	1,617,884
Totals	4198		616,684	4,934,304

Sources: AGI, SD, 2129 "Estado que manifiesta los gastos, y costos. . ." 31 Diciembre de 1772. The figures for the number of slaves purchased and their total value in reales are taken from this Estado. A footnote to the Estado states that the slaves were purchased at prices of 130, 150, and 156 pesos but since there is no way to determine how many slaves were purchased at the different prices an average was taken here. The Estado's final total in reales has been preserved in the table though it differs slightly from the total obtained by using the average prices. One peso = 8 reales de vellón. For monetary equivalencies see McNeill, *Atlantic Empires*. . . 212, Appendix B.

The purchase of slaves alone accounted for 50.5% of the expenses incurred in the first two and one-half years of the fortification projects. Labor costs more generally, which included the purchase of enslaved workers, rations, and medical care for slaves and prisoners, the cost of the desertion guards, and the salaries of other employees (not including the engineers) constituted 65% of the total expenses recorded for fort works between May of 1763 and the end of 1765. Yet the island of Cuba never generated enough revenue to pay for its own defenses. During the 1750s the Havana treasury recorded an average annual income of some 162,000 pesos, compelling the Crown to assign to the island a greater portion of the Mexican situado to cover the costs of the permanent garrison, shipbuilding, fort repair, and other state expenses.<sup>70</sup> Still, before the

<sup>69</sup> For conditions endured by workers on the fort projects see letters in AGI, SD, 1647 and Francisco Pérez Guzmán, "Modo de vida de esclavos y forzados en las fortificaciones de Cuba: Siglo XVIII," *Anuario de estudios americanos*, 47 (Sevilla: 1990) 245-253.

<sup>70</sup> Alan J. Kuethe, "Havana in the Eighteenth Century," in Franklin W. Knight and Peggy K. Liss, eds., *Atlantic Port Cities, Economy, Culture, and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650-1850* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991) 18.

British occupation of Havana the situado payments were modest compared with their escalation over the second half of the eighteenth century. Between 1750 and 1755 it amounted to an annual average of 267,000 pesos. During the late 1750s as expenses for shipbuilding rose, the situado climbed to an annual average of 437,000 pesos. But the most intense period of the fortification projects in Havana saw the subsidy payment more than triple to an average of 1,485,000 pesos per year from 1763 to 1769.<sup>71</sup>

With labor expenses running at over 60% of total costs on the fort projects and losses by disease, death, and desertion mounting, by 1765 officials were increasingly concerned about the overwhelming expenses involved in so many large and complex projects. King's slaves were the largest contingent of workers on the fortification projects in its most intense and urgent phase between 1763 and 1765. The highest yearly total of 1,967 slaves employed by the state had been reached in 1764.<sup>72</sup> In the following year, the King ordered the Intendant to begin selling off enslaved unskilled workers to raise money for the fort works.<sup>73</sup> After 1765 the proportion of King's slaves to convict laborers began to decline until by 1769, prisoners outnumbered the enslaved.<sup>74</sup> The report on fort expenses of 1772 listed 423 slaves still owned by the Crown after the state had recouped some 390,456 pesos by selling many of its enslaved workers. At slave prices current in Cuba in the 1760s (250 to 300 pesos) this would have involved the sale of between approximately 1,300 and 1,500 slaves.

At this point it is worth reflecting on the very different approaches by the Spanish state to the deployment of enslaved laborers in ship building versus fort building after the British occupation of Havana in 1762- 1763. The shipyard was able to function effectively both before and after the occupation with a workforce that was largely free. Wages for skilled work in shipbuilding were consistently high and the state had access to the labor of native Cuban skilled workmen as well as workmen passing through the city's port waiting for their vessels to be repaired and provisioned.<sup>75</sup> The state would purchase slaves in its own name for various jobs around the shipyard but these purchases rarely exceeded several enslaved persons at one time. The state did retain a select group of royal slaves as sawyers to ensure a constant and controlled group of workers for that crucial task. But the state was able to control its labor costs by not investing too heavily in the purchase and maintenance of a large dotation of royal slaves. In the past, in moments of crisis, the state had been able to avail itself of groups of royal slaves from other parts of the empire, as well as convicts. The state's most cost effective labor recruitment strategy was probably to hire enslaved workers as needed from private individuals. It employed all of these methods of labor recruitment for state projects after the British occupation but the labor demands of fort construction were unprecedented in

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>72</sup> AGI, SD, 2129, "Estado que manifiesta los gastos, y costos. . ." 31 Diciembre 1772.

<sup>73</sup> See for instance, AGI, SD, 1647 "Relacion de cargo y Data de esta Thesoreria general," dated 5 noviembre 1765 listing receipts for 1 March-31 August, sale of blacks at 220,960 reales out of a total of 11,362,086 reales.

<sup>74</sup> See Table 3.9.

<sup>75</sup> On wages in Havana shipbuilding from the mid-1700s see Marrero, *Cuba economía y sociedad*, vol. VIII, 94.

scale and difficulty because it was not until the eighteenth century that Spain faced the threat of a full-scale military and naval invasion at the strategic center of the empire.

Up to 1763 the Havana shipyard was the largest enterprise on the island, state or private, employing about 800 people, about one-third of them slaves. Since the state contracted out so many aspects of shipbuilding and maintenance it was able to pass significant amounts of the risk and cost of this construction on to the contractors. The shift was especially convenient when the Royal Company of Havana had assumed those risks and costs in the 1740s. Once the Company was relieved of those obligations the Havana shipyard ceased to build many of the large ships of the line, partly because so few contractors were willing to risk financial ruin.<sup>76</sup>

The horror inspired by the British occupation of the key to the Spanish empire's commercial and strategic hub in Havana meant that the Crown would no longer contract out vital defense projects to private entrepreneurs. Instead it assumed direct oversight of the repairs and fort construction around the city beginning in 1763. The scale of these projects had never been attempted before with plans for the large fort on La Cabaña, two smaller ones to the west and south, and repairs to the three existing forts and the city wall. The urgency of the projects was painfully clear from the humiliating circumstances of the Spanish defeat at Havana. To complete these projects the state had to think in new ways about colonial administration, labor recruitment, and commercial policy.

Compared to other Atlantic colonies of European powers, the Spanish empire had not been a major employer of enslaved African labor since the mid-1600s when the gradual recovery of the indigenous populations in the mainland colonies was able to satisfy the demand for labor in the mines of Mexico and Peru. The sugar revolution that had produced such explosive demand for slave labor on other Caribbean islands by the eighteenth century had largely bypassed Cuba. Only a direct military threat to a vital imperial center forced the Spanish Crown to become the dominant slaveholder on the island. To do so Cuba had to be integrated more fully into the networks of slave trading and sugar production that dominated so many other island colonies in the Caribbean.

In addition to planning and organizing the defense works the Captain-General Ricla helped develop and implement a plan for commercial reform that would generate the revenue necessary for imperial defense on the island. He conducted private consultations beginning in the autumn of 1763 with members of the Havana elite to come to a mutually beneficial package of reforms.<sup>77</sup> When Ricla's tenure on the island ended in 1765, a

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<sup>76</sup> The number of ships of the line produced in Havana declined sharply from a high of 12 ships produced in the 1740s to 5 in the 1750s after the Company ended its shipbuilding contract with the Crown. There was an increase in the 1760s to 9 ships after the loss of some of Spain's warships during the siege and then a steady decline through the 1790s in spite of Spain many military commitments over the rest of the eighteenth century. Instead the shipyard increased its production of the smaller frigates and other vessels. Inglis, "The Spanish Naval Shipyard," Table 2, 52.

<sup>77</sup> Allan J. Kuethe and G. Douglas Inglis, "Absolutism and Enlightened Reform: Charles III, the Establishment of the Alcabala, and the Commercial Reorganization in Cuba," *Past and Present*, 109, (Nov. 1985) 125-127.

plan had been approved by the King.<sup>78</sup> News of the final regulations of the commercial reform plan became official in Cuba on 1 March 1766 with the arrival of the new Captain-General, Antonio Bucarely. The new trade regulations represented some significant concessions to Cuban interests. There could now be “free” trade under which the Spanish ports of Alicante, Málaga, Cartagena, Barcelona, Santander, Gijón, La Coruña, Seville, and Cádiz were allowed to trade with Havana. This commerce could be carried in either Spanish or Cuban ships. Trade duties were also rationalized, converting older duties based on weight and volume to *ad valorem* duties in return for a hike in the excise tax (*alcabala*) from 2-4% to 6%. The new regulations were particularly advantageous to sugar interests. Cuban sugar now had greater access to the Spanish market and, despite pressure from the French Bourbons, sugar from the French islands was refused privileged access to Spain. After 1765, the new *alcabala* generated between 40% and 50% of the island’s revenues and Cuba contributed a growing percentage of the revenue for its own defense. Yet the island still relied on subsidies for the bulk of its financial needs. Luckily for imperial finances, royal revenues experienced considerable growth in Mexico during this period, so the *situado* continued to be a fundamental part of Cuban financing.<sup>79</sup>

In spite of reams of parchment from Crown officials on the island cataloguing the problems with carrying out the defense projects in Havana, by the mid-1770s there was evidence of some success. A number of the major fortification projects had been completed or were near completion. La Cabaña was finished in 1776, a major achievement given its size. As a result, the number of workers employed at various tasks around the sites, in warehouses, carting, woodcutting, at the lime kilns, at skilled trades and in the hospitals was now roughly equal to the number employed in actual fort work.<sup>80</sup> Segregation of King’s slaves and prisoners by task was more pronounced in the workforce of the 1770s. Warehouse work was carried out almost exclusively by King’s slaves by a ratio of 10:1. The transportation of supplies by both land and water was the exclusive domain of hundreds of prisoners and a mere handful of free workers. As desertion continued to be a serious problem for fort worker administrators throughout the period, the Crown sought to reduce losses of its own slaves by employing them in more easily monitored areas. As the goals of the defense projects were reached the state began reverting to earlier patterns of employment of royal slaves.

The acquisition of a skill by the enslaved remained an important factor in their retention as slaves of the Crown. The workers listed by specific skills in the summaries, such as coopers, armorers, masons, and smiths were all King’s slaves. Other occupations had smaller, but more mixed groups of workers. The hospitals, for instance, employed only some 44 workers, including a group of 11 soldiers.

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<sup>78</sup> Ricla returned to the court in Madrid and eventually became the Minister of War. O’Reilly brought military reform to Puerto Rico, suppressed the rebellion of French colonists in Louisiana in 1769, and then returned to Spain to become Inspector General of the army. *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 140-143.

<sup>80</sup> AGI, SD, 1211, “Estado[s] que comprende el numero de forzados. . .” dated 30 oct., 27 nov., 1774, 29 enero, 27 feb., and 26 marzo 1775.

Even though the total workforce employed on the fort projects had decreased by the mid-1770s, the state continued to employ over 1,000 workers at these sites a full decade after their inception. The most significant change in the state's deployment of labor on defense projects is visible in its divestiture of its dotation of King's slaves in favor of prisoners. Table 3 shows the available data.

The state was able to recoup about 63% of its initial expenditure for enslaved Africans by selling them to private owners in Cuba as the urgency of the projects diminished and more prisoners became available. 616,788 pesos were spent between 1763 and 1765 on the purchases of King's slaves. Sales of King's slaves between 1765 and 1772 netted 390,455 pesos for the Royal Treasury. The summary of 1772 also listed 423 slaves still owned by the Crown at a value of 126,900 pesos, an average value of 300 pesos/slave, or close to double the original price paid by the Crown. The summary noted the increasing number of deaths and desertions among the King's slaves as a reason for the loss of some 99,432 pesos. Yet the state's power to dictate the price at which it would buy enslaved workers from the *asentistas* between 1763 and 1765, had allowed it to offset some of the immense labor costs of the fortifications projects.

**Table 3**  
**Yearly Averages of King's Slaves and Prisoners**  
**Employed in Havana Fort Works, 1763-1775**

Year	King's Slaves	Prisoners	Total No. of Workers
1763	795	NA	NA
1764	1967	NA	NA
1765	1396	538	2249
1766	NA	NA	NA
1767	1158	964	2309
1768	1072	773	2004
1774	321	980	1517
1775	319	837	1318

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Sources: AGI, SD, 1647, 2129 and 1211.

The state still maintained a workforce of some 670 workers into the 1780s to keep the defense sites in good repair. The fort sites now employed only about 250 workers, 99 of whom were King's slaves. Even with the reduced number of workers in its charge the state maintained considerable segregation by task, as it had over the past 20 years. Warehouse work and skilled occupations like iron working and carpentry were still dominated by King's slaves. Prisoners were used exclusively on the ferries in the bay, at

the slaughterhouse, and in cutting wood. The hospitals still employed a mixed group of workers, although here too, prisoners predominated.<sup>81</sup>

By the 1780s the seemingly endless supply of prisoners from New Spain must have been largely exhausted, because colonial officials now devoted much of their attention to trying to recruit and control free day laborers.<sup>82</sup> In the fall of 1782, with Spain still at war with Britain and Spanish troops engaged in Florida and the Gulf of Mexico, the Captain-General Juan Manuel de Cagigal expressed fears that Havana might again be invaded. He discussed the defense works that were on the point of completion if only the necessary workers could be recruited and retained. He blamed the “well known retreat of day laborers, that are more and more scarce daily. . .”<sup>83</sup> The chief engineer, Luis Huet notified the Captain-General that 1,800 workers would be necessary to finish up the defense works quickly, probably an unrealistic number given the constraints imposed by militia recruitment during wartime. Cagigal tried to alleviate the shortage by publishing a proclamation in the city, calling for workers at the fort sites. Huet reported that proclamation netted 398 day laborers who initially presented themselves for work, but shortly thereafter 193 were missing or had deserted.<sup>84</sup>

Even with the return of peace between Britain and Spain in 1783, the Spanish Crown continued to maintain a workforce of some 600 people on the fort sites. In marked contrast to the workforce 20 years earlier, prisoners now dominated rather than King’s slaves as the major source of labor for state projects. A full two decades after the most intense phase of fortification construction in Havana, in which the labor of King’s slaves was crucial, the number of King’s slaves employed on the fort sites had fallen below 200 people. They also continued to be employed in other jobs in which they had predominated from the 1760s, warehousing, hospital work, and especially in skilled jobs such as metal working and carpentry. Fort work continued to stand in contrast to work in Havana’s shipyard as coerced laborers (now with more convicts employed than royal slaves) predominated.

When free trade in the enslaved was introduced by the Spanish Crown in 1789, the bulk of the major defense works in Havana had been completed and the defense of Havana had been secured until 1898. As the state had marshaled imperial resources to defend Havana it had also dismantled the major obstacles to sugar expansion in Cuba. By 1789 although the state was no longer a major purchaser of enslaved workers in the city’s market, sugar production was poised to take over the economy of the island.

Sugar production in Western Cuba had languished during the first three decades of the eighteenth century. From the late 1600s to around 1720 the number of mills around Havana actually declined. When growth resumed after 1740, expansion shifted to the

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<sup>81</sup> AGI, SD, 1371, “Estado[s] que comprehende el Numero de Forzados. . .” dated 28 nov., 31 diz., 1784 and 30 Enero 1785.

<sup>82</sup> AGI, Cuba, 1311, letter from Luis Huet to Captain-General Juan Manuel de Cagigal, Havana 29 julio 1782. Huet notes the scarcity of laborers and the lack of prisoners from New Spain “that for years have not come from the Kingdom of New Spain. . .”

<sup>83</sup> AGI, Cuba, 1311, letters Huet to Cagigal, Havana, 7 septiembre 1782, and 6 octubre 1782.

<sup>84</sup> AGI, Cuba, 1311, letter Huet to Cagigal, Havana, 28 octubre 1782.

south and east, with land closer to the city often devoted to truck farming and livestock raising to feed the swelling urban population.<sup>85</sup> Still the initial growth in sugar plantations in Western Cuba remained modest in scale and relatively close to Havana, with 50% of sugar mills being within 1 to 3 leagues of the city. The average mill extended to some 990 acres and employed 20 to 30 slaves.<sup>86</sup> Through the first half of the eighteenth century agricultural production in Western Cuba continued to be largely devoted to local consumption with some commercial production of sugar and tobacco.<sup>87</sup> Both Spanish officials and Creole landowners viewed the slave trade as a way to stimulate the productive capacities of the colony. Field Marshall Alejandro O'Reilly, Ricla's second in command, had noted the "lack of Negros. . ." as a principal cause of the backwardness of the island in 1764.<sup>88</sup> Agustín Crame, the military engineer charged with the building of Havana's new fortifications, summed up some of the reasons for the reliance on enslaved African labor in Cuba in 1768.

To think of more migration of new Spaniards would be to sin against good economy. To conduct foreigners would be a costly business, difficult and full of serious obstacles. But even in the case of all things being equal, Europeans would never come to carry out those rigorous country labors that are as though reserved for slavery. Who would come from Europe to be a simple day laborer comparable to an unfortunate slave? And even when one or the other might have accommodated himself to that fate owing to his dismay or misery, where would a competent number be found to do the clearing of new grounds, the cultivating of lands and to employ themselves in the other tasks that the principal products of the island need?<sup>89</sup>

While the Captain-General had found himself with similar problems in finding the necessary laborers for the fortification projects over the course of the 1760s, the state had been able to use increasing numbers of convicts laborers and to divest itself of the majority of its own enslaved workers. The private sector did not have such alternative sources of coercible labor and as the number of sugar mills increased, so too did the demand for enslaved Africans. Table 4 shows the growth in the number of sugar mills in the jurisdiction of Havana, which included the city and its hinterland.

Clearly, while there was growth over the entire period, the most spectacular growth occurred after the mid-1790s when warfare in the Atlantic world had destroyed the sugar economy of Saint Domingue and increased the price of sugar on the European market. With commercial restrictions and competitors eliminated Cuba was rapidly transformed into the third largest sugar producer in the world by the 1820s.

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<sup>85</sup> Fe Iglesias García, "La estructura agraria de La Habana, 1700-1775," *Arbor* (julio-agosto 1991) 92, 100-102.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 104. Iglesias lists the average mill at 30 caballerías, a Cuban caballería being equivalent to about 33 acres. See McNeill, *Atlantic Empires*, Appendix B, 212.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>88</sup> AHN, Estado, 3025, 4, Report of the visita of Field Marshall O'Reilly dated 12 abril 1764.

<sup>89</sup> AGI, SD, 1157, quoted in Tornero, *Crecimiento económico*, 25.

**Table 4**  
**Growth in Number of Sugar Mills in Jurisdiction of Havana 1740-1817**

Year	Number of Mills	Average Yearly Increase in Number of Mills
1740	43	2.3
1759	88	5.0
1761	98	4.4
1778	174	3.0
1796	228	3.0
1800	308	20.0
1817	534	13.2

Source: Tornero, *Crecimiento económico*, 158.

While some previous scholarship has recognized, in a general way, the importance of state policy to later economic development in Cuba, the evidence on the fort projects of the period 1763-1790 point to a number of ways in which the state shaped that development and the crucial catalyst to development provided by warfare. By the early eighteenth century state slavery in the Spanish empire and in Cuba in particular had evolved as a vital but not dominant component of imperial defense. Royal slaves were procured and deployed in myriad sites around the city among them the battlefield, the shipyard's sawmill, and fort sites. The criteria for determining whether the state would purchase and maintain its own slaves for a particular task were dependent on the relative urgency of any project weighed against the fiscal resources available, the nature of the work to be performed, and what laborers could be recruited at a given moment. The state always considered its own slaves as assets which needed to be deployed carefully. If a project were particularly urgent or strategic, the Crown would often commit some of its own slaves to the project to ensure a labor supply. But the continued presence of King's slaves on a given project depended on the empire-wide competition for resources. The King's offices were constantly flooded by urgent petitions from all the far flung points of the empire. With warfare and attacks on multiple fronts, the success of the defense projects in Havana is a testament to the arduous labor of the state's enslaved workers as well as to the initiative and organizational skills of its officials in Havana.

These defense projects forged deep linkages throughout the Cuban economy. The state's extraordinary investment in state enslavement in the 1760s was indeed temporary, but the many changes the state enacted to successfully complete the defense projects profoundly altered the allocation and orientation of all major factors of production on the island.

The state's demand for land changed the earlier, more casual attitudes toward land titles and usage by confiscating the land necessary for new forts, warehouses, barracks, and parade grounds. This demand coupled with population growth, increased land values in and around the city. When the Royal Treasury began compensating property owners

for lands claimed for defense purposes by the state after 1779, many small and larger landholders benefited.<sup>90</sup>

The state's demand for labor kept wages high, especially for skilled work. The urgent need for coercible labor on the fort projects was at least as great a stimulant to the slave trade to the island as free trade had been under the British occupation. State projects alone may have increased the city's enslaved population by 50%, while similar numbers of slaves were sold into the private sector between 1763 and 1765 as a result of contracts signed by the state with *asentistas*. Also the nature of the work to be performed in the initial stages of fort construction demanded work regimes that foreshadowed those used on Cuban sugar plantations decades later. The state helped create the economic framework for plantation expansion and modeled the successful deployment of enslaved labor in both skilled trades and in menial tasks.

Income within the empire was redistributed as much of the higher quantities of silver extracted from Mexico were funneled into Havana. The local economy was enriched, as the state contracted out many of the necessities of the fort projects -- slave procurement, transport, brick manufacture, lime and charcoal production. The state purchased provisions and supplies for its troops, workers, and projects. It confiscated, purchased, and rented land and buildings in and around the city. The tremendous expenses associated with the fortification projects also made colonial subjects the state's creditors, as *situado* payments fell in arrears. As Allan J. Kuethe has noted, ". . . this inflow of treasure established a level of financial liquidity that was unique in the empire."<sup>91</sup> Although it would be difficult to document, many scholars believe this capital was an important factor in the expansion of sugar production after the Seven Year's War.<sup>92</sup> State initiative and enterprise were crucial to all of these developments.

What insights can the case of Cuba in the late eighteenth century bring to the study of the development of an Atlantic economy? First, it should return the Spanish empire to a more vital position in the comparative studies of imperial warfare and economic development in the eighteenth century. In spite of the ignominy of Spanish defeat in 1762, Spain was able to recoup through reform and innovation. It successfully defended its empire and challenged the British in the War for American Independence, even regaining territory lost in the Seven Years' War. Much has been written comparing political and economic development in Britain and France as a result of imperial warfare

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<sup>90</sup> See Sherry Johnson, "La Guerra Contra los Habitantes de los Arrabales': Changing Patterns of Land Use and Land Tenancy in and Around Havana, 1763-1800," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 77:2, (1997) 181-209. She concludes, ". . . military spending, and its significant impact on the spatial arrangement of land surrounding the island's primary city, brought economic benefits that began almost from the moment royal administrators disembarked in 1763. Equally important, royal policies benefited many levels of Havana's society." p. 208.

<sup>91</sup> Allan J. Kuethe, "Havana in the Eighteenth Century," 24.

<sup>92</sup> See for instance, Franklin W. Knight, "Origins of Wealth and Sugar Revolution in Cuba," 231-253, especially p. 242. Also Moreno Fraginals, *El ingenio*, I: 65. For a summary of this scholarship on revenues from defense spending in Cuba see Kuethe, "Havana in the Eighteenth Century," 14-25.

in this era. Spain has not been included largely because of its perceived tardiness in industrialization and political liberalization which so often lurk unarticulated in comparative assessments of the European powers.<sup>93</sup> If the issue of failure to “modernize” is at least left to the side, one ask why Spain was more successful than its rivals, at least until 1808, in making its American empire support itself while retaining political control? Spain has often been cast as the backward and decrepit empire clinging to its colonies with outmoded policies. This vision may have some justification by the 1830s after the chaos and devastation wrought by the Napoleonic era, but it does not reflect the state’s actions in Cuba in the 1760s. There the state used its power and resources to encourage private entrepreneurs to expand into the most dynamic economic sectors of the era, slave trading and sugar production.

Questions about the effects of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery on the economies of European metropolitan economies are also issues that have been intensely debated both by participants and later historians. The question of the role of slavery in bringing about the British Industrial Revolution remains central to the field, especially since the publication of Eric Williams’ *Capitalism and Slavery*.<sup>94</sup> Again, if the preoccupation with industrialization is suspended, a range of comparative questions arises, suggested by the evidence presented here on state slavery in eighteenth century Havana. Although debate continues on the answers, some substantial scholarship exists on such questions as what effect did Cuba’s later incorporation into the Atlantic economy as a sugar colony have on the institution and experience of slavery on the island, on the island’s subsequent economic and political development, on its development relative to other sugar producers in the Caribbean?<sup>95</sup> But the subject of state slavery has not been treated in comparative perspective in the Atlantic context raising the question of the importance of state enslavement to the colonial projects of Spain’s European rivals.

The eighteenth century shows marked parallels between the actions of both Britain and Spain with regard to state slavery as they struggled for supremacy in the Caribbean. In spite of the significant differences in colonial development between the British- and the Spanish-colonized Caribbean, both powers increased their commitment to the practice in the last half of the 1700s. Besides the case of the siege of Havana, when renewed warfare broke out in 1792 against Revolutionary France the British faced urgent military

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<sup>93</sup> For an insightful discussion of the weight of disparaging comparisons in historiography on Spanish development so often couched in terms of decline, backwardness, and failure, see David R. Ringrose, *Spain, Europe, and the “Spanish miracle,” 1700-1900*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), especially Chapter 1, “Perceptions and perspectives,” 3-28.

<sup>94</sup> Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944) and more recent reassessments of his thesis and the resultant historiography such as Barbara L. Solow, ed. *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and Barbara L. Solow and Stanley L. Engerman, eds. *British Capitalism and Caribbean Slavery: The Legacy of Eric Williams*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Also Joseph Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England, A Study in International Trade and Economic Development*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>95</sup> A short list of works would include Moreno Fraginals, *El ingenio* and his “Peculiaridades de la esclavitud en Cuba,”; Herbert Klein, *Slavery in the Americas*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Franklin W. Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba during the Nineteenth Century*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970)

concerns in some ways similar to those faced by the Spanish in 1762. A major commitment of resources and manpower was necessary to defend Britain's West Indian empire and quell the slave rebellion in Saint Domingue. British government finally resorted to the purchase of slaves directly from Africa for the formation of the West Indian Regiments, reaching an estimated 13,400 enslaved soldiers by 1807.<sup>96</sup> How can we explain the timing of this action in the case of Britain, which was moving away from support for the transatlantic slave trade by then?

In 1815 the West Indian Regiments were disbanded, but as threats to Britain's imperial commitments in the Caribbean approximated those to Spain's in the eighteenth century, state enslavement had proven crucial to British imperial defense. What effects did such a large contingent of slaves employed as soldiers rather than menial workers have on their experience of enslavement? How did eighteenth century imperial investments in defense by Spain's rivals affect the economies of their Caribbean colonies? Is Cuba unique in the transformative effects of state slavery and imperial warfare on its economy?

One final thought surfaces in thinking about imperial states making war in the eighteenth century Caribbean. If the "sinews" of imperial power and war<sup>97</sup> were embedded in a state's access to money, they were also embedded in that state's access to muscle, in this case the coerced labor of slaves. So a worthwhile question would be, who did the physical work of constructing and defending the Atlantic empires and how might their effort be measured and evaluated as part of the history of an Atlantic economy?

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<sup>96</sup> Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, 55.

<sup>97</sup> The phrase is borrowed from Brewer, *The Sinews of Power*, who quotes Cicero, *Orationes Philippicae*, "The sinews of War are infinite money."