The Sinews of Spain's American Empire: Forced Labor in Cuba from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries¹

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The importance of forced labor as a key component of empire building in the early modern Atlantic world is well known and there is a rich scholarly bibliography on the main forms of labor coercion that European colonizers employed in the Americas—labor tribute, indenture, penal servitude, and slavery. Much of this scholarship on forced labor has focused on what might be called “productive” labor, usually in the private sector, and its connections to the growth of capitalism: work to extract resources for sustenance, tribute, or export. This focus on productive labor and private entrepreneurship is particularly strong in the scholarship on the Anglo-Atlantic world, especially the shifting patterns of indenture and slavery in plantation agriculture, and their links to English industrial capitalism.²

The historical development of labor regimes in the Spanish empire, on the other hand, grew from different roots and traversed a different path. Scholars have recognized the importance of government regulations (or lack thereof) as a factor in the political economy of imperial labor regimes, but rarely are

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 - 2 For an introduction to this bibliography see Eric Williams, *Capital and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994[1944]); Barbara L. Solow, ed., *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); David W. Galenson, “The Rise and Fall of Indentured Servitude in the Americas,” *Journal of Economic History* vol. 44, no. 1 (1984): 1–26; David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Russell R. Menard, *Sweet Negotiation: Sugar, Slavery and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2006).

the labor needs and employment patterns of the state itself foregrounded.³ Therefore to analyze the political economy of labor in Spanish America from a different perspective, this essay focuses on what might be called “constructive” or “defensive” labor and the imperial state as an agent of labor recruitment and employment, exploring three points of argument. The first contends that Spain’s resilience and longevity as an imperial power were due in part to the crown’s access, both at home and in the Americas, to large groups of people vulnerable to coercion and to its success in employing a wide range of methods of coercion to extract their labor for defense and development. Over time a symbiosis developed between the political and economic needs of the empire and its labor requirements. Different forms of forced labor could be employed to establish and sustain colonies and generate revenue, but labor coercion was also an effective method of controlling dissent and rebellion in the metropolis and the colonies. The second point of argument contends that Spain was distinctive in the importance of constructive and defensive labor to the physical and social construction of its American empire. As the earliest and initially the wealthiest of the American colonizers, Spain expended greater human and fiscal resources to defend that wealth from the 1500s into the eighteenth century. As such, marshalling the people necessary to build and staff the infrastructure of an early modern maritime empire (ships, ports, and forts) was a crucial component of the political economy of Spain’s American empire. Labor recruitment for state service shaped relationships between the crown and its many subjects and it created markets for labor that affected opportunities and costs for private employers. The third point of argument addresses a more speculative question. Were the traditions from which Spain drew its imperial policies of labor recruitment and deployment also a factor in the longevity of the Spanish empire? Crown labor policies grew out of historical contexts in which a measure of subjugation or coercion of labor was the norm, but a norm that was mediated to some degree by an ideal of mutual obligation between the state as an employer and its workers. Discourses about rights were most often couched in terms of an individual or group’s right to the king’s benevolence, protection, or succor at least until the eighteenth century. Hence, most of the unfree workers who built the Spanish American empire were considered subjects or dependents of the crown and as such had access to both the king’s

3 For instance, on the importance of government regulations see E. Van Den Boogaart and P. Emmer, “Colonialism and Migration: An Overview,” In *Colonialism and Migration: Indentured Labour Before and After Slavery* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publisher, 1986), 7 and Stanley L. Engerman, “Servants to Slaves to Servants’: Contract Labour and European Expansion,” 267–270 in the same volume and the included bibliography for both essays.

grace and royal justice. Though we have ample evidence of workers' resistance to imperial labor exactions, the crown negotiated a sufficient balance between upholding its working subjects' rights to sustenance, humane treatment, and royal justice and enforcing its will through punishment and violence often enough to build and sustain its empire physically and ideologically. Thus Spain was able to settle colonies, mine precious metals, build forts and ships, and staff an army and navy without generating resistance serious enough to bring down the monarchy or the empire until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The Spanish colony of Cuba is an especially useful example for exploring the political economy of forced labor in imperial service. The island remained a Spanish colony until 1898, much later than most of the rest of the empire. Also, in contrast to other Euro-American colonies in the Americas, particularly those in the Caribbean, Cuba experienced a wide range of development phases based on different regimes of forced labor: an early mining economy based largely on indigenous tribute labor up to the mid-1500s, a long phase of more than two centuries as a main hub of Spain's network of maritime trade and defense based increasingly on African slavery, a reliance on both penal servitude and slavery during the imperial wars of the 1700s, and a shift away from slavery in the public sector toward convicts and indentured laborers as the private sector, plantation economy expanded in the 1800s.

An examination of imperial labor regimes in colonial Cuba offers both an overview of forced labor as a foundational component of the political economy of Spain's American empire and an examination of those policies and practices in comparative perspective. Though the state rarely employed only one type of labor for any task, for clarity's sake this analysis is organized mostly by type of laborer (free, military, labor tributary, enslaved, convict, indentured) and the kinds of imperial occupations at which they worked to explore general patterns of who did what kinds of work for the state and why.

Free Spanish Emigration to America

Given the importance of indenture as a form of labor coercion in the establishment of England and France's American empires, it is worth asking why this was not the case for Spanish America. Much of the answer lies in the significant opportunities presented by the human and mineral resources of the Caribbean and mainland Spanish colonies compared with those resources in North America or the Lesser Antilles before 1650. Another important factor was the Spanish crown's policies toward emigration and toward labor by its diverse colonial subjects.

Spain's period of most extensive imperial expansion, the 1490s to about 1570, was also one of population growth on the peninsula.⁴ The Spanish crown tried mightily to restrict emigration to America to mostly Castilian Catholics with only limited success: requiring licenses from the House of Trade and proof of *limpieza de sangre* and requiring all passengers to the Indies to depart through Seville. Observing crown regulations often required emigrants to spend months traveling first to their birthplaces, then to Seville, to document their ancestry, await the issuance of their licenses, and then the sailing of the Indies fleet. The total number of emigrants from Spain to the Americas remained relatively small—an average of 2,000–2,500 per year or 200,000–250,000 over the sixteenth century, according to one commonly cited estimate.⁵ Another scholar estimates that 437,000 emigrants left Spain for America from 1500 to 1650.⁶

The costs of passage were usually negotiated with the ships' captains and included charges for baggage, rations of food, water, and firewood. Most emigrants had to sell their property and belongings to pay the customary half of the cost up front. Some took out loans or relied on remittances from family and friends already in the Indies to pay the rest, due within thirty days of arrival in the Americas.⁷ Others agreed to work for relatively short periods to pay off the debt. The time and expense involved in legal emigration usually meant that few poor Spaniards could afford the trip unless they were part of a wealthier person's entourage. Legal emigrants generally included royal officials and clergy or family groups, often of merchants, all of whom traveled with their servants and retainers. Individuals migrating "unattached" were uncommon as

4 J.H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2006), 52, estimates growth from about 4 to perhaps 6.5 million in the Castilian population over the sixteenth century. Jorge Nadal y Oller, *La población española (Siglos XVI a XX)* (Barcelona: Ediciones Ariel, 1966), 28, contends that the high tide of population growth in Castile did not extend beyond 1570.

5 Elliott, *Empires*, 52. B.H. Slicher Van Bath, "The Absence of White Contract Labour in Spanish America during the Colonial Period," in *Colonialism and Migration: Indentured Labour Before and After Slavery*, edited by P.C. Emmer (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986), 25.

6 Ida Altman and James Horn, "Introduction," in *To Make America. European Emigration in the Early Modern Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 4–5 for the Spanish estimates compared with those of emigrants from the other Atlantic imperial metropolises—Portugal, France, and England. Altman and Horn note that there are virtually no estimates of total emigration from Spain for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

7 Auke Pieter Jacobs, "Legal and Illegal Emigration from Seville, 1550–1650," in *To Make America. European Emigration in the Early Modern Period*, eds. Ida Altman and James Horn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 59–67.

emigrants more often traveled within the bonds of family or clientage relationships. As one historian has noted "even the conquerors were not solitary lions."⁸

Artisans and other working people whose skills were in demand in the colonies also emigrated in increasing numbers from the mid-sixteenth century onward.⁹ Emigrants who were skilled craftsmen sometimes traveled with an apprentice or servants. The norm for apprentices in Peru, for example, was a two- to three-year term of service after which the apprentice received a set of tools, clothing, or money, or sometimes all three. Even in skilled work white apprentices were soon joined by Amerindians and mestizos. Because of the high demand for skilled workers in the Indies, artisans also found it lucrative to train enslaved blacks in their trades and then sell them at a profit.¹⁰

The transatlantic journey and the new colonial environment certainly had their risks, particularly high mortality in the new disease environments. Yet, historian Ida Altman has concluded that the "rapid and precocious" development of Spanish America made "a variety of opportunities available to potential emigrants from all levels of society." Unlike many of the colonies of other European empires, these opportunities were sufficient to sustain Spanish emigration to the Americas with "little or no systematic governmental or commercial organization and intervention."¹¹ Wealthier Spanish emigrants had little trouble finding people who were willing to set sail in their retinues and agree to a period of work on arrival in the Indies.¹² White Spaniards in the Americas enjoyed freedom from the worst of the menial tasks because those jobs employed so many Amerindians, Africans, and mixed race peoples.¹³

8 Slicher Van Bath, "The Absences of White Contract Labour," 28.

9 Peter Boyd-Bowman, *Patterns of Spanish Emigration to the New World* (Buffalo: SUNY at Buffalo, 1973), 72. Boyd-Bowman's data shows that by the mid-1500s the numbers of "lone adventurers" progressively diminished and more emigrants were professional men, government and ecclesiastical officials and their entourages, skilled craftsmen or servants of large households. One in every sixteen male migrants was a merchant or factor.

10 Peter Boyd-Bowman, *Indice geobiográfico de cuarenta mil pobladores españoles de América en el Siglo* vol. I, 1493–1519 (Bogotá: Instituto de Caro y Cuervo, 1964), 225, 228 and Boyd-Bowman, *Indice de cuarenta mil pobladores españoles de América en el Siglo* svI, vol. II, 1520–1539 (Mexico: Ed. Jus. Academia Mexicana de Genealogía y Heráldica, 1968), 346, 526 for examples of apprentices listed on emigration licenses. Lockhart, *Spanish Peru*, III–III2 for a discussion of the different groups of people working as apprentices.

11 For the mortality estimate, J.H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World*, 49. The quotation is in Ida Altman and James Horn, eds. "Introduction," in *To Make America*, 14.

12 Jacobs, "Legal and Illegal Emigration," 79.

13 Lockhart, *Spanish Peru*, 125 contends that an important characteristic of sixteenth-century Peru was that white Spaniards largely disappeared from the lower levels of the agricultural

Volunteering for military service in the Indies was another way for poorer white Spaniards to emigrate without contracting significant debt or labor obligations. This stream of emigration was more likely to attract the solitary migrant. Soldiers were needed for fixed garrisons such as the one established in Havana in the second half of the sixteenth century and to protect the silver fleets at sea.¹⁴ Recruitment of soldiers for the armed Indies merchant ships was usually carried out in the areas around Seville.¹⁵ Desertion rates among both soldiers and sailors tended to be high, providing several avenues for unlicensed emigration to the Spanish colonies. Military commanders whose soldiers deserted before the sailing of the fleet from Seville could “sell” the open slot in their squads to illegal emigrants. On arrival in the Indies desertion among soldiers and sailors reached close to twenty percent in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, meaning that there were years when illegal emigrants outnumbered legal ones.¹⁶

Overall, the opportunities for whites in the Spanish American colonies kept the Spanish immigrant population comparatively free of the legal obligations to labor that constrained their mobility or choice of employment, and the crown refused to allow a formal system of indenture for white Spaniards to cover the costs of passage.¹⁷ By the early decades of the seventeenth century Spain had suffered a demographic decline due to epidemics, expulsions of Jews and *moriscos*, and losses in warfare. Thus, in a period in which some Northern European states were worried about “surplus” populations, the Spanish crown had no incentive to encourage emigration to its American colonies, but opportunities were sufficient to provide largely voluntary workers for skilled

sector. Such work, like mining and much domestic service, was done instead by blacks, Amerindians, and later generations of mixed race peoples.

- 14 Alejandro de la Fuente, *Havana and the Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 5.
- 15 De la Fuente, *Havana*, 51. Armed convoys of ships to guard the Indies trade from Spanish America to Seville were established in the 1530s and a formal annual fleet system was in place by the 1560s.
- 16 Jacobs, “Legal and Illegal Emigration,” 75–79. Jacobs notes that in 1614 there were 460 deserters from the galleons’ crews to the Americas and only 353 legal emigrants (79).
- 17 Altman and Horn, “Introduction,” in *To Make America*, 15. Elliott, *Empires*, 51–53 argues that the large non-white population in Spanish America meant that “there was no extensive labour market in the Spanish Indies to provide immigrants work” (53). Boyd-Bowman, *Patterns of Spanish Emigration to the New World*, 80 notes that by the second half of the sixteenth century there was a steady increase in the number of people emigrating “as servants in the retinue of some high-ranking official of Church or State.”

labor and in army and naval service in Spain's American empire from the late 1400s into the 1700s.¹⁸

Military Service

Forced levies and impressments for army and naval service in the Atlantic were two forms of labor coercion that Spain was able largely to avoid until the Caribbean became a major battleground of imperial rivalry in the eighteenth century. In contrast to labor recruitment for its Mediterranean galleys, the crown sought mostly free workers for the Atlantic navy emphasizing less compulsion and more positive incentives than it used in the recruitment of galley oarsmen and arsenal workers for its Mediterranean navy.

Though some slaves served in the Atlantic fleets, most sailors to the Indies were free men, ninety per cent of whom came from the regions of Andalusia in the south and Cantabria in the north.¹⁹ With a rapidly growing peninsular population in the first half of the sixteenth century the merchant and military fleets were able to recruit some 40,000 men, mostly volunteers, among the native born. This was in part due to higher wages for sailors than rural day-laborers, though these benefits were eroded by inflation from the late sixteenth into the seventeenth century.²⁰ The recruits most likely to be forced into service were homeless or orphaned boys or young men captured on the streets of Seville by the agents of ship owners to be pages or apprentices on an upcoming voyage.²¹

Pay for sailors on the royal armadas was lower than wages offered on privately-owned merchant vessels and over the sixteenth century all sailors were increasingly proletarianized. Yet, as historian Pablo Pérez-Mallaína has

18 Slicher Van Bath, "The Absence of White Contract Labour," 26.

19 Pablo E. Pérez-Mallaína, *Spain's Men of the Sea: Daily Life in the Indies Fleets in the Sixteenth Century*, trans. Carla Rahn Phillips (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 38–39.

20 For comparative data on the size of the populations of the main Atlantic imperial powers during the era of colonization see Stanley L. Engerman and Kenneth L. Sokoloff, "Factor Endowments, Institutions, and Differential Paths of Growth Among the New World Economies: a View from Economic Historians of the United States," in *How Latin America Fell Behind* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 265, Table 10.2. On wages in the early seventeenth century Spanish fleets and infantry Spain, see Carla Rahn Phillips, *Six Galleons for the King of Spain* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), Appendix C, Tables 10–13, 237–240.

21 Pérez-Mallaína, *Spain's Men*, 28, 76–78.

argued, sailors in the Indies fleets were “not obliged to render personal services” and “could not, with impunity, be treated unjustly or cruelly.” His deep research in the Spanish court of appeals records in the Seville’s House of Trade reveals substantial evidence that sailors’ accusations of mistreatment were taken seriously and abusive ships’ masters could be punished with fines and jail time.²²

By the seventeenth century both Spanish population growth and trade with the Indies had ebbed, though military demand for sailors increased as Spain got involved in the Thirty Years’ War after 1618.²³ Soon the Spanish state found it necessary to impose more incentives, both positive and punitive, to advance naval recruitment. In 1625 it instituted a mandatory registration plan known as the *matrícula* to generate a listing of all men in Spain with any seafaring experience. The “carrot” was tax exemptions for voluntary registrants with the “stick” of penalties for those who tried to escape it. When thousands of men for a fleet needed to be recruited royal officials or their contractors would use these lists for naval levies in various regions of Spain. Thus, in times of crisis the crown resorted to forced service. Coercive recruitment was not unique to the Spanish navy; all early modern powers resorted to such tactics to maintain a navy.²⁴ The crown also hired foreign ships and sailors in Spain’s European

22 Pérez-Mallaína, *Spain’s Men*, 191–196. In the argument of the proletarianization of sailors in the early modern era Pérez-Mallaína follows Marcus Rediker’s *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American World, 1700–1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987). But Pérez-Mallaína contrasts the Spanish courts’ response to sailors’ grievances to Rediker’s examination of the British Admiralty courts’ bias in favor of ship captains’ authority and the rights of capital. Instead, Pérez-Mallaína contends that Spanish monarchs and their advisers “believed their duty lay in protecting the rights of the weak” (196).

23 Phillips, *Six Galleons*, 8–9.

24 David C. Goodman, *Spanish Naval Power 1589–1665: Reconstruction and Defeat* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 258–259. Goodman emphasizes currency manipulations that caused drastic fluctuations of inflation and deflation as the main reason for Spain’s difficulties in maintaining a navy, along with the extent of Spain’s defense commitments relative to its European rivals, and the royal treasury’s repeated bankruptcies as factors in restricting resources available for naval expansion. Carla Rahn Phillips, “The Labour Market for Sailors in Spain,” in *“Those Emblems of Hell”? European Sailors and the Maritime Labour Market, 1570–1870*, Research in Maritime History, no. 13, eds. Paul van Royen, Jaap Bruijn and Jan Lucassen (St. John’s, Newfoundland: International Maritime Economic History Association, 1997), 342 argues that physical coercion for recruitment to Spanish naval service was rare, though economic coercion in the lack of viable alternatives likely played an important role in individuals’ decisions to go to sea. Phillips, *Six Galleons*, 116, 141–142 gives two examples of forced service, but says this coercion must have been rare.

colonies and among its allies, especially in the Mediterranean ports of Ragusa, Naples, and Genoa.²⁵

Thus, the two branches of Spain's navy evolved distinct patterns of labor recruitment and levels of coercion; the galleys became a notorious site of forced labor, floating prisons to exploit slaves and punish criminals from which few returned. The Atlantic fleets, on the other hand, were more able to recruit free workers as sailors in part due to depressed agricultural wages in Spain and the relative success of state paternalism in offering incentives. Also, though the fortunate were few, men volunteered based on the perceived opportunities that awaited in the Americas, even for those who deserted from military service. In the vast Spanish American empire capturing and punishing deserters was not well organized much before the eighteenth century.²⁶

Besides their duties as soldiers and sailors, men in military service also provided constructive labor to the crown. After the mid-sixteenth century Havana had a permanent army garrison and its soldiers could be employed digging trenches for the city's first *zanja* (fresh water canal) and as laborers in early fort construction projects.²⁷ Additionally, the Indies fleets employed both sailors and soldiers to ply Spain's Atlantic sea lanes and defend silver shipments. For the months they were in Havana awaiting their return to Seville sailors could hire out their labor in the shipyards, especially if they were skilled carpenters or caulkers.²⁸ Similar to the staffing of Spain's Atlantic fleets the building of its ships relied mostly on free laborers.²⁹

While Spain's empire afloat relied mostly on free workers, except for the human-powered galleys, its land-based defenses and infrastructure used a higher proportion of coerced labor. This may have been true in part because land fortifications required tremendous outputs of labor over many years, much of it unskilled, in contrast to building and sailing ships on the Atlantic.

25 Phillips, "The Labour Market," 333 and Phillips, *Six Galleons*, 119–151 and Appendix C, 237–240.

26 Pérez-Mallaína, *Spain's Men*, 215.

27 On the building of the *zanja* see De la Fuente, *Havana*, 108–110; Marrero, *Cuba, economía y sociedad*, vol. 2, 164, 269–270; Miguel A. Puig-Samper and Consuelo Naranjo Orovio, "El abastecimiento de aguas a la ciudad de la Habana: de la Zanja Real al Canal de Vento," in *Obras hidráulicas en América colonia* (Madrid: Ministerio de Obras Públicas, Transportes y Medio Ambiente, 1993), 81–83.

28 De la Fuente, *Havana*, 77–80 on the numbers of soldiers stationed in Havana from the 1570s to around 1610.

29 For more detail on the labor regime in eighteenth-century Havana's royal shipyard see Evelyn Jennings, "War as the Forcing House of Change," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd Series, vol. 63, no. 3 (July 2005): 411–440.

Also on land, the empire had access to larger numbers of tribute laborers or could more easily import and police populations of slaves and convicts, which will be discussed at length below.

Labor Tribute

When the Spanish extended conquest and territorial expansion to the New World after 1492, they transported slavery, labor tribute, and penal servitude as developed on the peninsula to their American colonies, but only rarely did they bring to the Americas the people subjected to those regimes in Spain. Rather, the Spanish forced their new American subjects, the Amerindians, to work, though the specific coercive regimes shifted over time. Spain, unique among its European competitors, was able to claim territories inhabited by many millions of indigenous peoples, most of who were subjected to varying regimes of coerced labor within a decade of contact.

Estimates of the size of the Americas' indigenous population before European contact remain inexact and contested, but some rough figures will make the point. By 1550 the Spanish had claimed and begun to settle the territories that would constitute their American empire into the eighteenth century. The most densely populated and most highly developed regions of the New World were all under Spanish control. Spain's first colony on Hispaniola had an estimated population of several hundred thousand native inhabitants in the 1490s. Cuba's total indigenous population may have been about 112,000 living mostly in the eastern portion of the island.³⁰ The large native empire of central Mexico may have had between sixteen to eighteen million people in 1520, the Andean region perhaps another thirteen to fifteen million. All of North America (excluding Mexico), on the other hand, had only an estimated three to four million native people.³¹

30 For Hispaniola see Maximo Livi-Bacci, "The Depopulation of Hispanic America after the Conquest," *Population and Development Review*, vol. 32, no. 2 (June 2006), 200. For Cuba, Louis A. Pérez, Jr. *Cuba. Between Reform and Revolution*, 3rd ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 14.

31 Suzanne Austin Alchon, "Appendix: The Demographic Debate," *A Pest in the Land* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 147–172 contains a review of twentieth-century estimates of and debates about the size of the pre-contact indigenous population of the Americas. For her conclusions on the most plausible estimates of populations by region see 160–172: Hispaniola (166), the entire Caribbean (167), Mexico (163), the Andes region (169), North America (160), and the entire hemisphere (172).

The regimes of tribute labor imposed in the Americas had deep roots in Spain's long history as a frontier of warfare between Christian and Muslim states. Armed conflict between the increasingly powerful Castilian monarchy and Muslim polities generated models of subjugation of conquered peoples and the extraction of their labor that were transferred and practiced in the New World. For instance, victorious Christian military commanders on the peninsula were often rewarded with grants of land and labor tribute known as *encomiendas* from the newly-conquered, sedentary Muslim populations in southern Spain, a practice that was later adapted to the conquered territories of the New World.

On both sides of the Atlantic variations of the *encomienda* as labor tribute were key instruments used by the Spanish crown to establish its rule in newly conquered territories with large settled populations. In Spain's American colonies the *encomienda* was a grant only of the labor of a group of natives and did not include land. Though the *encomienda* served to organize the labor of conquered subjects, it served other political and cultural goals as well. The grant of an *encomienda* rewarded loyal Spanish expeditioners at little cost to the crown, but they were held at the king's pleasure and usually were not inheritable. The *encomiendas* also used the political leadership of indigenous communities to muster laborers for service to Spaniards, further reducing the crown's costs. The crown could and did rescind, confiscate, and reassign *encomiendas* and ultimately abolished them in 1542 to curb the power of the early conquistadors. Initially, the cultural goals of the *encomienda* were to use the grants as a vehicle for Christianization by charging the *encomenderos* with the conversion and protection of their consigned Amerindians. The Spanish crown realized its economic, political, and cultural goals through the *encomienda* with varying success throughout the Americas, but native *encomendados* (the consigned natives) performed much of the labor that established mining centers in the Caribbean and the mainland colonies.³²

Though Columbus found no gold in Cuba on his first trip to the island in 1492, when the conquest of the island was undertaken in 1511 the expedition found gold in both the eastern and western halves of the island. Cuba's first Spanish settlers were keen to exploit these mineral deposits and by 1513 King Ferdinand granted Cuba's governor, Diego Velázquez, the power to establish

32 For a summary of the meaning of *encomienda* in Spain and the Americas and its legal precedents see Francisco J. Andrés Santos, "Encomienda y usufructo en Indias," *Legal History* vol. 69, nos. 3/4 (September 2001): 245–248. One of the best descriptions in English remains James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwartz, *Early Latin America* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 21–22; 68–70.

encomiendas. Velázquez rewarded the royal treasurer and other crown officials with 200 native workers. Other important Spaniards received grants of 100 natives; the smallest grants were for forty native workers.³³ Thus, Spaniards first exploited Cuba's gold largely with indigenous tribute labor.

The mineral resources of the Americas officially belonged to the crown and therefore, mining became a combined state-private enterprise. The king often supplied experts, loans, and grants of labor while private contractors raised the necessary capital for equipment, construction, and the sustenance of the labor force and paid the crown a portion of the gold produced, usually one-fifth. Over the sixteenth century the crown used reductions in the royal portion as an incentive to contractors to undertake new mining ventures or to stimulate greater production in older ones.³⁴ In Cuba however, the gold cycle was relatively short, in part due to modest deposits, but also to the failure of the encomienda system to maintain and protect the island's native population. Cuba's encomenderos pushed their charges so hard that thousands perished and agriculture languished, necessitating the importation of food.³⁵ In Cuba the economic and cultural goals of the encomienda system foundered on the greed of the early conquerors.

Within the first decade of conquest Spaniards in Cuba began to complain of the decline of the island's native population. Overwork and disruption killed thousands; despair compelled thousands more to choose suicide over subjugation to the Spanish.³⁶ Spanish settlers began to request access to both Amerindian and African slaves to supplement the labor of native *encomendados*. Queen Isabella had resisted Columbus's wholesale enslavement of Caribbean natives in 1498, but by 1503 she had allowed exceptions for those natives deemed cannibals or captured in a "just war."³⁷ The most well known of these may be the cacique Hatuey whose followers the king condemned to slavery after burning

33 Irene Wright, *The Early History of Cuba* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1916), 45–47.

34 Levi Marrero, *Cuba: economía y sociedad*, vol. 2 (Madrid: Ed. Playor, 1974), 24–26 for several examples of mining contracts for one-tenth and even one-twentieth as the royal portion for ten years in the copper mines of eastern Cuba.

35 Marrero, *Cuba*, vol. 2, 18–19.

36 The earliest recorded epidemic in Cuba was in 1519. Several Spanish authors in the sixteenth century, including Bartolomé de las Casas, left detailed accounts of native suicides, "sometimes as whole households together." Quoted in Louis A. Pérez, Jr. *To Die in Cuba: Suicide and Society* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 3–5.

37 Elliott, *Empires*, 97–98. For Columbus' proposal to Queen Isabella see Christopher Columbus, *Letter on the New World* in Jon Cowans, ed., *Early Modern Spain: A Documentary History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 33. For examples of continued Indian enslavement in the peripheries of the empire in the eighteenth century see

their leader at the stake, a story made infamous by former Cuban encomendero, Bartolomé de Las Casas.³⁸ Thereafter, to recruit more indigenous forced labor for the Caribbean colonies Spaniards embarked on slaving expeditions around the circum-Caribbean. Such expeditions in Central America resulted in the virtual extinction of some native groups by the 1540s.³⁹

The many royal orders over the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries affirming yet qualifying the Amerindians' free status as Spanish vassals demonstrated the tension between the crown's paternalism and the voracious demand for labor necessitated by the entire colonial enterprise. By 1526 Ferdinand's grandson, Charles I (V) was sufficiently alarmed at the diminution of the natives of the Caribbean to write that "the excessive...and continuous work" exacted by the "persons who had them commended (encomendados) to them, many of them [the Indians] have died and others have hung themselves...for not being able to suffer so much work." The king recognized that digging for gold was the most onerous work endured by tribute laborers and ordered that no encomenderos in Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, Cuba, or Jamaica could send their native laborers to mining or other draining work. Transgressors would face the loss of their grant of native workers and the confiscation of their goods.⁴⁰ After a second smallpox epidemic in 1530 further decimated the native population, the crown started issuing additional restrictions on indigenous enslavement.⁴¹

The encomienda, and to a lesser degree the enslavement of Amerindians, were the forms of labor coercion that allowed Spaniards in Cuba to establish their initial settlements and profit from the mining of gold. But even as early as 1530 when copper deposits were discovered in eastern Cuba local officials petitioned the crown for loans to buy black slaves to extract copper, not native slaves or tribute laborers. With the proclamation of the New Laws of the Indies for the Good Treatment and Preservation of the Indians in 1542 and 1543 the crown banned both the granting of new encomiendas and enslavement of the Amerindians. Though the full enforcement of those laws took several years, by 1550 the remaining several thousand indigenous people left in Cuba were officially free subjects

David J. Weber, *Bárbaros. Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 83–85 and 234–241.

38 Bartolomé de Las Casas, *An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies*, edited with and introduction by Franklin W. Knight, trans. Andrew Hurley (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 2003), 18–20 and Wright, *Early History of Cuba*, 47.

39 O. Nigel Bolland, "Colonization and Slavery in Central America," in *Unfree Labour in the Development of the Atlantic World*, edited by Paul E. Lovejoy and Nicholas Rogers (Ilford UK and Portland OR: Frank Cass, 1994), 11–18.

40 Quoted in Marrero, *Cuba*, vol. 2, 9.

41 Wright, *Early History of Cuba*, 47.

and both the state and private employers turned to other methods of coercion to carry out the work of empire.⁴² For example, while the initial construction and settlement of Havana had been accomplished largely with indigenous labor, the town's reconstruction after the attack by French pirate Jacques de Sorés in 1555 was carried out predominantly by African slaves.⁴³

Because of the catastrophic decline of the indigenous population, the predominant modes of labor coercion in Cuba throughout the colonial period were enslavement (briefly of Amerindians as discussed above, mostly of Africans and their descendants thereafter) and penal servitude. Though they will be discussed separately below, slaves and convict laborers were employed in tandem, often simultaneously, in state service until the final abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century. Both had deep roots in policy and practice in Spain and, like the *encomienda*, were transferred and adapted to the state's labor needs in Spain's American colonies from 1492 onward.

Slavery

In contrast to Northern European states that established American empires later, Spain and Portugal both had continuous experience with enslavement in law and practice in the metropolis as a mode of labor coercion from ancient times into the modern era. In the centuries of warfare between Muslim and Christian kingdoms on the Iberian peninsula both sides claimed the right to enslave any fighters captured in battle; for the Christians those many thousands of captives became slaves of the crown.⁴⁴ For example, the Christian siege of Malaga in 1487 generated between 11,000 and 15,000 royal slaves. Expeditions against the *moriscos* of Alpujarras, north of Granada under Philip II consigned some 25,000 to 30,000 defeated rebels to enslavement from 1568 to 1571.⁴⁵ Even as late as the eighteenth century raiding along the North African coast by Spanish corsairs between 1710 and 1789 produced close to 6,000 captives for

42 Marrero, *Cuba*, vol. 2, 11.

43 De la Fuente, *Havana*, 5.

44 Maximiliano Barrio Gozalo, *Esclavos y cautivos. Conflicto entre la Cristianidad y el Islam en el Siglo XVIII* (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 2006), 84 and ft. 194, though practice clearly predated the pronouncement, Pope Paul III in 1549 authorized the employment of male and female Muslim slaves in publicly useful tasks and for domestic service. Franco Silva, *La esclavitud en Andalucía*, 36.

45 Alessandro Stella, *Histoires d'esclaves dans la péninsule ibérique* (Paris: Éditions de L'École des Hautes études en Sciences Sociales, 2000), 67–70.

state projects.⁴⁶ Spain also had a smaller population of slaves of sub-Saharan African descent by the sixteenth century mostly purchased through the Portuguese or Mediterranean slave trades.⁴⁷ The supply of slaves through capture in war or purchase was uneven over time but the Spanish state controlled the labor of tens of thousands of slaves on the peninsula, while private owners employed many thousands more.

Slavery was also enshrined in Spanish law from the Middle Ages onward, recognized as a necessary, but unnatural state of subjugation. Spain's medieval law code, the *Siete Partidas*, was based on imperial Roman legal norms, later tempered by those of the Christian Bible and the Catholic Church.⁴⁸ Slavery was characterized as an institution with deep historical roots, but also one that was evil and against natural reason.⁴⁹ The code tried to bridge the contradiction between the ancients' view of enslavement as an appropriate state for inferior beings and aspects of Christian thought that viewed the slave as a human being with a soul, capable of attaining salvation and deserving of mercy.⁵⁰ The

- 46 Stella, *Histoires d'esclaves*, 68. Maximiliano Barrio Gozalo, "La esclavitud en el mediterráneo occidental en el siglo XVIII. Los esclavos del Rey en España," *Crítica storica* vol. 17, no. 2 (1980): 207–208.
- 47 There is a considerable bibliography on the history of slavery in Spain though studies of specific towns or regions tend to predominate, see William D. Phillips, "Slavery in Spain, Ancient to Early Modern: A Survey of the Historiography Since 1990," *Bulletin of the Society for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies* vol. 27, no. 2–3 (Winter-Spring, 2001–2002): 10–18; William D. Phillips, *Historia de la esclavitud en España* (Madrid: Editorial Playor, 1990) and "The Old World Background of Slavery in the Americas," in Barbara Solow, ed., *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 43–61. Also Stella, *Histoires d'esclaves*; Charles Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale, tome 1, Péninsule ibérique-France* (Brugge: De Tempel, 1955); Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, "La esclavitud en Castilla durante la Edad Moderna," *Estudios de historia social de España* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1952), 369–373.
- 48 Francisco López Estrada and María Teresa López García-Berdoy, eds. *Las Siete Partidas Antología* (Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1992), 13–38.
- 49 Partida IV, Título V and Título XXI, Ley I in *Las Siete Partidas*, vol. 4, ed. Robert I. Burns, trans. Samuel Scott Parsons (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 901, 977.
- 50 See the discussion on this question throughout David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988[1966]) especially 58–61 and 98–106, 251. On ancient precedents, mostly in Greek, Jewish, and early Christian thought, 62–90. On the dualism within Christianity that both rationalized slavery and contained ideals of freedom and equality that were "potentially abolitionist," 89–90. Also Alfonso Franco Silva, *La esclavitud en Andalucía, 1450–1550* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1990), 36.

authority of masters was upheld throughout the code, but the *Siete Partidas* also allowed the enslaved certain rights along with their obligations to obey and serve their owners; for instance, slaves had some right to choose their own marriage partners and to pursue their freedom through self-purchase.⁵¹ The Spanish crown resisted attempts by the conquerors and settlers in the Americas to enslave most of the Amerindians precisely because they were vassals of the crown, but had no such qualms, at least initially, about unconverted Muslims or sub-Saharan Africans.

The greatest demand for labor in peninsular sites of state-directed work was in the Mediterranean galleys. One historian estimates that as many as 150,000 slaves toiled in Spain's galleys from the sixteenth century to their abolition in 1748.⁵² For a period of about sixty years (1578 through the early 1630s) the crown also used galleys stationed in Cartagena, Santo Domingo, and Havana to defend its Caribbean colonies from pirates, employing a mix of convicts and several hundred slaves at the oars. Slaves comprised about twenty percent of the total workforce on the Caribbean galleys and their varied provenance shows the relative porosity of Spanish restrictions on emigration of foreigners and non-Catholics to the Americas. New World galleys employed Muslim slaves from North Africa usually listed as Moors and others called Turks from Anatolia and other sites in the eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea region. Even a few Christian renegades and rebellious *moriscos* enslaved for resisting expulsion from Spain in the 1610s found their way to the Caribbean as galley slaves.⁵³

Historiography on Caribbean slavery often foregrounds the transfer of enslavement of sub-Saharan Africans for plantation labor as the foundation of modern slavery in the region but, as David Wheat has argued in his examination of the Caribbean galleys, prior to 1650 "multiple forms of slavery and servitude" supported the empire "in ways that remain to be explored."⁵⁴ This insight can be extended to forced labor more generally and to state work beyond the galleys, in mining, ship and fort building, and naval service. For

51 Partida IV, Título V, Leyes I and II, in *Siete Partidas*, vol. 4, 901–902. For a study of these provisions in practice in a Spanish colony see Herman L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico. Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570–1640* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003).

52 Stella, *Histoires d'esclaves*, 70.

53 David Wheat, "Mediterranean Slavery, New World Transformations: Galley Slaves in the Spanish Caribbean, 1578–1635," *Slavery & Abolition* vol. 31, no. 3 (September 2010): 328–333.

54 Wheat, "Mediterranean Slavery," 338.

instance, over the seventeenth century the galleys became outmoded in naval warfare and the ships spent increased time in port. Rather than disband or simply incarcerate the forced laborers from the galleys, the crown chose to continue to confine both the galleys' slaves and convicts and benefit from their labor by sending them ashore to do heavy work to support the navy, in construction and maintenance on the docks, in arsenals, and in the transport of water, wood, and supplies.⁵⁵ The crown's choice to shift the extensive use of forced labor in galleys to land-based defensive and constructive labor replicated patterns of labor in building Caribbean forts from the late seventeenth century onward. In this sense the flow of precedent and practice may have been from the Americas back to the metropolis by the eighteenth century.

By the second half of the sixteenth century Spain's relative monopoly on land and at sea in the Americas had been sufficiently challenged by rival European powers to prompt the Spanish crown to experiment with new defense initiatives, supported by growing investments of state money, manpower, and supervision. State slavery, employing contingents of *esclavos del rey* or king's slaves, was an important component of these new defense plans. Royal slaves were always combined with other coerced and free workers for state projects and the shifting mix of workers provides insights into the overall political economy of the Spanish empire.

For land-based defense, the Spanish crown authorized the first forts in Cuba in 1537 and 1555 in response to French pirate attacks. The fortifications constructed in the late 1530s were very modest, however, and much of the actual construction and the later manning of the fort fell to the colony's Spanish and Amerindian residents. As silver production on the mainland increased so too did the labor required to defend the fleets that passed through Havana. By 1575 almost 200 slaves worked to complete Havana's first stone fort, La Fuerza. The crown employed its own slaves as a supplement to wage laborers and slaves furnished by city residents. Fort construction was also a site of forced labor for various troublesome elements of the local population, vagrants of mixed backgrounds, a few indigenous people, and even fourteen French pirates captured off the coast of Matanzas.⁵⁶ A similar mix of laborers completed the El Morro fort, which still guards the eastern point of Havana's port, in 1640.⁵⁷

Ships were built in Cuba for royal fleets from the sixteenth century onward and by the eighteenth century royal slaves had become a small but important

55 Barrio Gozalo, *Esclavos y cautivos*, 162–171. Wheat, "Mediterranean Slavery," 334–335.

56 Renée Mendez Capote, *Fortalezas de la Habana colonial* (Havana: Editorial Gente Nueva, 1974), 15–16.

57 Marrero, *Cuba*, vol. 2, 42.

component of the mix of coerced and free laborers there as well, especially in Havana's shipyards.⁵⁸ In a common example of state-private enterprise, the king contracted out royal shipbuilding in Havana to a chartered company in 1740, and granted the Royal Company of Havana [RCH] the right to import African slaves for sale in the private sector in exchange for undertaking the expense of constructing royal ships.⁵⁹ Though more than two thirds of the 800 workers in Havana's shipyard were free wage earners, the RCH owned and maintained several contingents of skilled slaves especially as wood cutters in the forests around the city and as sawyers preparing lumber for ship construction. By 1748 there were thirteen woodcutting sites around Havana with a mix of 350 to 400 enslaved and free workers.⁶⁰ The crown's policy of employing a mix of forced and free workers that included a modest number of royal slaves in strategic tasks succeeded in regenerating the stock of ships in the imperial navy by the mid-eighteenth century.

The relatively ad hoc and reactive labor policy for imperial defense protected Cuba until the humiliating defeat of Britain's siege and occupation of Havana from 1762 to 1763. When Havana was returned to Spain in the Treaty of Paris, Spanish policymakers felt compelled to carry out a new, comprehensive plan of defense for Cuba, some of which required changes in state policies of labor recruitment by assuming direct oversight of the repairs and fort construction around the city.⁶¹

A brief increase in the resort to state slavery was the remedy for labor recruitment in fort building. For much of the preceding period the crown had tried to restrict the trade in African slaves to Cuba through monopoly contracts, but in

58 For the early period of shipbuilding in Havana see De la Fuente, *Havana*, 127–134.

59 Archivo General de Indias [AGI], Ultramar, legajo 995, "Representación de la Junta de la Compañía," December 19, 1748 for the details of the Royal Company of Havana's charter; Monserrat Gárate Ojanguren, *Comercio ultramarino e Ilustración. La Real Compañía de la Habana* (San Sebastian: Departamento de Cultura del País Vasco, 1993) for a thorough analysis of the Company and all of its business dealings.

60 Marrero, *Cuba*, 8:19 on lumber gangs in Havana's hinterland. AGI, Ultramar, 995, "Representation of the Royal Company of Havana," Dec. 19, 1748 on the RCH's employment of enslaved and free workers in the shipyard.

61 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 Río de la Plata) to Portugal. France sought to soften the blow of these losses by ceding Louisiana to its Spanish ally. See John Lynch, *Bourbon Spain, 1700–1808* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1989), 318.

the face of the defense needs after 1762 Charles III authorized the importation through multiple carriers of almost 8,000 slaves in the next year and a half.⁶² Of this total, more than half (4,359) were purchased by the crown for work in the fortifications. To encourage a speedy increase in the legitimate slave trade to the island for defense construction, the crown allowed the rest to be sold to private owners.⁶³

This extensive resort to state enslavement in the early 1760s was unique in Cuba's experience with the state as a slave owner. By 1765 there were over 2,000 workers at the fort construction projects, 62.1% of whom were royal slaves.⁶⁴ Thereafter however, from 1765 to 1768 the state began to sell off some the unskilled royal slaves to offset the costs of purchasing and maintaining such a large cohort of state slaves, increasing its use of convict labor instead. In keeping with historical patterns of state slavery in Cuba, once the initial crisis had passed—the fort works begun and other networks for forced and free laborers tapped—the state could begin to sell some of its own slaves to recoup its initial investment.

Spain also pressed slaves into military service in its American empire but, in contrast to the English empire of the eighteenth century, the numbers were small. Spain employed hundreds of slaves in various capacities in a desperate, though failed attempt to save Havana during the British attack in 1762. Even in defeat the crown rewarded dozens of those slaves for their service and sacrifice.⁶⁵ During Spain's intervention in the American War of Independence from 1779 to 1783, the crown continued to follow more traditional patterns based on the strategic use of small groups of slaves as auxiliaries in battle.⁶⁶ Only when Spain was back on the defensive in the chaotic warfare following the outbreak

62 Gloria García, "El mercado de fuerza de trabajo en Cuba: El mercado esclavista (1760–1789)," in *La esclavitud en Cuba* (Havana: Editorial Academia, 1986), 135.

63 Archivo General de Simancas [AGS], Secretaría y Superintendencia de Hacienda [SSH] 2344, Balance sheet of state slaves purchased under Ricla from June 30, 1763 to May 18, 1765.

64 AGI, Santo Domingo [SD], 1647, Review extracts of the king's slaves and others in the defense works of Havana from March 31 to October 27, 1765; AGS, SSH, 2344, Review extract for February 23, 1766.

65 For more detail on the slaves rewarded for service after the occupation of Havana see Evelyn P. Jennings, "Paths to Freedom: Imperial Defense and Manumission in Havana, 1762–1800," in *Paths to Freedom: Manumission in the Atlantic World*, edited by Rosemary Brana-Shute and Randy J. Sparks, 121–141 (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2009).

66 AGI, Papeles de Cuba, 1247, reports of the artillery force dated the first days of June–December 1780 and January, February, April, and May, 1781. Also notice no. 239, Garcini to Navarro, March 13, 1781 on the embarkation of 30 royal artillery slaves with the army of operation.

of slave rebellion in nearby Saint Domingue in the 1790s did the crown resort to recruiting thousands of slaves to fight in the king's name and later rewarding them for their service, even in defeat.

In 1793 Spain was desperate enough to recruit rebellious slaves under the command of George Biassou, Jean François, and for a time Toussaint L'Ouverture, to try to save its colony in Santo Domingo. Though L'Ouverture later defected to the revolutionary French army, Biassou and François continued to serve the Spanish king in battle, in Spanish Florida and Spain respectively, until their deaths and were rewarded for their loyalty.⁶⁷ However, in the context of the revolutionary Caribbean of the 1790s and expanding plantation agriculture in Cuba, when those allies arrived in Havana's port after Spain withdrew from the war, the Captain-General of Cuba refused even to allow them off the ship. He insisted that they were a pernicious example of savagery and might incite rebellion in Cuba as well.⁶⁸ By the early nineteenth century, once the insurgent slaves of Haiti had freed themselves from slavery and French colonial rule, Cuba had become a plantation colony with a majority of its population enslaved or free people of color. Spanish officials assigned to the island now resisted the employment of slaves in the military and even questioned the loyalty of free militiamen of color who had fought so effectively to defend Spanish interests in the Caribbean in the previous generation.⁶⁹

For centuries, the Spanish crown had made strategic use of slaves to defend Cuba, rewarding loyalty and military service by slaves, employing others as squads of skilled slaves in vital tasks—lumbering in the shipyard or manning the cannons in Havana's forts. The crown resorted to extensive use of royal slaves in the most extreme moments of threat to the empire, after the British occupation of Havana in 1763 in unskilled fort building and during the Haitian Revolution in the 1790s as military allies.

As Cuba's plantation economy expanded thereafter the crown's approach to slavery shifted away from the paternalism of earlier policy and practice, though it never completely disappeared from official policies toward slaves. Shortly

67 Jane G. Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 68–94.

68 David Geggus, "The Arming of Slaves in the Haitian Revolution," in Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Arming Slaves from Classical Times to the Modern Ages* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 220–221. See also Jane Landers "Transforming Bondsmen into Vassals," 129–131 in the same volume on the recruitment of the black auxiliaries of Charles IV. The correspondence in AGI, Estado, 5A details the wrangles among Spanish officials in Cuba and Santo Domingo about the resettlement and rewards for the empire's black allies after Spain withdrew from the conflict.

69 See for instance, Kuethe, *Cuba*, 170–173.

after the crown conceded free trade in slaves to Cuban planters in 1789, slaves and people of color became a majority of the island's population. All forms of resistance to slavery increased in a crescendo of flight, destruction of property, rebellion and violence that culminated in the Escalera Rebellion of 1843.⁷⁰ The threat of a large and growing enslaved population in the private sector and British abolitionism in the same period tempered both the state's access to slaves and its paternal regard for their welfare. Instead the state came to rely more heavily on various streams of people forced to labor because of transgressions against Spanish law, people who were in many ways more expendable than the crown's native vassals or its own slaves.

Penal Servitude-Convict Labor

Spain's history of penal servitude had many similarities to its long and continuous history with slavery in policy and practice at home and in its colonies. In the late fifteenth century Ferdinand and Isabella supplemented their contingents of galley slaves in the Mediterranean fleets with convicts sentenced to hard labor at the oars. Due to rising wages for free oarsmen over the sixteenth century subsequent monarchs came to rely almost exclusively on forced laborers by the late 1500s.⁷¹ As noted above, almost eighty percent of the Caribbean galleys' labor force was convict laborers.

A major shift occurred in the use of forced labor in Spain, however, with the abolition of the Mediterranean galleys in 1748. Some former galley prisoners were sent to the mercury mines of Almadén, Spain, others to North African *presidios*. Slaves and convicts formerly working at the galleys' oars were assigned to Spanish navy yards and port areas pumping out dry docks and hauling materials. As new peninsular fortifications and naval arsenals were built in the middle decades of the 1700s, the state resorted to forced levies of "undesirables"—vagrants, beggars, and gypsies—to supplement labor by slaves and free wage workers. In a shift from military recruitment strategies of previous

70 On the growing tide of slave resistance and rebellion in the first half of the nineteenth century see Robert L. Paquette, *Sugar Is Made with Blood* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988); Matt D. Childs, *The Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle against Atlantic Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Manuel Barcia, *Seeds of Insurrection: Domination and Resistance on Western Cuban Plantations, 1808–1848* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008).

71 Ruth Pike, *Penal Servitude in Early Modern Spain* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 4–6.

centuries, by the mid-eighteenth century the most able-bodied of those rounded up were conscripted into the army; the rest sent to labor in forts and naval yards.⁷²

The almost endless cycles of war in which Spain was embroiled for most of the eighteenth century made defensive and constructive labor in Caribbean colonies such as Cuba an imperial imperative. As historian Ruth Pike has noted the 1700s were the high tide of the use of penal servitude in Spain's American empire and of state slavery as the previous section showed.⁷³ In the face of the high costs of purchasing and maintaining thousands of slaves, royal officials recruited laborers from the empire-wide pools of convicts; by the 1770s, prisoners outnumbered the enslaved by almost two to one in state projects in Cuba.

Free workers, both whites and free people of color, represented a growing percentage of the total workforce, though Cuban officials complained bitterly about the difficulties of retaining and disciplining free workers over time. To control at least some of its workers' mobility even after the main projects were completed in 1790, the state employed 300 prisoners and sixty king's slaves to maintain Havana's forts.⁷⁴

Some of the convict laborers in eighteenth-century Havana were sent from Spain, but the major crown networks of forced labor that expanded to fill the positions formerly held by slaves was the flow of convict laborers from Mexico.⁷⁵ The post-1763 militarization and defense plan that created such demand for forced labor in Cuba also brought greater state coercion for military recruitment to the much more populous colony of Mexico. Army levies in the 1770s and 1780s coincided with a period of hunger and deprivation in the region that increased crime. Men caught trying to desert the army and those accused of other crimes found themselves chained together and marched to Veracruz to complete their sentences at hard labor in the forts of the circum-Caribbean. Their sentences ranged from one to ten years, but those transported into the Caribbean averaged a little over five years each. One historian of these eighteenth-century Mexican convicts has concluded that there was a symbiosis of aims in the Spanish state's practice of sentencing transgressors to exile

72 Pike, *Penal Servitude*, 51–53 and 66–71.

73 Ruth Pike, "Penal Servitude in the Spanish Empire: Presidio Labor in the Eighteenth Century," *Hispanic American Historical Review* vol. 58, no. 1 (1978): 21–40.

74 AGS, Guerra, 7242, exp. 20, no. 193.

75 Pike, "Penal Servitude in the Spanish Empire," 33; Jorge L. Lizardi Pollock, "Presidios, presidiarios y desertores: Los desterrados de Nueva España, 1777–1797," in *El Caribe en los intereses imperiales, 1750–1815* (San Juan Mixcoatl, MX: Instituto de Investigadores Dr. José María Luis Mora, 2000), 21.

and hard labor in Caribbean defense works similar to the regimes of punishment in the Spanish Mediterranean. New Spain officials could relieve themselves of troublesome people from the margins of society and presidio officials in Havana and elsewhere could supply state projects with a cheap and largely expendable cohort of workers.⁷⁶

As the preceding examination suggests royal slaves were rarely cheap or expendable, but because they constituted a semi-permanent force at the king's disposal, they could be expedient in moments of crisis or urgency. If they acquired skills in the king's service they could be retained for particularly strategic tasks (wood-cutting and preparation in the Havana's shipyards, for instance) or sold to the private sector. Penal servitude, on the other hand, was becoming an increasingly attractive form of labor coercion for an imperial power facing the challenges of fighting wars on a global scale, defending a far-flung empire, and disciplining a diverse and restive population of subjects.

Plantation Expansion in Nineteenth-Century Cuba and Experiments with Indenture

The Spanish state in Cuba continued to own slaves in its own name into the nineteenth century, but it never again needed thousands of forced laborers at one time as it had in 1763. Cuba's expanded fortifications defended the island from attack until the US invasion in 1898 ended Spanish colonialism in the Americas. Imperial shipbuilding and naval recruitment declined after the Spanish defeat at the battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Napoleon I's invasion of the Spanish peninsula in 1808 brought civil war to the peninsula and ultimately independence to Spain's mainland American empire by the 1820s. For Cuban colonial officials this meant the end of access to large numbers of convict laborers from Mexico. British abolitionism from 1820 onward constrained the state's legal access to slaves, though the private sector continued to import slaves by the tens of thousands until 1867.⁷⁷

The most enduring form of state coercion for public labor over the entire colonial period was penal servitude. After 1790 the sources of these convicts shifted away from mainland Spanish America to Cuba itself and to the increasingly chaotic metropole. In both Spain and Cuba the state more aggressively pursued those classified as vagrants and military deserters. In the nineteenth

76 Lizardi, "Presidios," 20–27.

77 On treaties in 1817 and 1835 see David Murray, *Odious Commerce. Britain, Spain and the Abolition of the Cuban Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

century the number of political prisoners rose as revolutionary movements erupted in Spain and Cuba. The burgeoning enslaved population was also more restive and the state developed a program to centralize the incarceration of fugitive slaves in Havana that allowed colonial officials to benefit from their labor.⁷⁸

The Cuban railroad building projects of the mid-nineteenth century illustrate the shifting political economy of imperial labor recruitment and employment particularly well. The railroad projects' promoters, similar to planters in the private sector, had to recruit labor in a vastly different labor market after the 1820s. Antislave trade treaties with Great Britain in 1817 and 1835 had succeeded in disrupting the flow of African slaves to Cuba and raising prices. Spain abolished slavery in the metropole in 1836 and the British officially ended slavery in their empire in 1834 and freedpeople's apprenticeship in 1838, causing Cuban slave owners to fear the eventual end of slavery on their island as well.⁷⁹ Colonial officials began to experiment with contract labor in the 1830s to complete the first railroad line in Cuba.⁸⁰ As the transatlantic slave trade continued to shrink, by the late 1840s, private entrepreneurs were also compelled to recruit contract laborers from Yucatan and China.

The mid-nineteenth century was also a period of rising fears among Cuban whites of the social consequences of the first surge of sugar expansion that between 1791 and 1830 had brought almost three hundred fifty thousand African slaves to Cuba.⁸¹ The white elite wrote grimly of the "Africanization" of Cuban society as the island shifted from having a majority of whites to a majority of people of color after 1792, and the state and private organizations proposed initiatives to increase white immigration to the island to avoid the twin horrors of slave rebellion on the Haitian model or slave emancipation on the British Caribbean one.⁸²

78 Gabino La Rosa Corzo, *Los cimarrones de Cuba* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1988) on fugitive slaves and the policy of centralizing their incarceration in Havana.

79 Murray, *Odious Commerce*, 68–88, Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, *Empire and Antislavery. Spain, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, 1833–1874* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1999), 14–36.

80 For monographs on railroad building in Cuba see Oscar Zanetti and Alejandro García, *Sugar and Railroads. A Cuban History, 1837–1959*, trans. Franklin W. Knight and Mary Todd (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) and Edward Moyano Bazzini, *La nueva frontera del azúcar. El ferrocarril y la economía cubana del Siglo XIX* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigación, 1991).

81 Trans-Atlantic slave trade database. <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/assessment/estimates.faces>.

82 Archivo Histórico Nacional [AHN], Estado, leg 6374, exp. 36, no. 1, August 27, 1833, Ricafort to King.

The labor force for building the railroad came to include virtually every kind of forced and free laborer ever employed in the colony. The work, similar to plantation labor, was arduous and largely unskilled labor, rarely attracting free laborers at the low wages generally offered. An 1837 report from the commission that oversaw the railroad building, lamented that in Cuba where “daily wages are so high and hands always scarce for the urgent work of agriculture, workers are not to be found.”⁸³ From 1835 to 1840 the rail line's workforce contained some slaves owned by or housed in the Havana Repository for runaway slaves and nominally free Africans known as *emancipados*.⁸⁴ Other workers were convicts—Cubans or criminals sentenced to the island from other parts of the empire. The composite group of forced laborers numbered about 500 per year over the five-year span.⁸⁵

Though royal and fugitive slaves and hundreds of *emancipados* were assigned to the railroad project, the demands of other public works, like road repair, and the 209 deaths among rail workers necessitated that government officials search for new alternatives to recruit workers while retaining mechanisms of control.⁸⁶ Although there had been discussion since at least the late eighteenth century of encouraging white immigration to Cuba, the railroad commission's contracts were the first large-scale initiatives in that direction.⁸⁷ The largest group of contract laborers, a total of 927, came from the Canary Islands. By the time the rail line opened two years later in 1837, 632 had completed their contracts, 240 had died or fled, 35 were incapacitated, 13 worked

83 AHN, Ultramar, leg. 37, exp. 1, no. 30.

84 The *emancipados* were enslaved Africans freed by the terms of the antislave trade treaty signed by Spain and Great Britain in 1817. After 1820 any slaves illegally shipped to Spanish colonies could be seized by the British navy, then freed. In an example of creative coercion by the Spanish state, beginning in 1824 the *emancipados* were consigned to the Captains General of Cuba to be allocated to private individuals for training and Christianization rather than returned to Africa and possible enslavement. Murray, *Odious Commerce*, 271–297, Inés Roldán de Montaud, “Origen, evolución, y supresión del grupo de negros ‘emancipados’ en Cuba 1817–1870,” *Revista de Indias* vol. 42, nos. 169–170 (1982): 574–576, Luis Martínez-Fernández, “The Havana Anglo-Spanish Mixed Commission for the Suppression of the Slave Trade and Cuba's *Emancipados*,” *Slavery & Abolition*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1995), 209–213.

85 La Rosa Corzo, *Los cimarrones*, 68.

86 AHN, Ultramar, leg. 37, exp. 1, no. 30, July 26, 1837.

87 Consuelo Naranjo Orovio, “La amenaza haitiana, un miedo interesado. Poder y fomento de la población blanca en Cuba.” In *El rumor de Haití en Cuba. Temor, raza, y rebeldía, 1789–1844*. eds. María Dolores González-Ripoll, Consuelo Naranjo Orovio, Ada Ferrer, Gloria García and Josef Opatrný, 83–178 (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2004).

on other public projects, and only 7 remained working on the railroad.⁸⁸ A smaller group of workers (281) from the US, said to be Irish, were contracted through an agent in the US. In both cases, the railroad commissioners lost both the labor and at least a portion of the money advanced for the passages of the migrants through death or desertion.⁸⁹ However, those who protested or were captured in flight were returned to the railroad work as *forzados* or convict laborers. Since the state was the main employer, it could use both soldiers and the criminal justice system to enforce labor discipline among contract workers.⁹⁰ The main goal of the commissioners was to keep the contract workers sufficiently isolated from the larger free population to guarantee obedience and discourage flight. But ultimately, in spite of all these official complaints, the first line of railroad was finished on time and under budget. White contract labor was, for the railroad officials, a successful supplement to other forms of labor coercion.⁹¹

In the plantation sector, on the other hand, recruitment of white contract labor would not be the answer to the vagaries of the illegal slave trade. Like other Caribbean plantation colonies in the mid-nineteenth century the colonial state in Cuba turned its attention to Asia and to the now independent country of Mexico for relatively low-cost, bound labor. Funds were invested in the immigration of *yucatecos* (largely Mayans or mestizos from the Yucatan peninsula) and Chinese as indentured laborers, whose contracts obligated them to accept wages well below the Cuban norm for both free wage earners and hired slaves.⁹² The prices that planters paid to purchase their contracts were also considerably lower than the prices for African slaves; from 1845 to 1860 prices for Chinese indentures were less than half those of slaves.⁹³

The numbers of *yucatecos* imported into Cuba was small; Chinese indentured laborers arrived in much larger numbers, over 120,000 from 1847 to 1874.⁹⁴ The Cuban Captain General was forced to confront the increasing complexities

88 AHN, Ultramar, leg. 37, exp. 1, no. 29.

89 AHN, Ultramar, leg. 15, exp. 1, no. 4, 2 show losses of about 25% on the passages for Canary Islanders who died or deserted the railroad works.

90 Manuel Moreno Fragonals, *El ingenio. Complejo económico social cubano del azúcar* (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 2001), 253.

91 AHN, Ultramar, leg. 37, exp. 1, no. 30, July 26, 1837.

92 Naranjo, "Amenaza," 162.

93 Lisa Yun, *The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers and African Slaves in Cuba* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), Table 1.2, 17.

94 Yun, *The Coolie Speaks*, 19, Table 1.3 cites 138,156 Chinese as having embarked from China to Cuba from 1847–1873, and 121,810 who actually landed.

of introducing new peoples into Cuba.⁹⁵ Cuban officials proposed using the tools of slavery to control both groups in spite of their nominally free status.⁹⁶ These new indentured workers were no longer subjects or vassals of the crown. The queen and the Cuban Captain-General saw their primary obligation as defending the internal tranquility of Cuba from slave rebellion, not protecting foreign workers. But these bound laborers were the free subjects of other sovereign polities and this fact was the ultimate undoing of indenture in nineteenth-century Cuba. After several years' wrangle with representatives of both the Mexican and British governments, the Spanish crown curtailed the importation of involuntary workers from Yucatan.⁹⁷ Reports of mistreatment and disregard for the terms of the Chinese workers' contracts by planters led to so much resistance that both the Spanish crown and the Chinese government tried to intervene. Decrees from Spain over the 1850s and 1860s oscillated between efforts to hold Cuban employers to at least the terms of the Chinese workers' contracts and attempts to quell resistance and flight.⁹⁸

The political landscape in which colonial officials and the crown tried to negotiate the terms of forced labor in Cuba was dramatically altered by the outbreak of independence insurrection in eastern Cuba in 1868. The rebels sought recruits by offering freedom to both African slaves and Chinese indentured workers who joined the movement. The crown initiated gradual emancipation of slaves with the Moret Law of 1870 and increased its pressure on Cuban traffickers in Chinese workers to end the trade. Shortly after the Portuguese prohibited any further emigration through their port of Macao in December 1873 an official Chinese commission of inquiry arrived in Cuba to investigate the dreadful reports of conditions for workers. Traveling around the

95 Estimates vary widely, from 730 to as many as 10,000, but even the highest number was small compared to African and even Chinese bound immigrants. See Paul Estrade, "Los colonos como sustitutos de los esclavos negros," in *Cuba la perla de las Antillas: Actas de las I Jornadas sobre 'Cuba y su historia'*, eds. Consuelo Naranjo Orovio and Tomás Mallo Gutiérrez (Madrid: Dos Calles, 1994), 97. Many were captured and sold to Cuban traders by Mexican officials during the Caste Wars in the Yucatan in the 1840s. See Nelson A. Reed, *The Caste War of Yucatán*, rev. ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 142.

96 Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, Manuscripts, *Colonos yucatecos en Cuba*, MSS/13857, 1848–1849, f. 16.

97 For more detail on this whole episode see Evelyn P. Jennings, "Some Unhappy Indians Trafficked by Force: Race, Status and Work Discipline in mid-Nineteenth Century Cuba," in *Bonded Labor in the Cultural Contact Zone*, eds. Gesa Mackenthun and Raphael Hörmann, 209–225 (Münster and New York: Waxmann, 2010).

98 *The Cuba Commission Report. A Hidden History of the Chinese in Cuba*, Introduction by Denise Helly (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 23–26.

island the commissioners collected testimony from 2,841 Chinese “[a]lmost every [one of whom]...was, or had been undergoing suffering, and suffering was the purport of almost every word heard....”⁹⁹

Thus, by 1870 the political economy of forced labor in the much-diminished Spanish American empire had shifted irrevocably. The Spanish state no longer had large pools of workers vulnerable to coercion at its disposal to defend the empire. Instead it enacted the Moret Law to begin to free the enslaved to try to recruit them to defend colonialism against the independence movement. By the late 1880s the Atlantic context had also been radically changed by abolitionism and the emancipation of Africans and their descendants in all of the Americas with the exception of Brazil. Because Cuban sugar and the island’s market were the last remnants of American colonial wealth that Spain could exploit by the late nineteenth century, the crown worried less about protecting the weak among its colonial residents in favor of ensuring the rights of profit and property of their employers. Only when the colonial bond itself was threatened by independence insurrection did the Spanish state invoke its earlier paternalism and offer freedom in exchange for continued fealty to the crown.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis highlights the singular features of the political economy of forced labor in Spain and its American empire. Patterns of conquest developed on the frontier between Christianity and Islam on the peninsula led to the Spanish state’s extensive imposition of labor tribute and slavery on large populations of culturally different peoples. Such reserves of forced labor allowed Spain to man its Mediterranean galleys, staff its arsenals, and recruit labor for other state enterprises. Spain also embarked on its American conquests from a position of strength in the sixteenth century. With a growing peninsular population for much of the century, the crown was able to staff an army and navy and settle its new colonies with Spaniards relatively free of coercive labor strictures for the next two centuries. Spain also had the good fortune to claim its colonies in the American regions that contained the greatest stores of precious metals and the largest indigenous populations. By importing and adapting a wide range of forced labor regimes in the Americas, Spain was able to build colonies, mine their wealth, and successfully defend its empire until the early nineteenth century.

99 *The Cuba Commission Report*, 34.

As an early European colonizer, Spain's empire began from a medieval state whose authority was based in part on the paternalism of the monarch and the theoretically equal access of all her or his subjects to royal grace and justice. Much is often made of the slowness and inefficiency of both but many Spanish subjects, both free and unfree, seem to have had sufficient faith in the eventual outcome of their suits to try their luck by petitioning the crown rather than through outright rebellion. On the other hand, we cannot underestimate the Spanish state's powers of coercion and punishment. Spanish monarchs could reward faithful subjects with a small pension or gratuity, but they could also punish severely those who resisted royal authority. We have many examples of exemplary executions, the victims drawn and quartered and their heads left on pikes. Yet, one wonders if the possibility of years of miserable labor at the galleys' oars or digging trenches for the forts of Havana were not an even greater deterrent to resistance. Coffles of convicts suffering the long journey to labor far from their homes were a common sight in many parts of the empire. An uneasy balance between force and favor—penal servitude and paternalism, enslavement and manumission, labor tribute and loyalty to a distant lord—all built and maintained the Spanish American empire.

Until quite recently, in the historiography of comparative empire imperial Spain was often characterized as the lumbering giant—increasingly sclerotic and unable to adapt to changing times. This examination of the Spanish state's patterns of employment of forced labor suggests a different picture at least for the period before 1800. A skillful yet expedient combination of state and private enterprise carried out most imperial work and a skillful yet expedient combination of paternalism and repression maintained sufficient order and loyalty in Spain's mainland colonies until the early nineteenth century. In Cuba the colonial bond held much longer, but repression outweighed paternalism for much of the period after 1830. As policy and practice in the wider Atlantic world moved away from slavery, the colonial officials in Cuba relied more heavily on the expansion and manipulation of the criminal justice system to supply forced labor for public works—runaway slaves, emancipados, convicts, military deserters, and enemies of the crown. For the first time in the Spanish empire state bodies also looked for bonded labor through indenture in former colonies such as the Yucatan and in China. Ultimately however, no amount of adaptation, belated paternalism, or increased repression could save Spanish colonialism in Cuba by 1898.