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FRANCOPHOBIA AND INTERIMPERIAL POLITICS IN
LATE BOURBON PUERTO RICO:
THE DUKE OF CRILLÓN Y MAHÓN'S FAILED
NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE SPANISH CROWN, 1776-1796

Commenting on the poor state of the Puerto Rican economy, Alejandro O'Reilly's 1765 *memoria* brought to light the island's vast, untilled lands and tropical climate but decried the absence of agricultural exploitation. To remedy this, he called upon "the establishment of a few wealthy men capable of setting up sugarmills [as] indispensable for the prompt development of this island" (O'Reilly 1972:394). The colonists, he added, should be granted land in proportion to the slaves and dependents they bring along. By such means, he sought to emulate nearby Saint Croix, a Danish colony that had experienced remarkable economic development after adopting a similar plan (O'Reilly 1972:391-95). The clergyman-historian Iñigo Abad y Lasierra could not agree more. In 1788, he urged Spain to finance the transport of colonists to the Hispanic Caribbean and to furnish them with land, tools, and seeds. In his opinion, the duty-free import of slaves was just as crucial (Abbad y Lasierra 1959:165). Another observer concurred, noting that slave-holding colonists would be especially valuable since "scarcely half a dozen persons in Puerto Rico [were] able to purchase twenty negroes each" (Aimes 1907:41-42). Spain's Council of the Indies summed up consensus when it declared that, "no agricultural establishment can be undertaken in America ... without the funds to clear, sow and cultivate the land, and to support the [farmers] until their toil yields harvests to be free from debt and subsist on their own."¹

In Spanish royal circles, the notion that the economic fate of the Hispanic Caribbean rested on the infusion of external human and material resources was problematic. Spain had not been able to fill these needs, but securing them by embracing foreign colonization and mercantile schemes could leave

1. [Real] Academia de la Historia to the Principe de la Paz, c. 1797, leg. 2378, Sección de Santo Domingo (henceforth Santo Domingo), Archivo General de Indias (henceforth AGI), Seville, Spain.

the Indies exposed to rival European powers. In 1776 and 1783, the Spanish Crown “experimented” by offering land and other incentives to Irish and French Catholics from the nearby non-Hispanic Caribbean willing to relocate to the sparsely populated and economically marginal colony of Trinidad. Regulations were put into place to attract “safe,” economically viable colonists and simultaneously deter undesirable ones from slipping into Spanish soil. As a result of this effort, the last two decades of Spanish colonial rule (circa 1777-1797) witnessed a monumental demographic and economic boom. Trinidad’s population expanded from 3,432 to 17,718 and the value of its agricultural exports increased from 3,000 to 1,588,000 pesos (Newson 1979:139, 147). Unfortunately for Spain, England seized Trinidad in 1797. No new ventures of such a scale would be undertaken before the implementation in Puerto Rico of the 1815 *Cédula de Gracias* (China 2005).

In contrast to Trinidad, Spanish policy toward foreigners in late eighteenth-century Puerto Rico was very restrictive. The Spanish Crown issued residential permits and/or free land grants to a handful of enterprising foreign immigrants, such as Jaime O’Daly, the Count of Delage, Duke of Havre de Croy, Andres Juan de la Rocque, the brothers Julio and Enrique O’Neill, Juan Jaboco Gahn, and Thomas Armstrong. A 1778 royal *cédula* also authorized planters in Puerto Rico to recruit a limited number of skilled, Catholic workers with training in plantation agriculture from the nearby non-Hispanic Caribbean. Some of these cases, or others similar to them, have been widely noted in the published historical literature.² On the other hand, several obscure requests for setting up foreign-controlled operations in Puerto Rico during this period remain largely overlooked. Among them are proposals for establishing *colonias* of Germans, Franco-Dominguans, and Irish Catholics, some of which also solicited slave trading and mercantile privileges (Hull 1980:167).³

This essay explores one of these lesser-known projects: Louis Balbes des Berton’s failed attempt to persuade the Spanish Crown to grant him liberal commercial and colonizing concessions in Puerto Rico. Known mostly by his title as the Duke of Crillón y Mahón, Balbes des Berton was an aristocrat who sought to get rich in the Indies. In 1776, the Spanish monarch Charles III granted him a substantial donation of land in Puerto Rico, together with the right to import the necessary equipment and technical personnel to put it into cultivation. The significance and controversial character of this case may be gleaned from the multiple, copious dossiers it generated. They contain much information about the allocation, dimensions, appraisal, type, condition, location, and potential utility of the lands in question, all of which

2. See, for example, Picó 1986:142.

3. Knight of Losevil to King, April 13, 1789, leg. 2393, Santo Domingo, AGI; petition of Jacques Concanon, 1761, leg. 6948, exp. 11, Sección de Estado (henceforth Estado), AGS; petition of Juan Tuite, leg. 6961, exp. 14, Estado, AGS.

sheds light on agrarian conditions in Puerto Rico at that time. Perhaps for this reason, most investigators have focused too narrowly on that angle and ignored the larger colonial and interimperial context in which the Spanish Crown weighed such proposals.⁴

BOURBON REFORMISM AND AGRICULTURAL EXPLOITATION

The Crillón affair is a direct outcome of a series of eighteenth-century reorganizational measures that would come to be known collectively as the Bourbon reforms. Designed to overhaul the Spanish American colonial empire, the program of renewal focused special attention on those regions most vulnerable to foreign intrusions and least able to cover their administrative and military upkeep. Early eighteenth-century Puerto Rico matched this profile. In the aftermath of the Caribbean phase of the Spanish exploration, conquest, and colonization in the Americas, the island became little more than a penal colony, defensive post, and refueling station for the Spanish naval convoys. As Spanish colonization shifted to the mineral enclaves of Mexico and Peru, England, Denmark, France, and Holland gradually carved out their own colonies in the Caribbean. For the next two hundred years, they seized the Bahamas chain, Jamaica, western Hispaniola, and the eastern Antilles. Concurrently, illegal, widespread trading between the British, French, and Dutch Caribbean and the Spanish colonies developed (López 1980:25-47). In 1762 the British occupied Havana, gaining temporary control of a major Spanish military bastion in the Caribbean and disrupting mercantile operations centered on the port city.

The Bourbon reforms sought to put an end to such territorial and economic encroachments and bring these peripheral areas into closer alignment with Spanish imperial objectives. Its telltale signs in Puerto Rico, particularly after about 1750, could not be more clear: concerted efforts to promote the commercial cultivation of tobacco, coffee, sugar, and other cash crops; stepped-up attempts to eradicate vagrancy, apprehend deserters and maroons, and immobilize and harness the labor of artisans and peasants; accelerated urbanization; large-scale importation of bonded African workers; generous immigration incentives extended to politically “safe” foreigners; crackdown on illegal traders; reorganization of island militias and updating of defensive fortifications; statistical and scientific studies of the island’s natural and

4. See Coll y Toste 1914:280-81; Caro de Delgado 1963; Szászdi 1962:161; Gil-Bermejo García 1970:301-19; Godreau & Giusti 1993:488, 493-94; Moscoso 1999:245.

human resources; and the implementation of fiscal and mercantile regulations to bind Puerto Rico tighter to the Hispanic American economy.⁵

BACKGROUND TO THE LAND GRANT

Unprecedented changes of this magnitude on an island long coveted by Spain's European rivals for its central Caribbean location and fertile soil were bound to attract considerable attention (Morales Carrión 1974:60-61, 72-73). Lured by the prospects of fat profits, a trickle of enterprising colonists from Europe and the Lesser Antilles set out for the Spanish Antilles to invest in commercial agriculture. The Duke of Crillón y Mahón was one of the prominent fortune seekers of this age. French by nationality and Italian by heritage, Crillón was born in 1717. He joined the Spanish military in 1758 and enjoyed the rank of Teniente General in 1775. Awarded the *Gran Cruz de la Orden de Carlos III* in 1781, a year later he retook the Spanish Mediterranean island-colony of Menorca, which the British had wrested from Spain during the War of Spanish Succession. In addition to possessing the duchy of Mahón and the aristocratic title of *Grande de España de Primera Clase*, he served as Captain General of Valencia and Murcia from 1785 to his death in 1796 (Terrón Ponce 1998:14-23). Toward the end of his life, he authored a book recounting his military career (Crillón 1791).

"Desiring to contribute to the greater wellbeing of the state as a loyal vassal of His Majesty, hence applying his assets to promote agriculture," in late 1775 the duke petitioned the Crown for land in Santo Domingo. He asked for six *leguas* of land around the Hispaniola regions of Neiba, Gonaïve, and Monte Christi – all near the border with French Saint Domingue. These regions, he maintained, were sparsely settled and abandoned because their settlers had no means, skills, or inclination to make them productive, or no one legitimately owned them. To this end, he proposed relocating to Santo Domingo at his expense to set an example of hard work and simultaneously place secured limits on the border with French Saint Domingue.⁶

Judging by the negative reaction of the Spanish Crown, Crillón misperceived the political climate of interimperial relations in the Caribbean. Spain had been concerned for some time with French expansionism in Hispaniola. What began in the middle of the seventeenth century as a buccaneers' nest in the western tip of Hispaniola, the French enclave of Saint Domingue,

5. Torres Ramírez 1968; Cambre Mariño 1972; Fisher 1981; González Vales 1983; Román Gutiérrez 1998; González-Ripoll Navarro 1999:45-77.

6. Crillón to King of Spain, leg. 464, December 4, 1775, Sección de Ultramar (henceforth Ultramar), AGI; leg. 26, Archivo Campomanes (henceforth Campomanes), Fundación Universitaria Española, Madrid, Spain.

eventually occupied just about a third of the island. Unable to effectively check this advance, the Spanish Crown resorted to limiting or barring further foreign settlement. In 1686, 1694, and 1701, the Council cited the need to safeguard the Spanish American trade in blocking Flemish and Irish families from settling Hispaniola (Gutierrez Escudero 1983:58-61). Just five years before Crillón's request, it also rejected the Frenchman Francisco Le-Negre's project for settling 12,000 foreign colonists in Hispaniola. In making this determination, the council claimed that the Le-Negre's offer further corroborated France's aim of taking over the entire island.⁷

Since Crillón's request came just as Spain was conferring with France over competing territorial claims in Hispaniola, the Council of the Indies expressed reservations about his timing. The likelihood that it was a French ploy to grab additional land before the frontier disputes were officially settled did not go unnoticed. The council wondered how the duke's plan to seal off six *leguas* would protect a border that was one hundred and fifty *leguas* in length. Besides, the Laws of the Indies banned foreigners from settling near frontiers and port regions. The body conceded that Santo Domingo desperately needed agricultural workers and other forms of assistance, but concluded that approving the Crillón proposal would only reinforce the French position. It pointed out that although the duke named his Spanish wife and children as beneficiaries of the grant, it was entirely possible for his relatives in France to inherit the properties in their absence. Furthermore, the council was not prepared to displace the local inhabitants by giving away their lands to a foreigner by origin, another clear indication that non-Hispanic colonization in threatened regions of the Indies would not be tolerated. However, in recognition of his naturalized Spanish status and military record, the council gave him the option of choosing land away from the disputed zone or in nearby Puerto Rico.⁸ Although Puerto Rico was adjacent to Hispaniola, Spain did not consider it as much an imminent target of French imperial designs in the Caribbean (Gutierrez Escudero 1983:58-64; see also Sevilla Soler 1980).

Crillón picked Puerto Rico, and at once asked for four *leguas* among the *terrenos realengos* (state-owned plots) closest to the port city of San Juan that would be suitable for growing sugar, coffee, indigo, and other crops. The Crown issued him the land grant on September 25, 1776. In accordance with the Laws of the Indies, the concession was not to infringe on the rights of private parties or communal grounds and could not be allocated near port areas. Moreover, it required that foreigners brought to work the land meet

7. Council of the Indies to King, March 29, 1776 and multiple *expedientes* dated c. 1776-1779, leg. 464, Ultramar, AGI; there are additional *expedientes* on Crillón, dated c. 1779-1789, in legs. 2368 and 2393, Santo Domingo, AGI.

8. Apuntaciones del expediente del Duque de Crillón (undated), leg. 26, Campomanes; King to Duke of Crillón, April 11, 1776, leg. 464, Ultramar, AGI.

the conditions for obtaining residence and naturalization, as the case might be. They were not to engage in commerce or any other activity normally forbidden to aliens, except agriculture. The Crown directed the governor of Puerto Rico to assign Crillón the lands with the previous concurrence of the San Juan city council. He was given one year to farm the land. Failing that, the land would revert to the Crown. Only Roman Catholics who pledged allegiance to Spain would be allowed to settle in Puerto Rico to work on or look after the duke's estates.

The Crillón grant came on the heels of a land reform program that started in 1735 when the Spanish Crown began looking closely at agricultural land use in Puerto Rico. Since then, a policy of confiscating and redistributing fallow lots among those willing and able to farm them commercially gradually emerged. Intended to increase agricultural exports, this revenue-generating strategy culminated in a 1778 *cédula* that granted islanders legal titles to the lands they had previously occupied. The process of measuring, parceling out lots, and awarding titles went on throughout the second half of the eighteenth century as *hateros* (cattle ranchers) and *estancieros* (farmers) waged legal battles over control of the land (Gil-Bermejo García 1970:275-76, 303; Moscoso 1999:119-246).

Crillón saw in the 1778 decree and related Bourbon measures to revitalize the Hispanic Caribbean economy a fitting opportunity to press for additional or supplementary concessions that he believed to be compatible with the spirit of the imperial overhaul. Accordingly, he sought to clarify what his grant actually entailed in order to uphold the royal intent and preclude any potential misunderstandings later on. Since the Crown had granted him four *leguas en cuadro*, he reasoned that each measured one *legua* in length by one *legua* in width. Hence, he asked that the Crown declare that his grant comprised sixteen squared *leguas* in total. Next, he pointed out that the vast size of his donation would necessitate additional time and effort before he could place the lands under cultivation. Therefore, he requested that the one-year time limit for tilling them start once he broke ground.

The duke also found the word "successors" employed in the grant language to be ambiguous, since it was often applied only to relatives as opposed to conventional heirs. For that reason, he also asked that the Crown unequivocally affirm his right to do whatever he pleased with his properties, including his right to name any representatives – be they relatives or not – as long as they met all the other criteria stipulated in the grant. To this effect, he indicated that the French Guyanese Company was ready to finance and administer the project and that he had secured the *colonos* needed to farm the estates. To reassure both parties, he outlined what historian A.R. Caro de Delgado (1963) has correctly labeled as an ill-advised, ostentatious attempt to transform the land grant into his private feudal state. In essence, his plan called for selling the lands in smaller lots to either Spanish or foreign colonists, over whom the duke would

exercise certain rights. For instance, the colonists would be free to sell their lands to whomever they wished but not before notifying Crillón or his successors, who would have a preferential option to re-acquire the properties. They would also have to agree to purchase all agricultural implements and slaves from the duke and to pay him an annual tribute to be determined at the time of contract. Crillón asked for the unprecedented right to erect churches within his domain, to appoint all ecclesiastical personnel, and to exempt his *colonos* from military service for a twenty-five-year period.

“THESE TYPES OF WORKERS ARE THE FUNDAMENTAL BASE OF
FARMING IN THE AMERICAS”

With these words, Crillón broached the subject of bonded Africans, which had made it possible for Saint Domingue and much of the eastern Antilles to fill the European and North American demand for sugar, coffee, and a variety of other tropical staples. Servile labor had also been used extensively in the Hispanic Caribbean during the short-lived mining boom of the early sixteenth century. It resurfaced gradually in the 1700s, but for a variety of reasons none of the early eighteenth-century attempts to fill the growing demand for African captives in Spanish America proved satisfactory. Wartime conditions hindered the Spaniard Miguel Iriarte's 1760 *asiento* or slave importation contract calling for the delivery of 15,000 captives to the Hispanic Caribbean over a ten-year period. A new agreement signed in 1765 and modified in 1768 transferred the *asiento* to the Aguirre-Aristégui Company (which became known as the *Compañía de Asiento de Negros*), co-owned by Iriarte and several other business associates. The new accord set aside 500 to 600 slaves to Puerto Rico, which was designated as the main depot for slave shipments to other Spanish American destinations. The partnership landed just over 12,500 captives in San Juan between 1766 and 1770, but nearly all were sold outside Puerto Rico (Díaz Soler 1970:84-90).⁹

The duke recounted how Spain's determined efforts to promote agricultural production in Puerto Rico had been unsuccessful. It chartered the Barcelona Company in the 1750s, endowing it with special privileges, to encourage Puerto Rican growers to ship their products on Spanish carriers. But the enterprise could not stay afloat when the projected volume of agricultural exports proved insufficient for investors to make a profit. The *Compañía de Asiento de Negros* preferred to sell slaves on a cash basis, a practice that prevented most planters in Puerto Rico from buying them. Poor sales in Puerto Rico were a

9. Mapa Abreviado de los Negros introducidos en Puerto Rico por el Asiento ... de Aguirre Aristégui y Compañía ... 1766 [to] 1770 ... March 25, 1772, leg. 2516, Santo Domingo, AGI.

major consideration in the decision to transfer its operations to Havana, which had a larger, more lucrative slave market. He believed that such obstacles could ultimately cripple, if not destroy, his future agricultural project. First, he would have to inform the *Compañía* each and every time he wished to purchase slaves, sell his crops in anticipation to have the currency at hand to make the transaction, and wait until enough buyers in Puerto Rico placed similar orders to sway the slave-trading contractors to make a stop in San Juan. He therefore requested authorization to import the slaves on his own. The *Compañía* would suffer no adverse consequences, he declared, since his slave-trading permit would “add the advantage ... of promoting the cultivation of the island, and thus [trigger] a greater consumption of slaves.”¹⁰

It seems that nothing came out of the above appeal, or perhaps the Crown purposely ignored it, prompting the duke to repeat it two years later. This time he submitted a detailed, five-chapter proposal to cover all facets of his slave trading project, such as its organization, administration, and security. Chapter four dealt specifically with the exploitation of captives in agricultural work. They “are to till the land ... [their acquisition] is ... one of the most indispensable elements ... for the success [of his agricultural enterprise].”¹¹ To ensure the right number, quality, and price of slaves, Crillón asked the Crown for authorization, effective May 1, 1779, to import “into Puerto Rico under foreign flag the number of slaves considered necessary for the use of his plantation and those of his *colonos* and farmers.”¹² Although the Crown had granted individual slave-trading licenses to selective planters in the past, as of 1779 it was still under contract with the *Compañía de Negros*. Even if the Crown had been willing to grant an exception, Crillón further requested the right to sell any spare slaves to other parties in Puerto Rico, as well as to the other Spanish American colonies. In essence, the duke sought to transform the original land grant – intended specifically to boost royal revenues in a marginal Spanish colony – into his private *asiento*.

Having laid out his case for African slavery, Crillón then proceeded to spell out how he would manage the bonded workers, whom he described “by nature of a harsh, bad condition and inclined in the extreme to gossip, idleness and laziness, and even ... to savagery and cruelty.”¹³ He believed that such traits, when combined with the disproportionately small number of Whites, usually not more than the four or five that typically led and lived with crews of two hundred or more slaves, would endanger the entire operation. Whites might be placed in harm’s way unless the captives were “infused [with] a certain kind of terror [, a] panic to frighten and subordinate them to the proper obedience

10. Crillón to King of Spain, San Ildefonso, September 23, 1776, leg. 464, Ultramar, AGI.

11. Crillón to King of Spain, Madrid, July 30, 1778, leg. 464, fol. 158, Ultramar, AGI.

12. Crillón to King of Spain, Madrid, July 30, 1778, leg. 464, fols. 158-59, Ultramar, AGI.

13. Crillón to King of Spain, Madrid, July 30, 1778, leg. 464, fol. 160, Ultramar, AGI.

and subjection.”¹⁴ Arguing that it was in the masters’ best interests to ensure the welfare of their slaves, he would “discipline” them prudently and discreetly according to their unique temperaments. Nevertheless, many would still refuse to work, fear, and respect their masters or complain to the authorities when reproved for disobeying orders. To prevent such “grave inconveniences,” he asked that no slave grievances against masters be admitted by the courts of justice for the first fifteen years, “until they have given proof of their domesticity and [work?] regularity.”¹⁵ In the meantime they would live under the immediate supervision of an adjudicator within the estate and were required to abide by a new set of rules that Crillón would implement as he saw fit.

Since *bozales* (African-born captives) would undergo a seasoning process and extensive training in all aspects of plantation production, he expected them to appreciate fourfold or even higher in value over time. Considering the additional money and time used up to transform the so-called “brutes” to manageable, skilled individuals, selling or redeeming them at their original purchase price would turn masters into mere educators or trainers of slaves for someone else’s benefit. He reasoned that this might happen under the current system of *coartación* or self-purchase, which could motivate slaves acting out of self-interest, revenge, greed, or those seeking to emulate others to avail themselves of this provision. Therefore, he asked that his slaves be exempted from the self-emancipation regulations for the first twenty-five years.¹⁶

Thirty-two articles dealt specifically with the sale of the captives. Crillón asked to be allowed to conduct his slave-trading business for a twenty-five-year period. To this end, he offered to establish a slave depot – together with housing units, medical facilities, and provision grounds – in Puerto Rico. Commissioned Spanish and foreign ships would haul in the captives to be sold on credit, cash, or in exchange for local products to the estates owned by Crillón, his *colonos*, private parties on the island, or to other parts of Spanish America. He also requested that the captives and their supplies be exempted from the various import and sales duties, except for a one-time, all-inclusive two percent tax. The duke would have the option of selling captives to foreigners in the event sales in the Spanish colonies sagged. These transactions would be governed by the regulations of 1778 *comercio libre* (free trade) which sought to increase Spain’s economic participation in its American colonies (see Fisher 1992 and Sonesson 2002:32-33). Francisco de Llano y San Ginés, a resident of the Spanish port city of Cádiz, was to have oversight over the entire slave-trading business.¹⁷

14. Crillón to King of Spain, Madrid, July 30, 1778, leg. 464, fol. 160, Ultramar, AGI.

15. Crillón to King of Spain, Madrid, July 30, 1778, leg. 464, fol. 161, Ultramar, AGI.

16. Crillón to King of Spain, Madrid, July 30, 1778, leg. 464, Ultramar AGI.

17. Crillón to King, Madrid, July 31, 1778 and December 30, 1778, leg. 464, Ultramar, AGI.

METROPOLITAN OVERSEERS INTERVENE

The Crown forwarded the request to the *Junta de Provisión General de Negros*, a ministerial committee that dealt with matters pertaining to the slave trade in Spanish America. The *Junta* characterized Crillón's new demands as so "warped that they not only inflate and deform the essence of his claims, but also the manner in which they are proposed, and misrepresent the substance of the [original land] concession."¹⁸ Although the duke's plan treated both the subject of his land grant and planned slave-trading project at length, the Council focused almost all of its sharp criticism on the land donation. Among other things, it accused Crillón of "running away" from his responsibilities to the grant; substituting *operarios* (workers) with *colonos* (colonists), and thus altering the grant's language and intent; further contravening the provisions and spirit of the 1778 *cédula* which required all newly titled proprietors to farm their land within one year of taking possession; twisting the language of his grant in an attempt to grab more land than was originally allotted to him; making ill-timed demands, including a request to purchase additional land that went against the royal order of dividing up the territory of Puerto Rico among as many farmers as possible; attempting to establish *mayorazgos*, or entailed estates, without royal authorization and in which he would have sole feudal power; illegally seeking to transfer his business interests in Puerto Rico to the French Guyanese Company, a foreign-owned enterprise "for whom the [King's] subjects would become mere dayworkers";¹⁹ and trying to take over the entire land mass of Puerto Rico, thus depriving His Majesty of a key defensive post in the Americas.²⁰

In contrast to the heavy-handedness noted above, the panel simply dismissed his attempt to slip in a request for slave trading privileges as "inadmissible at this time."²¹ Hence, it did not address any of the duke's clauses pertaining to the acquisition, transportation, sale, and treatment of captives.²² "It is very odd," it went on, "that the duke would want to become a slave trader."²³

18. [Junta de Provisión General de Negros] to King of Spain, Madrid, September 6, 1779, leg. 464, fols. 212-13, Ultramar, AGI.

19. [Junta de Provisión General de Negros] to King of Spain, Madrid, September 6, 1779, leg. 464, fols. 220-21, Ultramar, AGI.

20. The firm in question is likely the Company of the Coast of Africa, which was renamed the Guyana Company in 1776 (Thomas 1997:277).

21. [Junta de Provisión General de Negros] to King of Spain, Madrid, September 6, 1779, leg. 464, fols. 223, Ultramar, AGI.

22. For information on the Crown's attempt to regulate the treatment of slaves, see the aborted 1784 *Código Carolino* discussed by Lucena Salmoral 1996:18-19.

23. [Junta de Provisión General de Negros] to King of Spain, Madrid, September 6, 1779, leg. 464, fols. 223, Ultramar, AGI.

He was directed to formalize it separately from the land grant, leave out other interested parties, and abide by the procedures established for such purposes. In the meantime, he would have to acquire slaves as everyone else in Puerto Rico did, presumably through the *Compañía de Asiento de Negros*. In sum, the *Junta* concluded that, “This petition harbors grave inconveniences, and there is no instance of a like concession, neither in Spain nor in the Indies, undoubtedly because of its harmful effect on our constitution.”²⁴ Since the governor of Puerto Rico had not yet allocated him the full donation, the *Junta* advised the Crown to give Crillón a two-year extension, which was to take effect in 1784, to put all his lands under cultivation.²⁵

Despite the pointed rebuff, the duke pressed on. On September 1784, he applied for and received permission to let his French agents Santiago Alfonse and Simón Esteban LeBlanc relocate to Puerto Rico from Saint Domingue with two retainers, thirty slaves, and some plantation equipment. Not long thereafter, he resubmitted the previously rejected petition to allow him to transfer some of his properties to third parties, so long as they were Roman Catholics and pledged allegiance to Spain, and asked for authorization to export timber harvested on his properties that was not needed in Puerto Rico. The former was denied again and the latter tabled until officials in Puerto Rico assigned Crillón his entire donation and finalized the general distribution of *terrenos realengos*, *incultos* (untilled lands), and *baldíos* (unoccupied or untitled lands), which was moving at a snail’s pace.

Three years later, in 1787, he asked the Crown to extend him a loan, repayable in three to four years, to help get his agricultural project off the ground. The council expressed serious reservations about the subsidy. It observed that he had brought in only five workers of the anticipated 400 to 500 needed to tend to his four *leguas* but had imported plenty of plantation implements and supplies duty-free while continuing to give top priority to his other holdings in Saint Domingue. Besides, it considered the amount of the loan insufficient to accomplish his objectives. In the opinion of the Council, his track record so far strongly suggested that he might just default on the loan and use it as yet another excuse for delaying farming his lands. As with earlier requests, this one was also turned down.²⁶

Seemingly disregarding the aforementioned, on May 31, 1789 he re-submitted the loan request disguised as a petition for a 60,000 peso line of credit to buy 300 *bozales* for his lands in Puerto Rico. In support of the advance,

24. [Junta de Provisión General de Negros] to King of Spain, Madrid, September 6, 1779, leg. 464, fols. 224, Ultramar, AGI.

25. Council of the Indies to the governor of Puerto Rico, San Lorenzo, October 14, 1779, leg. 464, Ultramar, AGI; Junta de [Provisión General de] Negros to King, September 6, 1779, leg. 2393, Santo Domingo, AGI.

26. Council of the Indies resolution, May 20, 1792, leg. 464, Ultramar, AGI.

which he promised to reimburse in six years, he cited a royal decree of April 12, 1786 by which the Crown agreed to bankroll the acquisition of 1,500 African captives for settlers in Santo Domingo. The Crown acknowledged the purchase but explained that it was executed with the slave-trading firm of Baker and Dawson, whose contract with the *Real Hacienda* had since expired. In either case, a subsequent 1789 decree liberalized slave trading with Spanish America, rendering state intervention in this matter unnecessary. Besides, the outlay might prompt other equally deserving landowners to seek similar concessions. But before the Crown could notify Crillón that his loan application had been denied, he took the impulsive step of forwarding it an addendum outlining a loan repayment schedule!²⁷

Sensing that Crillón was quickly running out of options and that the donation was on the verge of expiring, the Council asked for an update on the grant from Puerto Rico's governor, Juan Dabán y Noguera. The official replied that he had been taking legal steps to expedite the Crillón donation when the Crown appointed Julián Díaz de Saravia, *fiscal* from the Audiencia of Santo Domingo, to oversee the land distribution program mandated by the 1778 *cédula*. He conveyed the Council's directive to Saravia, who immediately set to work on his commission. The thick, forested, and impenetrable nature of the terrain, constant rains, demarcation hurdles, and the lack of trained surveying personnel and equipment hindered his effort. Saravia estimated that it would take four years to complete the job. But after only eight months of measuring and parceling out lots in the settlements of Humacao, Fajardo, and Loíza, Saravia was promoted to the Audiencia of Caracas and abruptly left Puerto Rico. Before departing, he reported that Crillón's lands in the said towns consisted of forty three *caballerías*, of which fifteen were located in Humacao and thirty in Fajardo. Of these, the first fifteen in Humacao had been officially handed over to his agent Santiago Alfonse in late October 1786. The duke's representative began farming but pulled back claiming that Crillón had yet to deliver the additional funds that he had promised.²⁸

Frustrated with the meager results, the duke fired back. On March 28, 1792, he complained to the Crown that the real hold-off stemmed from the multiple surveying snags and suspension of the Saravia assignment. He

27. [Exmo Sr. Baylio Fray Don Antonio Valdes y Bazán?] to Duke of Crillón, June 22, 1789, leg. 2368, Santo Domingo, AGI.

28. Council of the Indies resolution, May 20, 1792, leg. 464, Ultramar, AGI. Since one *caballería* equals about 200 acres or the same in *cuerdas*, by that measurement the duke's donation may have been about 18,500 *cuerdas*. That quantity harmonizes with the figure of 19,000 *cuerdas* given in Caro de Delgado's essay (1963:62-63) but is far below the 40,000 *cuerdas* reported in the work by Godreau & Giusti (1993:488). Islandwide, his donation totaled between 85 and 94 *caballerías* spread out in the towns of Naguabo, Fajardo, Luquillo, Loíza, Isabela, and Pepino (Gil-Bermejo García 1970:316).

also pointed the finger at Alfonse, to whom he had allegedly delivered over 150,000 pesos over a fourteen-year period. Unfortunately for Crillón, the agent passed away in 1790 without advancing the project or taking ownership of the whole four *leguas*. Notwithstanding the setbacks, the duke managed to line up an affluent business partner and a new designee to get back on track. In order to go forward, he asked the Crown to approve a new, eleven-point proposal based on royal *cédulas* that sought to revamp Trinidad's economy and authorized the importation of enslaved Africans into Spanish America. In it, he repeated many of the same demands that the Council of the Indies had already rejected, such as permission to sell or transfer his properties to Spanish and foreign parties, recruit *colonos* overseas and collect personal tribute from them, and import slaves duty-free for a decade, that is, for four more years beyond the six-year window of opportunity decreed on November 24, 1791.²⁹ Now, he also solicited that his trustees, consignees, and *colonos* be exempted from all obligations to the state for the same interval, and be allowed to acquire provisions, agricultural implements, and ships either in Spain, its colonies, or in foreign markets.

Despite his tenacity, metropolitan watchdogs resisted all attempts to surrender treasured ecclesiastical prerogatives, confer feudal rights akin to the then-extinguished *encomienda*, and grant extraordinary exemptions from taxes and military services. As the Council of Indies observed, such concessions would have given Crillón a considerable, unfair advantage over all other Spanish subjects and would shortchange the royal coffers. The Council of State concurred, adding that he could sell his lands only to foreign Catholics who took up residence in the Spanish dominions. It directed the governor of Puerto Rico to finalize allocating the duke's grant within two years and gave Crillón four years from that point forward to cultivate the estates or forfeit them. In the event the governor could not find enough land to complete the full donation, it suggested transferring the deed to either southern Guyana or Trinidad. Crillón eventually pursued one of these options by filing a petition for a concession of land in Trinidad shortly after the 1783 *Cédula de Población y Comercio* (literally, a decree for the promotion of colonization and commerce) was made public (see Borde 1982:214).

Once again, however, the Council of State rejected the duke's plea to obtain the same special economic and political incentives given to foreign immigrants in Trinidad. Those concessions, the panel argued, were specific to the unique circumstances of the eastern Caribbean island which, unlike Puerto Rico, was nearly deserted. The Council of the Indies went even further. It called attention to a recent royal order forbidding the settlement of citizens of Great Britain, Holland, and Denmark in Cuba, and recommended that the ruling be put into operation to Puerto Rico and applied to French sub-

29. Spain's slave-trading efforts for this period are discussed in Díaz Soler (1953:84-99).

jects as well. By contrast, the Council of State found his request for extending the royal dispensation to import slaves from six to ten years reasonable as long as it was not abused. He could haul in as many *bozales* as he needed for his lands, but not for speculation.³⁰

The Crown relayed its decision to Crillón on July 19, 1792, but to its surprise he continued to pursue the matter. On May 15, 1793, he proposed selling one-half of his grant in Puerto Rico to the Barcelona-based British company of Herries, Keith, and Stembor. The firm reputedly could muster 600,000 pesos by floating six hundred stocks valued at 1,000 pesos a piece to both Spanish citizens and foreigners. The Crown would have to agree not to seize the company's assets for twenty-one years, even during wartime. In turn, the firm would dispatch three representatives in Puerto Rico to farm the land, import the necessary equipment and slaves, and ship out the agricultural products to Barcelona on private or chartered ships. It would pay out annual dividends of up to ten percent to each stockholder. Of the balance, one-third of the profits would be turned over to Crillón and the rest reinvested in the company. The Crown declined his latest offer.³¹

CONCLUSIONS

Despite two decades of unrelenting planning, proposal writing, and countless appeals, Crillón died in 1796 before he could plow his fields or carry out any of his other related ventures. The archival paper trail makes it abundantly clear that he lacked both the financial and royal backing to successfully bring the project to fruition. While he unquestionably bit off more than he could chew, it is also clear that Hispanophiles in the inner circle of the Spanish Crown saw him primarily as a foreigner by origin and scrutinized his requests accordingly. Those who resented the Bourbon monarchy's alleged favoritism toward certain non-Hispanics raised a storm of criticism when Crillón landed the duchy of Mahón. From their perspective, "these were unacceptable concessions when bestowed on a foreigner" (Terrón Ponce 1998:23). His successful 1782 military feat in Menorca may have temporarily silenced his detractors, but could do little to lessen Franco-Spanish tensions in the Caribbean. In the eyes of zealous Crown officials, some of his demands involving foreign interests confirmed the dangers of French expansionism in the Hispanic Caribbean and would only have contributed to the troubling erosion of Spanish economic and territorial hegemony in the Indies.

Although many of the objections raised by the Spanish Crown focused on project-specific concerns unrelated to Crillón's French roots per se, the fol-

30. Leg. 26, Campomanes, and leg. 464, Ultramar, AGI, various dates.

31. Resolution of the Council of the State, May 24, 1793, leg. 464, Ultramar, AGI.

lowing passage suggests that he was keenly aware that nativistic sentiments could derail his project:

The duke offers to give preference to Spaniards any time settlers come forward, but the gentlemen that make up the Council of State know very well how difficult it is to find natives of ... [Spain] or ... [the Indies] who would want to settle there. It is therefore indispensable to get a hold of foreigners not only as *colonos*, but also as capitalists who might be able to advance the funds and payments needed.³²

Since xenophobes in Spain believed that foreigners siphoned off the riches of the Indies, took jobs away from Iberians and native “Whites”, introduced heretical or superstitious ideas, and otherwise subverted Spanish authority, the duke tried to allay some of these fears as well:

In order to prevent these *colonos* or slaves from introducing beliefs that would harm the government, the duke ... would recruit people known for their [good] habits and ways of thinking, from friendly, Catholic nations; and would make sure to weed out slaves from islands in which they are rebelling, although the uprising of slaves [in the French Caribbean] has nothing to do with their way of thinking or being insubordinate, but [due] to the [rights given] to their comrades among the people of color, whose condition they have sought to achieve and which their owners have resisted fiercely.³³

Playing up his reputed loyalty to Spain, Crillón added that his agricultural *colonias* would boost the island’s population and thus provide the surest guarantee for its defense, “since no one defends the land better than those who own or settle it.”³⁴

Crillón planned to but did not join the migrant flow headed to the Spanish Antilles.³⁵ Exercising little control over his affairs across the Atlantic, a small share of his land grant was sold, some was illegally occupied by squatters, and the remainder reverted to the Spanish Crown by the end of the 1850s. Heirs and their legal spokespersons undertook numerous unsuccessful efforts throughout the nineteenth century to reclaim the land (Gil-Bermejo García 1970:301-19). In the end, anti-foreign sentiments in Spain, inter-European imperial politics in the Antillean region, and Crillón’s avarice and public pro-French views combined to thwart his long-sought plans to become both planter and *negrero*.

32. Leg. 26, Campomanes.

33. Leg. 26, Campomanes.

34. Leg. 26, Campomanes.

35. Leg. 409, c. 1781, Sección de Arribadas.

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