

‘POR QUE NO SABEMOS FIRMAR’: BLACK SLAVES IN EARLY GUATEMALA*

Juan, a literate black slave born and raised in the Spanish town of Cáceres, labored for at least five years during the 1560s in the Honduran gold mines of Guayape. Finally, growing tired of the arduous work of placer mining and taking advantage of his isolation, he made a bid for freedom. Upon hearing of Juan’s flight, his owner, a wealthy Santiago-based merchant named Santos de Figueroa, immediately began the process of securing Juan’s recovery. Eventually Juan made his way to Santo Domingo where unfortunately he was captured and Figueroa notified of his whereabouts.¹ It remains unknown if Juan was actually returned to Santiago or if Figueroa instead preferred to sell him, a rather common occurrence in cases of runaway slaves.

Juan serves to illustrate several aspects of African slavery in early Santiago. First, while literacy among slaves was rare, Juan was not unique in this regard; in his case, literacy undoubtedly was one of the important skills that permitted him to achieve a position of some trust. Second, the Honduran silver and gold mines used substantial numbers of African slaves.² Juan’s

* Research for this article was made possible by a fellowship from the Del Amo Foundation. Writing was made possible in part by a First Year Assistant Professor Summer Research Grant from the Florida State University (FSU). Completion was permitted by a sabbatical from the Department of History at FSU. I am grateful to Jane Landers, Matthew Restall, Lisa Sousa and the anonymous reviewers for their comments on earlier drafts. “Por que no sabemos firmar” (because we are unable to sign) appears often in notarial documents involving illiterate peoples. Literacy during the period, a topic as of yet not deeply studied, proved somewhat rare. While few people could completely read and write, more could sign their names and many more could at least manage a rough rubric. Those that could not write at all usually asked the notary or a witness to sign for them. The use of this phrase, thus, seems apropos given that literacy was extremely rare among Black slaves. Additionally in every single document consulted involving the need for Black slaves to sign, someone else inevitably did so in their place. Consequently the historical voice of Black slaves living in sixteenth-century Spanish Central America rarely appears directly, to date no diaries or other such documents have come to light and only a smattering of wills have been discovered, but rather indirectly.

¹ Archivo General de Centro América (from here on abbreviated as AGCA). A1.20.437.8840.f.12236 (1-18-68).

² One document states in Comayagua alone (a place of relatively large silver mining activity) 400

position at the mines, likely in a supervisory capacity overseeing native laborers, and his distance from Santos de Figueroa, are both in keeping with general patterns of black slavery as they developed in Santiago and elsewhere in Spanish America. Third, Juan's resistance, in the form of his escape, also proves quite common.

The general history of Africans in sixteenth-century Santiago de Guatemala, like Juan's flight, has for a long time remained buried in obscurity. The pioneering work done on early Mexico and Peru lacks counterparts for the Central American region;³ indeed, only a few scholarly works have considered blacks as part of larger projects.⁴ Fewer have made blacks (enslaved or free) the central theme of their investigations.⁵ Santiago's population of African descent has often been portrayed as small and insignificant. Therefore the historical importance of blacks is ranked far behind that

Blacks labored. See Carlos Alfonso Alvarez-Lobos Violator and Ricardo Toledo Palm, editors, *Libro de los Pareceres de la Real Audiencia de Guatemala, 1571-1655* (Guatemala: Academia de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, Biblioteca Goathemala, V. XXXII, 1996), p. 23. For a general discussion of silver production in the area see Linda A. Newson, "Silver Mining in Colonial Honduras," *Revista de Historia de América* 97 (1984), pp. 46-75.

³ See James Lockhart, *Spanish Peru, 1532-1560: A Social History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994, first edition 1968); Frederick P. Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru, 1524-1650* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974); and Colin A. Palmer, *Slaves of the White God: Blacks in Mexico, 1570-1650* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976). For the later colonial period see Patrick James Carroll, *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz: Race, Ethnicity, and Regional Development* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991); and Douglas Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660-1720* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994). For the nineteenth century see Peter Blanchard, *Slavery and Abolition in Early Republican Peru* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Books, 1992); and Christine Hünefeldt, *Paying the Price of Freedom, Family and Labor among Lima's Slaves, 1800-1854* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). Triana y Antorveza recently produced a well-written general history with useful documentation. See Humberto Triana y Antorveza, *Léxico documentado para la historia del negro en América (Siglos XV-XIX), Tomo I: Estudio preliminar* (Santafé de Bogotá: Instituto Caro y Cuervo, Biblioteca "Ezequiel Uricoechea," 1997).

⁴ MacLeod's work remains a classic in its incorporation of Black slaves as part of the larger colonial society. See Murdo J. MacLeod, *Spanish Central America: A Socioeconomic History, 1520-1720* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973). Despite some shortcomings the work of Martínez Peláez deserves mention for the inclusion of free and slave Blacks as part of the larger Guatemalan colonial society. See Severo Martínez Peláez, *La patria del criollo: Ensayo de interpretación de la realidad colonial guatemalteca* (Guatemala: Talleres de Ediciones en Marcha, 1973).

⁵ A few scholars have briefly examined the roles of Black slaves in Spanish Central America. See Thomas Fircher, "Hacia una definición de la esclavitud en la Guatemala colonial," translated by Daisy de Marengo, *Pensamiento Centroamericano* N. 153 (Octubre-Diciembre, 1976), pp. 41-55; Nigel Boland, "Colonization and Slavery in Central America," *Slavery and Abolition* 15:2 (August, 1994), pp. 11-25; and Beatriz Palm de Lewin, "La esclavitud de negros en Guatemala," *Memoria Primer Encuentro Nacional de Historiadores, Guatemala, Noviembre 24-26 de 1993* (Guatemala: Universidad de San Carlos, 1994), pp. 103-114. Christopher Lutz undertook the study of Blacks as part of larger quantitative works. See Christopher H. Lutz, "Santiago de Guatemala, 1541-1773: The Socio-Demographic History of a Spanish American Colonial City." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, University of Wisconsin at Madison, 1976; *Santiago de Guatemala, 1541-1773, City, Caste, and the Colonial Experience* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994).

of Europeans and natives.⁶ In general, an historical amnesia, one that negates the cultural contributions of blacks and minimizes their economic and cultural impact, has hampered the study of this group.

As justification for the paucity of studies, a lack of sources has often been cited. Yet local and international archives contain hundreds of records related to blacks. Although documents written specifically by blacks for the period under consideration have not been found, slaves and their free counterparts appear in scores of mundane sources, including land sales, freighting contracts, testaments, and criminal and civil cases. When used judiciously these records shed much light on the lives and activities of blacks in sixteenth-century Guatemala.⁷

Even though the number of black slaves remained modest when compared to the larger European and native populations, it was not so small that it did not influence the economic growth of Santiago. Indeed black slaves, and later free blacks, filled nearly every imaginable role in that city, working as semi-skilled domestics, highly trained (and valued) artisans, and supervisors of profitable agricultural lands such as cacao groves. Black slaves—and, by the mid to late sixteenth century, free blacks—served as intermediaries between natives and Europeans, contributing to (most likely in an unconscious way) the Hispanizing process by taking elements of Iberian culture to the largely native countryside. Within the urban context, black slaves also co-mingled closely with natives and likely exchanged cultural beliefs and practices. Undoubtedly, they also introduced elements of their own cultures to indigenous peoples and Europeans.⁸

To gain a better understanding of black slavery during the early years of the Spanish conquest this article discusses how and when Blacks arrived in Guatemala, the black slave trade as it developed in Santiago, the roles slaves played in the local society and economy, and some aspects of slave family life. This discussion is prefaced with a brief account of sixteenth-century

⁶ Martínez Peláez serves as a prime example. See Severo Martínez Peláez, *La patria del criollo: Ensayo de interpretación de la realidad colonial guatemalteca* (Guatemala: Talleres de Ediciones en Marcha, 1973), pp. 82, 272-279. See also Alfredo Jiménez, editor, *Antropología histórica: La Audiencia de Guatemala en el Siglo XVI* (Seville: Universidad de Sevilla, 1997); and Francis Polo Sifontes, *Historia de Guatemala: Visión de conjunto de su desarrollo político-cultural* (León, Spain: Editorial Evergraficas, 1988).

⁷ Olsen provides a solid synthesis of approaches to the use of documentary sources for the reconstruction of the Black past. See Margaret M. Olsen, "Negros horros and Cimarrones on the Legal Frontiers of the Caribbean: Accessing the African Voice in Colonial Spanish American Texts," *Research in African Literatures* 29:4 (Winter, 1998), pp. 52-72.

⁸ Blacks held onto many of aspects of their cultures, despite an intense pressure for them to conform to the cultural norms of their owners; see Emilia Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1812* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 77-78.

Santiago. In these early years, black slavery, not yet fully codified and still dependent on models of slavery developed in Spain, was undoubtedly an oppressive institution, but allowed for much variation.

THE SETTING

Few would have imagined that within a few decades after the arrival of Pedro de Alvarado in the company of a multitude of Spaniards, Blacks, and native auxiliaries, the small village they founded would eventually become an important regional center.⁹ After some major setbacks, including the relocation of the settlement three times, Santiago was finally firmly reestablished in 1541 astride important trade routes in the Valley of Panchoy.¹⁰ The existence of readily exportable goods led to a rapid growth that eventually saw Santiago turn into a hub for less important Spanish settlements to the north and south.¹¹ Cacao in particular played a central role in the development of the Guatemalan economy. Santiago also served as the seat of the Audiencia de Guatemala (regional high court) and except for a brief interruption in 1563-1570, this situation persisted until the end of the colonial period.¹² The combination of economic and political factors made Santiago an entrepôt with all manner of goods coming and going. The transactions of both professional merchants and other profit-seekers enlivened the city's commerce. Indeed throughout most of the sixteenth century, Santiago outranked all other Spanish settlements in Central America and occupied a tertiary position behind only Mexico City and Lima.

FIRST ARRIVALS

In many areas invaded by Spaniards, Blacks and peoples of mixed black descent (mulattos) accompanied the first arrivals, usually as slaves but also as free individuals.¹³ Blacks played a small, but not insignificant, role in the

⁹ For a grand narrative of these events see Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, Volume VI: History of Central America, Volume I, 1501-1530* (San Francisco: A.L. Bancroft and Company, Publishers, 1882); and Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (México: Editorial Patria, Second Edition, 1997, first printed in 1632). A more recent account appears in Wendy Kramer, *Encomienda Politics in Early Colonial Guatemala* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 25-46.

¹⁰ See Verle Lincoln Annis, *The Architecture of Antigua Guatemala, 1543-1773* (Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, 1968), pp. 1-4.

¹¹ See MacLeod, *Spanish Central America*.

¹² See Fernando González Davison, *Guatemala 1500-1970, Reflexiones sobre su desarrollo histórico* (Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, 1987), p. 9.

¹³ Juan Carlos Reyes G., "Negros y afroestizos en Colima, siglos XVI-XIX," edited by Luz María Martínez Montiel, *Presencia africana en México* (México: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y la Artes, 1997, first printed in 1995), pp. 259-335, 265.

violent clashes between Europeans and natives during the initial phase of the conquests of Chile, Mexico, and Peru.¹⁴ Although scholars have dated the arrival of Blacks in Santiago to 1543, when the first substantial shipment of slaves arrived in Honduras,¹⁵ it is clear that the first blacks arrived two decades before this, playing much the same role in Central America as they did elsewhere. At least one freed black slave named Juan Bardales received an award consisting of an annual subsidy for participation in the conquest of Honduras.¹⁶ Given the participation of blacks in the conquest of other areas, and in particular the case of Bardales in Honduras, it seems extremely likely that blacks also played a role in the Spanish subjugation of Guatemala.¹⁷

There is also specific evidence of black slaves being brought to Guatemala in the 1530s. For example, a Spaniard on his way from Seville to Santiago in 1532 requested license to take with him a couple of black slaves, one female and the other male.¹⁸ He was not the only person asking permission to transport slaves to Guatemala at this time; two similar requests date from the same year and another dates from 1535.¹⁹ These cases suggest that Spaniards had successfully imported black slaves in small numbers well before the 1543 shipment.²⁰

¹⁴ See Matthew Restall, "Black Conquistadors: Armed Africans in Early Spanish America," *The Americas*, this issue; Peter Gerhard, "A Black Conquistador in Mexico," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 58 (1978), pp. 451-459; James Lockhart, *The Men of Cajamarca: A Social and Biographical Study of the First Conquerors of Peru* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972), pp. 35-36, 380-84; and Henry Kamen, "El negro en hispanoamérica (1500-1700)," *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* 28 (1971), pp. 121-137. For a discussion of Blacks in the military during the whole of the colonial period see Peter M. Voelz, *Slave and Soldier, The Military Impact of Blacks in the Colonial Americas* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993).

¹⁵ See José Joaquín Pardo, *Efemerides para escribir la historia de la muy noble y muy leal ciudad de Santiago de Los Caballeros del Reino de Guatemala* (Guatemala: Tipografía Nacional, 1944), p. 8. Pardo's claim has been repeated unquestioningly for decades. See for example Mayra Valladares de Ruiz, "Capítulo IV, Estructura social de la colonia," In Mario Monteforte Toledo, editor, *Las formas y los días: El barroco en Guatemala* (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal Quinto Centenario: Turner Libros, 1989), pp. 51-62.

¹⁶ See AGCA. A1.29. 4677. 40220. (1565) Probanza de Méritos de Juan Bardales.

¹⁷ Rout states that Black slaves accompanied Pedro de Alvarado but fails to cite the source. See Leslie B. Rout, *The African Experience in Spanish America* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 75. See also Restall, "Black Conquistadors," *The Americas*, this issue.

¹⁸ See Licencia para esclavos de Juan Rodríguez Palma: Archivo General de Indias (from here on abbreviated as AGI): Sig.: Guatemala, 393, l. 1, f. 16 (fechas extremas 5-24-32).

¹⁹ Licencia de esclavos a Eugenio Moscoso AGI: Sig.: Guatemala, 393, l. 1, f. 49v-50 (fechas extremas 8-5-32) and Licencia de esclavos a Gabriel de Hurueña AGI: Sig.: Guatemala, 393, l. 1, f. 73v-74 (fechas extremas 11-27-32). Licencia para pasar esclavos a Gonzalo de Ronquillo, AGI: Sig.: Guatemala, 393, l. 1, f. 113-113v (fechas extremas 2-6-35).

²⁰ For a brief analysis of the Black slave trade in sixteenth-century Guatemala see my "The African Slave Trade in Early Santiago," *Urban History Workshop Review* 4 (Fall, 1998), pp. 6-12.

THE TRADE AND TREATMENT OF SLAVES

Already deeply rooted before the arrival of the first Spaniards to the so-called New World,²¹ the institution of African slavery thus appeared in Guatemala from the onset of the Spanish Conquest. By that time African slaves had gone from novelty to an indispensable part of the rural and urban work force of the Mediterranean,²² as they would in much of Spanish America.

In Guatemala, the relatively small number of black slaves did not warrant a large number of descriptive categories by owners. Spaniards relied on three major categories, namely *bozal* (recently arrived), *ladino* (fluent in Spanish or Portuguese and cognizant of Iberian ways), and *criollo* (born outside of the African homeland)—terms used throughout Spanish and Portuguese America. These terms served to provide prospective buyers with at least a modicum of information about their chattel. Prices, though dependent on other factors such as skills and sex, also reflected this categorization. Consequently, bozal slaves invariably cost much less than ladino or higher priced criollo slaves. Initially, during the early part of the sixteenth century, locally born black slaves prove extremely rare. Apparently, not enough time had lapsed since the arrival of black slaves to permit for local births. Imported criollo slaves, despite their high cost, do appear intermittently in the documentation.

Generally buyers and sellers remained ignorant of the exact geographic origin and consequently the ethnicity of African-born slaves. Usually the port of embarkation or an area close to it came to mean the place of origin. Given this confusion, determining which ethnic groups contributed the most slaves during the early period proves nearly impossible. At this time most African slaves embarked at ports located in West Africa, and for this reason the overwhelming majority of slaves were thought of as indigenous to that zone.²³ This of course does not mean that the majority of slaves originated solely from that vast area. Rather it points to the slight importance generally assigned to the ethnicity of African slaves, at least during the sixteenth century. Documents dating before 1550 rarely mention places of origin, but some two years later places of origin begin to appear with greater frequency.

²¹ See Charles Gibson, *Spain in America* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966), p. 114.

²² See Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex, Essays in Atlantic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, first edition 1990), p. 10.

²³ For discussion of areas of origin and the black slave trade in general see Robert Edgar Conrad, *World of Sorrow, The African Slave Trade in Brazil* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986); Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade. A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969); and Herbert S. Klein, *Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

Probably the small number of slaves in Guatemala before 1550 meant that the place of origin was not a significant factor in purchasing decisions.

As the number of black slaves grew, the need for more information to facilitate identification also increased. Therefore place of origin came to appear in more bills of sale. This greater availability may also have led at least some buyers to take an interest in the ethnicity of their slaves. Mention of place of origin even after 1552 remains haphazard, however, and it is unclear when ethnicity began to appear systematically in slave bills of sale.²⁴ Evidence indicates that ethnicity did not affect prices; fluency in Spanish and training affected prices more than ethnicity did. The small number of black slaves also made impossible the dominance of one ethnic group over another. The documentary records reveal that male slaves outnumbered females, no doubt reflecting the fact that males outnumbered females in the total number of slaves available for purchase in the West African markets.²⁵

Black slaves represented an investment not likely to lose its value but rather to increase with training. Therefore, those seeking to profit purchased unskilled black slaves, trained them, and then sold them for a substantial gain. Not surprisingly artisans in particular employed this method of investment.²⁶ Considering that the price of a trained slave was nearly double that of an untrained slave and that artisans depended on skilled auxiliaries, this investment strategy made good sense.²⁷

Black slaves, like native slaves, also played an important role, much like any other type of “merchandise,” as collateral for loans.²⁸ Given the high value of black slaves in general and of trained slaves in particular, their use as collateral proved quite common.²⁹ A case from 1544 illustrates this prac-

²⁴ Work with local seventeenth-century documents might well answer this important question.

²⁵ See Herbert S. Klein, *Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 147-148. For the seventeenth century see Robin Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa, 1550-1750: The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on an African Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 167.

²⁶ See AGCA. A1.20. 1362. 9853. f. 154 (5-31-44) and AGCA. A1.20. 439. 8842. f. 12606 (6-12-70).

²⁷ Compare with AGCA. A1.20. 446. 8849. f. 14428 (6-21-84), AGCA. A1.20. 2023. 14005. f. 31 (3-3-84), AGCA. A1.20. 424. 8827. f. 136 (10-16-86), and AGCA. A1.20. 445. 8848. f. 13832 (12-30-81).

²⁸ Credit, although relatively little studied for the sixteenth century, served as the basis for the local economy. The near complete lack of liquid capital mandated the existence of a complex credit structure in early Guatemala. For excellent discussions of credit in the later colonial period see Alfonso W. Quiroz, *Deudas olvidadas: Instrumentos de crédito en la economía colonial Peruana 1750-1820* (Lima: Fondo Editorial de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 1993); “Reassessing the Role of Credit in Late Colonial Peru: Censos, Escrituras and Imposiciones,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 4 (1994), 193-230; Linda Greenow, *Credit and Socioeconomic Change in Colonial Mexico: Loans and Mortgages in Guadalajara, 1720-1820* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983).

²⁹ See A1.20. 732. 9225. f. 52 (5-9-44), f. 88 (2-21-44), AGCA. A1.20. 733. 9226. f. 43 (4-6-66), f. 176 (9-9-44), f. 178 (1-31-49), 231 (10-17-52), f. 300 (5-12-62), AGCA. A1.20. 734. 9227. f. 130 (12-

tice. That year a local Spaniard sought to borrow 450 pesos from a wealthy encomendero.³⁰ The borrower used as collateral some houses, four black slaves (three men and a woman), and eight native slaves (five men and two women).³¹ Slaves in general, and black slaves in particular, served as excellent collateral since their confiscation (and sale if it came to that) proved quick in cases of default on either the annuities or principal of a loan. When this happened black slaves ranked among the first of a borrower's possessions impounded.³² The records reveal that this happened not infrequently.

The small black population in early Santiago made slaves scarce and expensive. Their scarcity and high value them important auxiliaries who enjoyed a high degree of trust from their owners. In many situations flight would have been relatively easy, particularly when supervising agricultural enterprises.³³ Surprisingly the majority of slaves in these situations did not opt for flight. Perhaps black slaves realized that flight rarely proved successful; not too much time would elapse before their capture. Indeed owners confided in the eventual return of their slaves to the point that runaways commonly sold for the same price as if in captivity.³⁴

During this early period black slaves simply did not have many places where they could hope to find permanent refuge. The native countryside did not offer much in the way of long term refuge, and Spanish cities also proved generally inhospitable. Eventually runaways would have to confront someone cognizant of their status, and capture and return would likely ensue. Therefore, unless mistreatment, overwork, or loneliness proved too great, the majority of black slaves chose not to flee.³⁵ Runaway slaves organized into resistance bands (*cimarrones* or maroons) do not appear in or around early Santiago.³⁶ The small runaway population made it nearly

29-67); AGCA. A1.20. 807. 9301. f. 125 (7-18-75), AGCA. A1.20. 1362. 9853. f. 168 (6-23-44); AGCA. A1.20. 1489. 9969. f. 11 (12-30-54), and AGCA. A1.15. 4079. 32373. (4-3-83).

³⁰ See note 26.

³¹ See AGCA. A1.20. 732. 9225. f. 110 (3-3-44).

³² See AGCA. A1.20. 423. 8826. f. 100 (8-11-84). Guevara Sanginés mentions merchants acquiring black slaves as payment for debts in early Guanajuato. See María Guevara Sanginés, "Participación de Los africanos en el desarrollo del Guanajuato colonial," in Luz María Martínez Montiel, editor, *Presencia africana en México* (México: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y la Artes, 1997, first printed in 1995), pp. 133-198, 148.

³³ See AGCA. A1.20. 734. 9227. f. 395 (12-9-68), "Last Will and Testament of Pedro Alemán," AGCA. A1.20. 734. 9227. f. 395 (12-9-68) and AGCA. A1.20. 422. 8825. f. 3 (2-23-83).

³⁴ See AGCA. A1.20. 1489. 9969. f. 41 (1-3-55) and AGCA. A1.20 424 8827 f. 140 (10-21-86).

³⁵ I reserve a full discussion of resistance for a manuscript currently in progress.

³⁶ Martínez Peláez mentions a black slave revolt that took place in Honduras in 1548. He does not elaborate, however, if the revolt resulted from the activity of cimmarones or whether it occurred spontaneously. See Severo Martínez Peláez, *La patria del criollo: Ensayo de interpretación de la realidad colonial guatemalteca* (Guatemala: Talleres de Ediciones en Marcha, 1973), p. 278.

impossible to establish maroon communities during the sixteenth century. By the 1620s, however, at least one visitor to the region tells of two to three hundred cimarrones operating in the Caribbean coast of Guatemala.³⁷

The high price and scarcity of black slaves likely influenced their treatment, although exactly to what extent remains unknown. While slavery produced untold horrors for those in bondage, the high price of slaves in early Santiago led many owners to provide if not humane treatment then at the very least adequate care to their slaves. Comparing the situations of black and native slaves helps to illustrate the better treatment received by the former. The low price and ready availability of native slaves, at least until the Crown made a concerted effort to abolish native slavery,³⁸ made it easy and inexpensive to replace them. Thus those who owned native slaves had little incentive to provide reasonable care and to avoid mistreating them.

Native slaves nearly always received brands on their faces: the seal of the king and the name of their owners (a repetitive process for those having more than one proprietor).³⁹ An exhaustive examination of local records revealed that black slaves generally did not undergo this ordeal.⁴⁰ Branding proved much more common in areas where larger black slave populations inspired a greater need for identification.⁴¹ Branding, then, served at least three important functions for Spaniards: it facilitated the collection of tax (a small fee was paid each time someone used the king's iron); it helped specify ownership of slaves in cases where a proprietor's name or seal appeared; and it helped differentiate the slave from non-slave, a particularly crucial issue in the case of natives. Santiago's small black slave population and their generally high prices offset the need for branding. Yet in early Santiago it

³⁷ Gage's tendency to exaggerate makes use of his work problematic. See Thomas Gage, *Thomas Gage's Travels in the New World*, edited by J. Eric Thompson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958, third printing 1985, Gage's original published in 1648), pp. 195-196. For other areas of Latin America see Patrick J. Carroll, "Mandinga: The Evolution of a Runaway Slave Community, 1735-1827," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 19:4 (October, 1977), pp. 488-505; José L. Franco, "Maroons and Slave Rebellions in the Spanish Territories," in Richard Price, editor, *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), pp. 34-48; and Stuart B. Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels: Reconsidering Brazilian Slavery* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), pp. 103-36.

³⁸ Although native slavery continued in isolated instances long after the Royal ban of 1548, the large number of native slaves that characterized the trade during its apex dwindled after the mid-sixteenth century. See William L. Sherman, "Indian Slavery and the Cerrato Reforms," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 51 (1971), pp. 25-50, and *Forced Native Labor in Sixteenth-Century Central America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), pp. 129-188.

³⁹ See AGI: Sig.: Guatemala, 393, l. 1, f. 42-43v and Sherman, *Forced Native Labor*, pp. 64-67.

⁴⁰ See AGCA. A1.20. 437. 8840. f. 12042 (1-8-68) and AGCA. A1.20. 438. 8841. f. 12427 (3-17-69).

⁴¹ See Frederick P. Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru, 1524-1650* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 83-84.

seems that Spaniards cared little for the ethnicity of slaves if they considered branding necessary. Indeed, even costly *blanco* (white) slaves, usually of Moorish extraction, received the hot iron.⁴²

A number of slaves, however, did suffer terribly at the hands of their owners. Some slaves underwent unmerciful mutilation. In most cases the records do not specify whether the disfigurement resulted from accident, illness, or willful corporal punishment. Thus the causes of severe mutilation prove difficult to deduce. A slave sale from 1586 identifies Juan, a black slave born in Lima, as “having a scar on the left arm that resembles a burn with the nerves of the arm a bit shrunken.”⁴³ This document, like the majority containing descriptions of mutilated Blacks, does not describe the origin of the physical disfigurement. In rare instances, however, the mutilation appears clearly identified as a result of punishment. A twenty-eight-years old Guatemala-born black slave named Juan had his owner’s name branded on his face and his ears cropped off as punishment for stealing.⁴⁴ The document does not state whether Juan’s present or past owner mutilated him. Cases such as that of the latter Juan proved rare. At least some owners simply preferred to sell “troublesome” slaves rather than damage their investments with mutilations.

In addition to serving as important auxiliaries and potentially lucrative investments black slaves also conferred status on their owners. Thus, almost anyone who possessed the means owned at least one black slave in their household. Indeed a wealthy household seemed incomplete without the presence of at least one black slave.⁴⁵ It does not surprise then, that the colonial Spanish elite such as *encomenderos* and wealthy merchants owned numerous black slaves. In an effort to emulate the Spanish elite at least a small number of natives also owned black slaves. Yet the high price of blacks never made this practice widespread. Indeed only *principales*⁴⁶ and other well-to-do natives from areas that produced valuable agricultural goods such as cacao purchased black slaves.⁴⁷ Juan de Pineda, a visitor to the

⁴² See AGCA. A1.20. 2023. 14005 f. 7 (1-4-84). At this time the term *blanco*, when used in conjunction with *esclavo* (slave), usually meant moor.

⁴³ The original reads “en el brazo yzquierdo una señal a manera de quemadura y tiene losnerbios del brazo un poco encoxidos” see AGCA. A1.20. 424 8827. f. 136 (10-16-86).

⁴⁴ See AGCA. A1.20 437 8840 f. 12042 (1-8-68).

⁴⁵ See James Lockhart, *Spanish Peru, 1532-1560, A Social History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994, first edition 1968), pp. 204-05.

⁴⁶ Borrowed from the Central Mexican region, the term *principal* referred to the native noble males who had been or were presently members of the municipal or ecclesiastical councils. See Robert M. Hill, II, *Colonial Cakchiquels: Highland Maya Adaptation to Spanish Rule, 1600-1700* (Fort Worth: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich Publishers, 1992), p. 165.

⁴⁷ See AGCA. A1.20. 441. 8844. f. 12789 (9-22-70).

profitable cacao regions who later wrote a detailed chronicle of his travels, stated that some natives had “[male and female] blacks that served them.”⁴⁸ Thus it seems that both natives and Europeans, their economic standing permitting, owned black slaves.

The African slave trade, at least during the early years, lacked the necessary elements to make it efficient. The lack of direct trade links with slaving centers in West Africa, competition from more lucrative labor markets in Mexico and Peru, the unavailability of liquid capital, and poor transportation routes prevented the large scale importation of African slaves to Santiago. As a result, available black slaves commanded a premium for sellers, and most purchasers bought only one or two slaves at a time, acquiring them in a piecemeal fashion. Only rarely do transactions involving more than two slaves appear in the documentation. The ready availability of first native slaves and later (and indeed throughout the colonial period) of coerced native labor made the acquisition of large numbers of black slaves unnecessary for basic labor, for the most part. Despite a severe decline in the size of the native population, due to among other factors the introduction of European diseases, it remained sufficient to accommodate Santiago’s labor needs during the period studied.⁴⁹ Thus inadequate trade links in combination with the existence of relatively easily available coerced native labor made impractical the direct importation of slaves from the African homeland. Consequently black slaves arrived indirectly, usually from Spain or other parts of the empire. In some cases imported criollo black slaves came from places such as Puerto Rico⁵⁰ and in others they were first brought to neighboring areas such as El Salvador before being sold to a person living in San-

⁴⁸ The original reads “algunos dellos tien negros y negras que les sirven.” Although the passage does not specifically identify the Blacks in question as slaves the context leaves little doubt. See Juan de Pineda, “Descripción de la Provincia de Guatemala, Año 1594” in Manuel Serrano y Sanz, editor, *Relaciones históricas y geográficas de América Central* (Madrid: Librería General del Victoriano Suárez, 1908), p.442. Also quoted in Felix Webster McBryde, *Cultural and Historical Geography of Southwest Guatemala* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1971, first edition 1947), pp. 13-14.

⁴⁹ For excellent discussions of the native demographic decline in Guatemala see Robert Carmack, John Early, and Christopher Lutz, editors, *The Historical Demography of Highland Guatemala* (Albany: Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, State University of New York, 1982); W. George Lovell, *Conquest and Survival in Colonial Guatemala, A Historical Geography of the Cuchumatán Highlands, 1500-1821* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1985, revised edition 1992), pp. 67-72; Christopher H. Lutz, and William R. Swezey, “The Indian Population of Southern Guatemala, 1549-1551: An Analysis of López de Cerrato’s Tasaciones de Tributos,” *The Americas* 40 (1984), pp. 459-477; Thomas T. Veblen, “Native Population Decline in Totonicapán, Guatemala,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 67 (1977), pp. 484-499; Francisco de Solano, “La población indígena de Guatemala (1492-1800),” *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* 26 (1969), pp. 279-355, and Elías Zamora Acosta, “Conquista y crisis demográfica: la población indígena del occidente de Guatemala en el siglo XVI,” *Mesoamerica* 4 (1983), pp. 291-328.

⁵⁰ See AGCA. A1.20. 734. 9227. f. 516 (7-28-68).

tiago.⁵¹ Therefore, while there did not exist sufficient demand to warrant direct importation, there did exist enough buyers to make the small-scale importation of black slaves feasible and profitable.

Santiago's geographic location in the middle of important trade routes that went from central Mexico to El Salvador and Honduras, short-lived booms in valuable commodities like cacao,⁵² and the seat of the regional colonial government all contributed to the rapid creation of a black slave market. This market catered to buyers and sellers from areas to the north and south of Santiago, with the majority of participants coming from the north. In the initial phase of the trade transactions likely took place in an informal manner. Sellers such as merchants already had the appropriate connections in the local society necessary for quick sales. Those that lacked such connections either visited local notaries, perhaps the single best source of information on interested buyers, or sought out friends or relatives living in Santiago.

In the second phase, around 1570 if not earlier, a permanent venue, perhaps akin to a full fledged market, came into existence.⁵³ Here interested individuals could buy and sell black slaves. The existence of a permanent space for slave transaction suggests a well-developed trade. No longer did sellers or buyers have to rely on third parties such as notaries, who acted out of favor or a desire to profit. The exact mechanisms of this slave market remain unknown.

ECONOMIC ROLES OF BLACK SLAVES

In the case of the Iberian Peninsula, African slaves worked in agricultural enterprises and as skilled artisans, although most labored primarily in urban settings as domestics.⁵⁴ In early Latin America black slaves served as essential auxiliaries in all manners of tasks. When working in proximity to natives, Blacks, regardless if in bondage or free, almost always supervised less or equally skilled natives (whether these natives worked as *naborías*,⁵⁵ slaves or salaried employees). During the construction of a wheat mill in the 1570s, Domingo, identified alternatively as "Domingo el negro" (Domingo

⁵¹ See AGCA. A1.20. 441. 8844. f. 12840 (8-1570).

⁵² See MacLeod, *Spanish Central America*, pp. 82-95.

⁵³ See AGCA. A1.20. 733. 9226. f.116 (7-18-70).

⁵⁴ See Ruth Pike, "Sevillian Society in the Sixteenth Century: Slaves and Freedmen," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 47 (1967), pp. 344-359. For slaves in provincial settings see Vicente Graullera Sanz, *La esclavitud en Valencia en Los siglos XVI y XVII* (Valencia, 1978); and Alfonso Franco Silva, *Esclavitud en Andalucía, 1450-1550* (Spain: Universidad de Granada, 1992).

⁵⁵ Here I use the word *naboría* to denote a native person dependent on a Spaniard (invariably an *encomendero* (holder of a grant to collect tribute) and not in its later usage of a paid native laborer.

the black) and “Domingo albañil negro” (Domingo black mason) supervised fifteen native workers, some of them skilled masons like him.⁵⁶ Yet despite the diversity of tasks they undertook, black slaves served above all as domestic workers, either as heads of sizeable urban household staffs (largely consisting of natives) or as workers in home-based enterprises. Consequently slaves were concentrated heavily in Spanish cities, although a good number also worked in the countryside or in more distant areas of gold placer and silver mining.

Black slaves had to learn Spanish ways and customs, and consequently they came to represent one more element of the Spanish world. This of course does not imply that Blacks did not retain their identities and cultural beliefs and practices,⁵⁷ but it does partially explain the facility with which they came to occupy the middling position between higher-ranking Europeans and lower tiered natives. Indeed evidence indicates that in the early years, if not throughout most of the colonial period, native communities perceived blacks as one more element of the intrusive Spanish presence.⁵⁸ While black slaves did not hold a position equal to Spaniards in social or legal contexts, they did have great economic value, especially in the case of skilled artisans. Indeed black slaves, almost from the moment of their arrival, began performing all manners of tasks in early Santiago.

Although the majority of black slaves labored as domestics, this does not mean that they functioned as simple chambermaids or servants entrusted with tasks such as hauling firewood; for such simple tasks Spaniards preferred to hire inexpensive native laborers.⁵⁹ Instead black slaves held positions of greater import such as household managers and or workers in home-based commercial enterprises. Work in home-based enterprises proved quite common since many Spaniards operated industries such as bakeries or confectioneries from their homes.⁶⁰ Female slaves in particular, since many home-based enterprises relied on gendered labor tasks, could expect triple

⁵⁶ Not once during the testimony of natives and Spaniards alike does Domingo receive the label of *esclavo*. Therefore it seems highly probable that he formed part of Santiago’s free Black population. AGCA. A1.15. 4076. 32349. (3-23-71).

⁵⁷ Uncovering elements of Black culture for the period under study proves extremely elusive. In some cases, such as that of the *marimba* (xylophone), at least some scholars argue for African roots. See Fernando Ortiz Fernández, “La afroamericana ‘marimba’,” *Guatemala Indígena* 6:4 (December 1971), pp. 9-43.

⁵⁸ See Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule, A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519-1810* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983, first printed in 1964), p. 147.

⁵⁹ See AGCA. A1.20. 423. 8826. f. 39 (6-28-84).

⁶⁰ In contemporary Guatemala there exists little difference between commercial enterprises and the home, people operate bakeries, all manners of stores, and even medical clinics from the same building wherein they make their homes. Author’s Field Notes, Guatemala, 1990-1997.

duty, preparing the home, working in the commercial enterprises, and finally as if all that did not suffice they also sold the products they helped make. Therefore female black slaves worked as *panaderas* (bakers) and *cocineras* (cooks),⁶¹ while others sold items such as bread in the local *tianguiz*,⁶² often alongside native sellers of similar goods.⁶³ The use of female black slaves as bakers and cooks proved quite common during this period.⁶⁴ Male black slaves, although in smaller numbers, also worked in the preparation of food, suggesting some flexibility in the gendered division of labor.⁶⁵

Black slaves also provided much needed labor on agricultural estates.⁶⁶ There existed a well-developed system whereby a black slave, whether alone or in the company of her or his family, would oversee wheat-fields, vineyards, cacao groves, or participate in animal husbandry such as sheep herding, and cattle and pork raising. The slave would ensure the functioning of the agrarian business by organizing necessary repairs, contracting extra workers during harvest time, and in the end providing her or his owner with a stipulated amount of the produce. Thus these situations resembled contractual agreements and afforded slaves much independence so long as they kept the enterprises profitable. Female black slaves also administrated agrarian businesses just like their male counterparts. The life of Ana Martel is illustrative. Ana, a black slave owned by María de Paredes, administrated a cacao grove, a business of considerable value.⁶⁷ Ana lived on the site of the cacao grove and apparently acted with autonomy from her owners. In this case Ana's sex does not seem to have affected her owner's decision to leave her in charge of a rural business. On other occasions entire slave families served as caretakers of enterprises such as wheat fields.⁶⁸

While relatively small numbers of black slaves cared for agricultural estates, in early Guatemala mining employed more substantial numbers. The

⁶¹ See AGCA. A1.20. 423. 8826. f. 28 (6-15-84).

⁶² The word *tianguiz* (from Nahuatl *tianquiztla*) was commonly used among the population of New Spain and subsequently Guatemala. For its use in New Spain see James Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 191.

⁶³ See AGCA. A1.15. 4075. 32343. (12-6-77).

⁶⁴ Compare to James Lockhart and Enrique Otte, editors, *Letters and People of the Spanish Indies, Sixteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 70.

⁶⁵ See Autos Bienes de Difuntos: AGI: Sig.: Contratación 472, n. 4, r.9 (fechas extremas 8-5-67) and Autos de Bienes de Difuntos: Relaciones de Caudales de Bienes de Difuntos: Sig.: Contratación, 473, n. 1, r. 3 (fechas extremas 1568).

⁶⁶ See Severo Martínez Peláez, *La patria del criollo: Ensayo de interpretación de la realidad colonial guatemalteca* (Guatemala: Talleres de Ediciones en Marcha, 1973), p. 276. For black slaves on large agricultural estates see Lolita Gutiérrez Brockington, *The Leverage of Labor: Managing the Cortés Haciendas in Tehuantepec, 1588-1688* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), pp. 126-142.

⁶⁷ See AGCA. A1.20. 443. 8846. f. 13551 (1579).

⁶⁸ See AGCA. A1.20. 444. 8847. f. 13730 (9-27-81).

greater revenue potential of mining led to the use of larger numbers of black slaves since the margin for profit warranted the use of such costly labor auxiliaries.⁶⁹ Yet despite the high revenue potential of mining the overall number of black slaves remained small when compared to the quantity of native slaves involved in that activity,⁷⁰ at least until the successful abolition of native slavery. Placer mining for gold along riverbanks⁷¹ proved far more common than pit mining;⁷² indeed the evidence indicates that the latter form was practiced only in extreme occasions. Regardless of the form it took, gold mining lasted only a relatively short time in Guatemala. Several factors caused the quick demise of this industry, chief among them the small amounts of ore deposits, disease associated with the hot, wet climate of placer deposits, poor nutrition of laborers, and the subsequently heavy toll on native slaves.⁷³ Black slaves also played an important role in the area of pit silver mining,⁷⁴ although here too the small deposits of ore did not permit the growth of large-scale mines such as those that developed elsewhere.⁷⁵

Most black slaves assigned to gold mines performed arduous labor, perhaps the most physically demanding of all tasks performed during the era under study. In the absence of Spanish taskmasters black slaves resorted to their traditional role as overseers of less skilled natives. In these situation Blacks operated as the de facto administrators of the mines. The distance of the mines from Spanish cities, the subsequent physical isolation, and the large sums of liquid capital involved suggest that there existed a great deal of trust between slave owners and their mine supervisors. Occasionally some slaves found the temptation too great and simply decided they would leave the mining sites.

In general when conjuring images of black slavery, agrarian laborers and domestics immediately come to mind. An important segment of the black slave population, however, functioned as highly skilled artisans.⁷⁶ The exact number of black slave artisans that operated in early Santiago remains unknown. Given patterns seen elsewhere, it seems safe to infer that there were far fewer slave artisans than there were slaves working as household

⁶⁹ See Kris Lane, "Captivity and Redemption: Aspects of Slave Life in Early Colonial Quito and Popayán," *The Americas*, this issue.

⁷⁰ See AGCA. A1.20. 732. 9225. f. 16 (10-19-44).

⁷¹ See AGCA. A1.20. 442. 8845. f. 13084 (12-1-76).

⁷² See AGCA. A1.20. 438. 8841. f. 12397 (2-8-69).

⁷³ Compare to Frederick P. Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru, 1524-1650* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), p. 13.

⁷⁴ See AGCA. A1.20. 1362. 9853 f. 130 (5-19-44) and AGCA. A1.20. 444. 8847 f. 13644 (5-23-81)

⁷⁵ For a fuller discussion of silver mining in a Central American area see Linda A. Newson, "Silver Mining in Colonial Honduras," *Revista de Historia de América* 97 (1984), pp. 46-75.

⁷⁶ Compare to Bowser, *African Slave*, p. 125.

servants. This does not imply that they did not play a vital role in the local economy, however. Due to their capacity for generating revenue and high initial cost, artisans made up a sort of elite among black slaves. Consequently slave artisans constituted a group apart from lesser-trained slaves.

Black slaves worked in nearly every European manual craft represented in Santiago. Bartolomé and Juan Arada, identified as *esclavos molineros* (slave millers) appear in a bill of sale for a mill dating from 1586.⁷⁷ Other black slaves worked as cobblers and as aides to barber surgeons.⁷⁸ For reasons that remain somewhat unclear, slave artisans appear more frequently in the records for the first half of the sixteenth century than they do for the latter part. Beginning in the 1560s, native artisans began to displace black slave artisans. The lower initial investment of training a free native as compared to purchasing a black slave and the general difficulty of finding young male black slaves to train likely caused this shift. Nonetheless the predominance of native artisans did not lead to the disappearance of black slave artisans, only to a reduction in their numbers.

Slave artisans did not, however, make up a monolithic group but instead reflected the same divisions present among Spanish artisans.⁷⁹ Stated differently, the more complicated the work performed the higher the economic value of a given slave artisan. Towards the bottom of the slave artisan ladder stood muleteers. Their relatively low position likely resulted from the length of training (much longer than that of a domestic but still much less than a tailor) and their work with beasts of burden. Muleteers were subdivided into two large groups, *capitanes de harria* (mule train captains/administrators) charged with supervising the pack animals and human workers and the lesser-trained auxiliaries.⁸⁰ The auxiliaries had the toughest work as they had to load and unload the pack animals, a ritual practiced twice daily (at the beginning and end of a day's travels) or more often if the going proved particularly demanding.

As a group, despite differences in rank and status, black slave artisans had access to that which many slaves aspired—their freedom. Contractual agreements, whereby slaves would pay owners stipulated amounts while keeping the excess for themselves, served as an ideal mechanism for self-purchase. Since slave artisans had a greater income earning potential they, with far

⁷⁷ Interestingly Bartolomé had runaway four months before the transaction took place. See AGCA. A1.20. 424. 8827. f. 217 (12-31-86).

⁷⁸ See AGCA. A1.20. 446. 8849. f. 14428 (6-21-84) and AGCA. A1.15. 4074. 32340. (5-8-76).

⁷⁹ See John E. Kicza, *Colonial Entrepreneurs: Families and Business in Bourbon Mexico City* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), p. 207.

⁸⁰ See AGCA. A1.20. 733. 9226. f. 74 (5-29-66).

greater frequency than other slaves, could acquire their freedom though self-purchase. This mechanism does not prove unique to Santiago; virtually identical arrangements existed other places of Spanish America.

Individuals who could not purchase their freedom nevertheless had access to property in ways not usually associated with slavery. Black slaves could and did own real estate in early Santiago. In fact a careful scrutiny of the records reveals that there did not exist specific prohibitions against this practice. Black slaves wishing to purchase real estate did have to notify their owners and have them authorize the transaction. A simple power of attorney, usually granted to most economically active black slaves, sufficed to fulfill this requirement. So long as this relatively uncomplicated procedure was fulfilled black slaves could purchase and sell real estate as they wished. Real estate-owning black slaves appear rarely in the documentation, while slaves owning multiple pieces of real estate prove rarer still. The black slaves Juan de Dueñas and María de Dueñas (their exact relation is unclear) owned at least three distinct plots of land in Santiago.⁸¹ Circumstantial evidence indicates that they owned either a horse or a mule and that they operated a small bakery, though the exact nature of their economic activity remains unknown. In another case a free mulatto woman and her black slave husband bought a *solar* (house plot) from a native couple.⁸² These examples not only show that black slaves were property owners but also shed light on the existence of slave families, a topic barely studied for early Santiago.⁸³

THE SLAVE FAMILY

By emphasizing the strategies developed by black slaves to cope with bondage, and the significance of non-nuclear family units,⁸⁴ slave families in

⁸¹ The documents identify each as having the surname de Dueñas and not as a couple followed by de Dueñas. The former implies some sort of relation while the latter leaves little doubt that they would have been the chattel of Dueñas. See AGCA. A1.20. 807. 9301. f. 87 (3-26-75) and f. 125 (7-18-75).

⁸² Since the free woman undertook the transaction her husband's owner did not require notification. See AGCA. A1.20. 422. 8825. f. 319 (4-16-83).

⁸³ See my "The People of Santiago: Early Colonial Guatemala, 1538-1587," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1997, pp. 254-318. The slave family has received greater attention in other parts of Latin America. See David Lee Chandler, "Family Bonds and the Bondman: The Slave Family in Colonial Colombia," *Latin American Research Review* 16:2 (1981), pp. 107-131; Christine Hünefeldt, *Paying the Price of Freedom, Family and Labor Among Lima's Slaves* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 9-36; and Kátia de Queirós Mattoso, "Slave, Free, and Freed Family Structures in Nineteenth-Century Salvador, Bahia," *Luso-Brazilian Review* 25: 1 (Summer, 1988), pp. 69-84.

⁸⁴ See B. W. Higman, "Methodological Problems in the Study of the Slave Family," in Vera Rubin and Arthur Tuden, editors, *Comparative Perspectives on Slavery in New World Plantation Societies* (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1977), pp. 591-596; Stuart B. Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels: Reconsidering Brazilian Slavery* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 10; Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1990), pp. 85-86.

cities such as Santiago can be better understood. Indeed not even individuals who could afford to enter into Church-sanctioned marriages and set up a household always did so.⁸⁵ Therefore the different strategies developed by black slaves to cope with the particular demands of their existence as chattel often times replicated patterns practiced by other members of Santiago's non-black free community.

In the majority of cases involving slave families, Church-sanctioned marriage and living in the same domicile proved nearly impossible. Yet a small number of slave families, particularly those that worked on agricultural estates, managed the ideal of sharing a single home space.⁸⁶ A sale of one such agricultural estate dating from 1575 listed a slave couple, "un negro llamado Anton y una negra llamada Ysabel portuguesa su muger" (a Black named Anton and a Black named Isabel Portuguese, his woman).⁸⁷ The greater prevalence of slave families in agrarian settings resulted from several reasons, perhaps chief among them the desire of owners to prevent slaves from running away, a not unreasonable fear given the distance of many of these enterprises from the owner's place of residence. Providing slave women and men with the possibility of a stable home environment likely diminished the potential of running away. Once linked to other enslaved individuals, the repercussions of flight were made far more negative as owners could take out their anger on remaining family members. In other cases slaves entered into long term unions with non-slave individuals. And in most of these situations the pair consisted of a male black slave and a free woman, either black, mulatto or more commonly a native woman. A document from 1573 identifies a black slave named Anton as "married with an Indian named Margarita."⁸⁸

Circumstantial evidence suggests that owners, for the most part, did not seek to interfere in the sexual relations that took place among unattached black slaves. Although in the main most slave unions came into existence and ended without the overt intervention of owners in cases of sales, slave unions, indeed entire families, suffered disruption. In some rare instances Blacks relied on the Spanish legal system to stave off or prevent separation

⁸⁵ See for example Asunción Lavrin, "Sexuality in Colonial Mexico: A Church Dilemma." in Asunción Lavrin, editor, *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), pp. 47-95.

⁸⁶ See AGCA. A1.20. 734. 9227. f. 367 (10-29-68).

⁸⁷ See AGCA. A1.20. 807. 9301. f. 85 (3-20-75). The wording "su muger" is ambiguous. It could either mean wedded spouse or concubine. Nevertheless it does imply much more than a fleeting relationship between Anton and Ysabel.

⁸⁸ The original reads "negro esclavo Anton . . . casado con una yndia que se llama Margarita." AGCA. A1.20 441. 8844. f. 12953 (3-14-73). See also AGCA. A1.20 441. 8844. f. 12954 (3-14-73).

from their kin. The case of a freed black slave named Francisca illustrates. She filed suit against a Spanish woman who refused to honor a contract specifying the freedom of Francisca's young son. The Spanish woman insisted on keeping the enslaved child in her custody, but the courts found in Francisca's favor and in the end the child was freed.⁸⁹

In several cases slave women and their children appear in the documents with no mention of their partners. Commonly phrases such as "Catalina criolla con dos criaturas suyas" (Catalina, creole, with two of her children)⁹⁰ and "dos negras madre y hija llamadas Ysabel y Juana" (two blacks, mother and daughter, named Isabel and Juana)⁹¹ appear in the local records. These women and their children together made up families no less valid than those where a male head-of-household was also present. Indeed owners left the care of slave children largely in the hands of their slave mothers, not paying much heed to them until such a time as they began generating income as well. Children resulting from unions of black slave males and free native women usually lived with their mothers in their communities.

CONCLUSION

Black slaves and their descendants, despite their relatively small population, contributed greatly to the development of Santiago's society, culture, and economy. For many years the history of this important ethnic group remained largely forgotten or ignored. Therefore little information as to the lives of black slaves had come to light.⁹² In addition to black slaves there also lived in early Guatemala a large and rapidly expanding population of free Blacks that began to grow from around mid-century onward.⁹³ Along with their enslaved counterparts free blacks also contributed to the growth of Santiago from little more than a village to an important colonial center of commerce. Once freed, either as a result of service to owners, self-purchase, or manumission due to old age or extraordinary circumstances, Blacks engaged in activities similar to those of Spanish members of colonial society. Indeed in some parts of Spanish America, most clearly in Chile, Blacks managed to

⁸⁹ See AGCA. A1.20. 733. 9226 f. 148 (8-25-44).

⁹⁰ See AGCA. A1.20. 733. 9226 f. 74 (5-29-66).

⁹¹ Last Will and Testament of Juan de León de la Rúa AGCA. A1.20. 440. 8843. f. 11902 (10-72).

⁹² The 1950s saw the beginning of the systematic study of Blacks in Guatemala's colonial society. See Gustavo Correa, *El espíritu del mal en Guatemala* (New Orleans, 1955). Later Lutz ably took up the challenge in his landmark study. See Christopher H. Lutz, "Santiago de Guatemala, 1541-1773: The Socio-Demographic History of a Spanish American Colonial City," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1976. See also note 5.

⁹³ Compare to Bowser, *African Slave*, p. 273.

obtain the most sought after of all holdings, an *encomienda*,⁹⁴ while others acquired substantial holdings after their manumission.⁹⁵ Some even owned black slaves themselves.⁹⁶ Most free Blacks, however, carried on with their lives, occupying much the same roles as they had when enslaved.⁹⁷

To many owners, black slaves represented more than simple chattel. Clearly their acquisition resulted from dual desires of economic profit and increased social status, but in the end black slaves became indispensable to their owners on a daily basis. Slaves helped in maintaining—if not actually running—the households of the economically successful. They operated agricultural estates and home-based business like bakeries; they worked with costly mule trains, and operated artisan workshops. Black slaves functioned in nearly every imaginable role in early Santiago.

In the early years, black slavery was undoubtedly oppressive, but allowed for much variation. Therefore even within the framework of slavery a small number of Blacks in bondage managed to run enterprises apart from their owners and to own real estate. Although the total number of black slaves that owned property never proved numerous, the very fact that some did manage to acquire house lots and homes bespeaks of a great entrepreneurial drive among these individuals.

Despite significant adversity black slaves managed to maintain family structures. Owners did not always respect the family connections of slaves, and children and parents could be separated by sales with little heed paid to the negative emotional and psychological ramifications. Yet instead of leading to the destruction of families this adversity rather strengthened the determination of black slaves to cope as best they could. Like all parents, black slaves attempted to improve the situation of their offspring. Free children born to slave fathers would almost surely be apprenticed with an artisan,⁹⁸ no doubt to ensure the child greater economic opportunities.

The study of Santiago's black slave population proves essential to understanding the economic and cultural growth of the region. By placing Santiago's black slaves in the wider historical context of Spanish American,

⁹⁴ See Kamen, "El negro en hispanoamérica," pp. 121-137, 136; and Restall, "Black Conquistadors," *The Americas*, this issue.

⁹⁵ See Thomas Gage, *Thomas Gage's Travels in the New World*, edited by J. Eric Thompson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958, third printing 1985, Gage's original published in 1648), p. 197; also cited in *Ibid*: p. 136.

⁹⁶ See Luis M. Díaz Soler, *Historia de la esclavitud negra en Puerto Rico* (Rio Piedras: Editorial Universitaria, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1965), p. 251 also cited *Ibid*: p. 136.

⁹⁷ See Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places, Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans 1769-1803* (Durham: Duke University press, 1997), p. 55.

⁹⁸ See AGCA. A1.20 424. 8827. f. 40 (6-6-86).

indeed of the Atlantic World, unique and universal practices, patterns, and trends emerge. Fortuitously the field looks promising as more scholars begin to peel back the layers of historical memory to reveal much information on Guatemala's slave and free black population.⁹⁹

Florida State University
Tallahassee, Florida

ROBINSON A. HERRERA

⁹⁹ Komisaruk's work promises to shed much needed light on Black and mixed-Black women in the late colonial period. See for example Catherine Komisaruk, "'The Work it Cost Me': The Struggles of Slaves and Free Africans in Guatemala, 1770-1825," paper presented at The International Conference of the American Society for Ethnohistory, Mexico City, 1997. As well Paul Lokken's (Department of History, University of Florida) and Leonardo Hernández's (Department of History, Brown University) forthcoming dissertations will help towards the understanding of Blacks in Santiago's militias and interethnic interaction, respectively.