

Odious commerce

Britain, Spain and the abolition of
the Cuban slave trade

DAVID R. MURRAY

*Associate Professor, Department of History
University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario*

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE

LONDON NEW YORK NEW ROCHELLE

MELBOURNE SYDNEY

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Cambridge University Press 1980

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1980

First paperback edition 2002

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 22867 0 hardback

ISBN 0 521 52469 5 paperback

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	ix
1 The 'opening' of a legal trade	1
2 Parliament versus Cortes	22
3 Legality and illegality	40
4 The treaty of 1817	50
5 Enforcement and re-enforcement: the attempt to make the slave trade prohibition effective	72
6 The treaty of 1835	92
7 An abolitionist era	114
8 The Turnbull affair	133
9 The Escalera conspiracy	159
10 The penal law of 1845	181
11 Free trade and annexationism	208
12 The failure of the penal law	241
13 A new class of slaves	271
14 The abolition of the Cuban slave trade	298
<i>Abbreviations</i>	327
<i>Notes</i>	328
<i>Bibliography</i>	400
<i>Index</i>	415

TABLES

1	African slaves imported through Havana, 1790-1821	18
2	African trade through Havana, 1803-16	20
3	Number of African slaves landed in the Havana area, 1822-29	80
4	Nationality of Cuban slave trade vessels, 1834-40	103
5	Nationality of suspected slave trade vessels leaving Havana, 1834-40	104
6	British consul Tolmé's estimate of slave landings in Cuba, 1830-38	111
7	Numbers of slaves imported into the Havana-Matanzas area, 1835-41, taken from the books of the Cuban slave traders	112
8	British imports of Cuban sugar, 1845-60	243
9	Havana commissioners' estimate of the number of slaves imported into Cuba, 1840-67	244

The 'opening' of a legal trade

From the middle of the eighteenth century Cuba began to experience the remarkable economic growth which was to transform the island from a relative backwater of Spain's colonial empire into the world's richest colony and leading sugar producer by the late 1820s.¹ Cuba's importance to Spain hitherto had arisen chiefly from the strategic geographical location of its main port and capital, Havana, the traditional rendezvous for Spanish treasure ships on their way back to the peninsula. Prior to 1763 Cuba's economy was a mixed agricultural one based on tobacco, sugar and cattle grazing. Cuba was not yet dependent on sugar as were the other major Caribbean islands, Jamaica, Barbados and St Domingue. Even in the 1750s, however, the seeds of the later sugar latifundia were germinating; in spite of a tobacco boom the number of sugar plantations was growing. Cuba's sugar revolution occurred in the years after 1763. The official export figures of sugar from Havana offer dramatic evidence of sugar's conquest of Cuba. A yearly average of 13,000 boxes of sugar left Havana in 1760–3, rising to 50,000 boxes in 1770–8 and to over 80,000 in 1778–96. Yearly averages from 1796 to 1800, amounting to nearly 135,000 boxes a year, illustrate how well Cuba capitalized on the vacuum created by the devastation of St Domingue.²

The French colony of St Domingue had been the leading sugar producer in the Caribbean prior to the French Revolution, but the Revolution in 1789 set off a series of slave rebellions in the island which escalated into civil and race war, destroying the island's economy but leading eventually to the creation of Haiti, the first independent, black republic in the Caribbean. Cuba was the greatest beneficiary of the economic collapse of her neighbour, yet the export figures for Cuban sugar in the late 1790s pale into insignificance beside the yearly totals of the 1840s; over 700,000 boxes were exported from Matanzas and Havana in 1840, rising to nearly 850,000 boxes by 1844.³ At the end of the Napoleonic Wars Cuba's sugar production

was only slightly more than half of that of Jamaica, by then her leading Caribbean rival. Twenty-five years later, by 1840, Cuba's sugar production was 60% greater than all the British West Indian colonies combined and twice as large as Brazil's. The enormous rise in the export figures of Cuban sugar reflected an increasing economic prosperity but a prosperity that by 1850 was almost wholly dependent on the sugar industry.

Cuba's transformation came during a period when her leading Caribbean competitors either were declining economically like Jamaica and Barbados or, like St Domingue, being consumed by revolution. Cuba's sugar revolution was solely economic and it did not affect her status as a Spanish colony. Cuba remained 'the ever faithful island' during the Wars of Independence which saw all of Spain's mainland American possessions win their political independence. There were many reasons for Cuba's rapid economic development as a plantation colony, both internal and external, but none was more important than the assurance of a slave labour force continually replenished by new arrivals from Africa.⁴ Without the African slave trade Cuba's economic transformation could not have occurred. As one Cuban historian has stated, 'the number of slaves determined the volume of production'.⁵

The African slave trade to the Spanish Indies began before the conquest of Cuba in 1511 and African slaves either arrived in the island accompanying Diego Velásquez and his *conquistadores* or very shortly afterwards.⁶ The division of the world into Spanish and Portuguese spheres of influence first by a Papal Bull of 1493 and then by the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494 meant that Spain was denied direct access to the coast of Africa and thus deprived of owning slave factories herself. She was forced to rely on foreigners to supply slaves to meet the great demand for servile labour in her American colonies. By 1517 the *asiento* or contract system had evolved whereby the Crown sold licences to individuals or to companies for the export of slaves to Spanish America. The *asientos* were designed to provide revenue for the Crown, slaves for the colonists and royal control over the number and religion of African slaves arriving in the Indies. Ideally, the *asiento* system offered a number of advantages to the Crown, the greatest of which was a guaranteed revenue. As the slave trade grew so did the royal share of the proceeds. The Spanish monarchy in the sixteenth century, becoming more desperate for money, soon developed the practice of selling slave licences in larger and larger blocks, and the licences themselves became objects of speculation.⁷

These licences or *asientos* which were attempts by the Crown to regulate the supply of slaves through monopoly contracts never developed into a true monopoly system.⁸ But they retained all the defects of monopolies and both the holders of the contracts and the colonists had every incentive to resort to contraband trading to avoid the restrictions of royal regulations. From the very beginning the African slave trade to Cuba, as to other areas of Spanish America, had certain distinct and lasting characteristics. It was controlled by foreigners, starting with the Flemish, Portuguese and Dutch, and then the English after 1713. They supplied slaves under the provision of contracts whose conditions were negotiated in Spain, but at the same time both *asentistas* and purchasers connived in a lucrative and expanding contraband trade. A clandestine African slave trade existed alongside the legal and much more restrictive *asiento* system from the outset of the Atlantic slave trade to Spanish America, certainly not on the scale of the nineteenth century but sufficient to imprint a lasting tradition.

A memorial drawn up by the *Consulado* of Havana in 1811 suggests the War of the Spanish Succession, when the French came to Havana to trade slaves for tobacco, stimulated a demand for slaves and gave Havana merchants the means of paying for them.⁹ The number of slaves brought to Cuba legally increased after Britain's acquisition of the *asiento* through the Treaty of Utrecht and continued to rise during the years 1740–60 when the *Real Compañía Mercantil de la Habana* held the monopoly. Because of the high prices charged by the *asentistas* and royal taxes, the demand for slaves was never satisfied and a contraband trade with the other West Indian islands flourished. The British South Sea Company, holder of the *asiento*, wrote to its factors in Panama in 1724:

We are Concerned to hear of the Illicit Trade you Advise, is Carried on to the Havana from the South Kays of Cuba, And have too great Reasons to Complain of the Remissness of our Factorys both at Havana and St. Iago on this Head: Notwithstanding they have so Little to do: this may well be a cause of their vending so few Negroes.¹⁰

Yet, both the *Consulado* of Havana and the Cuban historian of the slave trade, José Antonio Saco, agree that prior to 1763 comparatively few slaves were brought to Cuba. The *Consulado* estimated that 25,000 slaves had been brought to Havana and 35,000 into the eastern part of the island through Santiago where clandestine trade with the English and French colonies was much easier.¹¹

The British conquest of Havana in 1762 threw open the commercial gates of Cuba which until then had been shut against foreigners by Spain's mercantilistic commercial policies. British and British colonial merchants descended on Havana to sell merchandise and slaves. Britain held Havana for eleven months before returning it to Spain and in this period reputedly over 700 vessels entered Havana to trade, glutting the market with British goods.¹² An English merchant, John Kennion, received a monopoly to bring in 2,000 slaves a year and, even though he could not preserve it, he apparently managed to import 1,700. The total number of African slaves brought in during the short British occupation probably exceeded 4,000, adding significantly to Cuba's slave population and providing additional slave labour for the expansion of Cuba's sugar industry.¹³

The British occupation also awakened the metropolitan authorities to the commercial and agricultural potential of Cuba. Reforms in 1764 and 1765 eased the restrictive commercial regulations and tried to instil more administrative efficiency in the island's government. Spain introduced the intendancy system into Cuba where this administrative innovation for the Spanish colonies was tested before being adopted for the rest of the Spanish American empire. The political head of the island remained the Captain-General but the intendant was put in charge of royal revenues, fortifications and trade with the aim of rooting out corruption and strengthening royal control.¹⁴ Besides greater administrative efficiency, another object of the reforms was the expansion of Cuban commerce. Cuban trade with Spain was no longer confined to the peninsular ports of Cadiz and Seville, and direct commerce was permitted now between Havana and Spanish Caribbean ports such as Vera Cruz, Portobello and Cartagena.¹⁵ Other royal orders continued to widen Cuban facilities for trade within the bounds of the Spanish empire until the *Reglamento* of October 1778 ratified the West Indian concessions by extending them to the rest of Spain's American empire except Venezuela and New Spain.¹⁶ Cuba, in company with other parts of Spain's colonial empire, profited from the theory of expansion of trade implicit in these decrees.

When Spanish forces arrived to repossess Cuba in 1763, along with them came General O'Reilly as *visitador* to examine the state of the island. His reports prepared the way for the administrative and commercial reforms. O'Reilly's conclusions on the island's agriculture reflected the interests of the planters and merchants. One of the principal causes of the backwardness of the island was the scarcity

and high price of African slaves. 'It can be stated as an absolute principle that the prosperity of this Island depends mainly on the importation of African slaves.'¹⁷ He advocated the removal of taxes on the importation of slaves and the adoption of a less restrictive policy on the slave trade to permit direct contacts with the foreigners who controlled it. 'The King will derive much more revenue from the taxes on sugar produced by slaves than he will obtain from the import duties on the slaves themselves.'¹⁸ O'Reilly's recommendations for a more 'open' slave trade were ignored in Spain; the *asiento* granted to Uriarte in 1765 marked a return to the old system of monopoly.¹⁹

The terms of the *asiento* stipulated that slaves could be brought to Puerto Rico, designated as the deposit area, by slave traders of any nationality; in fact, most were English. After reaching Puerto Rico the slaves were then sent off in smaller Spanish ships to their destinations. All operations, including the transport of slaves from Africa to Puerto Rico, were supposedly under the direct control of the company holding the *asiento*.

The Uriarte contract was not exclusive – the *Compañía de la Habana* imported an estimated 4,957 slaves in the three years after the peace of 1763²⁰ – yet its restrictions were doubly irksome to the planters at a time when restrictions on other forms of commerce were being loosened. The grievances of the Cubans went to the Spanish government in a *representación* of the Havana *Ayuntamiento*, dated 8 January 1767.²¹ Because of the *asiento*, the planters claimed they were forced to pay exorbitant prices for their imported slaves, prices fixed in the terms of the contract. They also protested at having to pay cash. They argued that the Cuban allotment of 1,000 slaves a year was inadequate and proposed, as an alternative, that at least 3,400 slaves should be introduced per year in each of several, specified Cuban ports. What the Cuban planters really wanted was permission to trade directly with the British West Indies instead of being forced to purchase slaves through the agents of the monopoly holders. The *Contador General de Indias* who examined the Cuban complaints recoiled in horror from their proposal: 'the proposition is scandalous'.²² Havana was censured for its temerity. Even the Captain-General was not exempt from the tongue-lashing because he had supported the planters.

The Spanish authorities were not yet prepared to adopt a system of 'free trade' for the slave trade in spite of the pressures from Havana. Undeterred, the Havana planters continued to petition against the high prices charged by the *asentistas*. Not all the petitions were in vain. The Council of the Indies, in a report of 8 January 1768, re-

commended the resumption of the original tax, the *derecho de marca*, at a lower rate and the abandonment of the *capitación* which had replaced it in 1765. The King agreed and a royal order, based on this advice, was sent out to Havana.²³ This measure was designed to reduce the price of slaves to the buyers by 15 pesos. The thinking behind it was in line with the earlier recommendations of General O'Reilly that a decrease in the price of imported slaves would increase agricultural production and thereby add to the royal coffers.

Official policy was headed in the right direction as far as the Cuban planters were concerned, but it had a long way to go. A reduction of 15 pesos still left the price far higher than that quoted by British slave traders. Even worse, events proved the difficulty of speedy implementation of royal directives. Two slave ships, belonging to the *asiento* company, arrived at Havana early in May 1768, carrying 310 Africans. The price for *Negros Piezos*, or prime male slaves, was 260 pesos, 10 pesos higher than the previous year instead of 15 pesos lower as ordered by Madrid. The Cubans were astounded and enraged by this apparent exploitation, but their representation to the Council of the Indies was regarded with suspicion in view of the Cubans' known desire for unrestricted trade with the British slave traders, and the Council of the Indies took no action against the *asentistas*.²⁴

Complaints continued to flow into Spain from Cuban planters about the high prices they were forced to pay for slaves sold under the *asiento*. Even if the peninsular officials had wanted to accede to the planters' wishes, their hands were tied by the financial losses of the company holding the *asiento*. A royal *cédula* of 1 May 1773, modifying the original terms of the Uriarte contract which had been taken over subsequently by Lorenzo de Arístegui and Francisco Aguirre, two Cadiz merchants, revealed that the company had lost 1,200,000 pesos in 8 years.²⁵ Thus any suggestions that the company lower its prices were countered with statements of its losses. Alternative proposals from Cuba that payments be made in crops, at prices fixed by the planters, were also rejected in Spain.²⁶ Spanish attitudes were, however, slowly changing. 'Henceforth, not revenue, but the provision of ample labor at the lowest possible cost was to guide the crown's attitude toward the slave trade.'²⁷

Some relief did come to the Cuban planters from the financial straits of Aguirre, Arístegui and Company. In the revised contract of 1773, even though the prices established in the original *asiento* were to remain approximately the same – Cuban planters would still have to pay 250 pesos apiece for the slaves – the *hacendados* no longer had to

rely on the entrepôt of Puerto Rico. The company received the right to send Spanish ships from Havana or Santiago de Cuba to foreign colonies to buy slaves and such was the importance of Havana by then that it became the chief factory of the company.²⁸

Cuba's slave supply, which for a long time had been indirectly dependent on Jamaica and British slave traders, was now directly so. A contemporary account makes clear the extent of this dependence:

For some time previous to the Year 1769 untill 1779 the Spanish West India Islands and the Continent of South America were supply'd with Slaves by means of a Royal Asiento, or Company of Merchants in Spain who had an exclusive privilege from H.C.M. for that purpose – This Asiento was under the direction of an Agent General established in the Havana, from whence he despatched Spanish Vessels in Search of Slaves to the different Foreign Islands, but particularly to Jamaica from whence at least three fourths of all the Negroes were supply'd . . .²⁹

The British Free Port Act of 1766, renewed in 1774, enabled Jamaica to take full advantage of the lucrative re-export trade in slaves. Aguirre, Arístegui and Company, the supposed beneficiaries of the modifications of 1773, now became 'unnecessary middlemen', for all that lay between Jamaica and Cuba was their monopoly.³⁰ The slave trade in this mercantilist period managed to overcome the economic barriers to trade between rival empires, whether by legal or illegal means, and was one of the forces responsible for the collapse of mercantilist trade walls.³¹

Clear evidence that colonial, including Cuban, planters managed to circumvent the Aguirre, Arístegui *asiento* came in a royal *cédula* of 18 July 1775, which reaffirmed the monopolistic character of the *asiento* and castigated the clandestine importation of slaves from foreign colonies.³² The existence of a contraband trade in slaves to Cuba had been tacitly recognized through a tax, known as the *indulto de negros*. This levy, equal in value to the regular import charges on slaves, was paid by slaveowners to secure legal possession of illegally imported slaves.³³

Aguirre and Arístegui did not have an exclusive right to the Cuban slave trade from 1773 to 1779. Another *asiento* held by the Marquis of Casa Enrile resulted in the introduction of 14,132 slaves during those same years.³⁴ If the supply still did not match the growing demand of expanding agricultural production in Cuba, the number of imported slaves was increasing rapidly. The metropolitan authorities in Spain were preoccupied equally with developing their agricultural colonies

and reducing the dominance of foreigners in the slave trade to Spanish America. It was with these ends in view that the rights to the islands of Annobon and Fernando Po, located in the Gulf of Guinea off the West African coast, were acquired from Portugal in 1778. But Spain's inability to take effective possession of the islands left the slave trade still in the hands of foreigners.³⁵ More radical proposals also existed. A paper presented to one of the Councillors of the Indies, Bernardo de Yriarte, in 1781, advocated government support for an all Spanish slave trade, even to the point of stationing Spanish frigates off the coast of Africa to protect slavers. 'Our past experience has taught us not to rely on companies or assientos.'³⁶

War with Britain from 1779 to 1783 illustrated Spain's difficulties in providing her colonies with slaves. The Aguirre, Arístegui *asiento* was not renewed in 1779, no doubt due to the loss of the English contacts as well as to the continued unprofitability of the contract in spite of the revisions of 1773. War did not reduce the demand for slaves and to meet this demand a royal order of 25 January 1780 gave permission to the colonial authorities of Spanish America, except those of Chile, Peru and La Plata, to buy slaves from the French colonies during the war on condition that they were imported in Spanish ships.³⁷ An Englishman familiar with the slave trade to Cuba reported, though, that when war broke out between Britain and Spain, 'a general Licence was granted to all Spanish Subjects to Introduce Slaves into the Havana, either in National or Neutral Bottoms'. When the war ended neutral flags were prohibited.³⁸ Saco includes a table in his *Historia de la esclavitud de la raza africana en el Nuevo Mundo* which shows that the tax yield on slave importations was greater in the war years of 1780 to 1784 than in the two years following the war.³⁹ The planters took full advantage of the relaxation of restrictions made necessary by the war.

There was a close link between measures to expand commerce and the increased importation of slaves since much of the slave trade to Cuba was, in fact, part of a much larger intra-Caribbean commerce. In 1779 Spain authorized a limited trade with friendly powers, principally the thirteen Anglo-American colonies, to ensure a sufficient supply of food for Cuba.⁴⁰ This chink in the Spanish mercantilist armour enabled Cuban merchants to take advantage of the wider markets for their goods offered by neutral ships and increased the likelihood of neutral vessels, many of which also carried slaves, visiting Cuban ports. This pattern, not a new one, was to continue throughout the Napoleonic Wars. When maritime communication

between Spain and Cuba was interrupted as a result of war, Havana was permitted to trade with neutrals, the permission being withdrawn as soon as peninsular or colonial monopolists persuaded the government that relaxation of restrictions on trade with foreigners was no longer needed.⁴¹ The Congress of the United States Confederation in 1781 appointed an agent to reside in Havana to assist American traders, an indication of the rapid growth of this commerce. Even after the permission to trade with neutrals was withdrawn, United States vessels continued for a brief time to trade with Havana. In 1783, after the end of the war, 22 ships cleared the port of Philadelphia for Cuba while 18 returned to Philadelphia from Havana.⁴² A bank in New York reportedly was saved from bankruptcy by the arrival of ships with specie from Cuba. The contrast was evident in 1785 when only one United States vessel cleared Philadelphia for Havana and none entered from Havana. Between 1785 and 1789 United States trade with Cuba died away almost completely.⁴³

The growth of commerce with the new republic of the United States was not the only external stimulant to the Cuban economy in the 1780s. Cuba received a substantial number of slaves as a result of the slave-trading activities of several European colonial powers. The French slave trade experienced a remarkable resurgence after the end of the American War of Independence. The peak of that trade occurred in the year of the French Revolution in which an estimated 130 slaving voyages were launched from French ports. The decline in the French slave trade did not really begin until 1792 after the revolution in St Domingue and the last French slaving vessels left at the beginning of 1793.⁴⁴ The nine years from 1783 to 1792 were the most prosperous in the history of the leading French slave-trading port of Nantes, surpassing the previous peak period from 1748 to 1754. At least 350 slavers were outfitted in Nantes alone between 1783 and 1792, an average of 35 per year.⁴⁵ French slave traders had always practised a lucrative contraband trade with Cuba and the other Spanish colonies and undoubtedly the 'boom' in the French slave trade had a spillover effect in Cuba, reflected in the number of French slavers arriving at Havana after 1789 and in additional clandestine landings of African slaves in other parts of the island. Even after 1792, the French slave trade resurfaced during the years of peace in 1802–3 and again in an illegal form after 1815. Nantes continued to dominate in the years 1814–33 when it was responsible for nearly half of the French illegal slave trade, with Cuba as the major destination.⁴⁶ The Danish West Indian islands also were the centre of a brisk re-export trade in slaves

to the Spanish colonies during and after the American War of Independence. This transit trade flourished during periods of war with the greatest volume occurring during the years 1799–1805. Danish subjects were prohibited from participating in the slave trade from Africa in 1803, but Cuban planters received African slaves via the Danish West Indies at least until 1805 after which the Danish involvement rapidly declined.⁴⁷

The trend to free the Spanish slave trade from restrictions, discernible at various points in the reign of Charles III, accelerated at the end of the 1780s, just in time, as it turned out, for the Cuban planters to capitalize on the agricultural shortages caused by the ruin of St Domingue. It is generally agreed that Cuban pressure was responsible for the experiment which changed the nature of the slave trade to Spanish America from a closed commerce operated by monopolies to a trade open to Spaniards and foreigners alike. After the American War of Independence the Spanish Crown reverted again to the *asiento* system. In 1786 the firm of Baker and Dawson of Liverpool received a contract to supply between 5,000 and 6,000 slaves to Cuba and Caracas on the same terms as a previous contract to supply Trinidad and Caracas.⁴⁸ Two other *asientos* ran concurrently involving smaller numbers of slaves.⁴⁹ When the Baker and Dawson contract came up for renewal in 1788, their new proposal was sent out to Havana for examination. It called for no fewer than 3,000 slaves to be supplied annually to Caracas and Havana but the terms were ambiguous especially those concerning prices.⁵⁰ To many of the planters they were unacceptable and their opposition was made known in Madrid through their representative, Arango y Parreño. He presented a memorandum to the *Junta Suprema de Estado* on 6 February 1789, the arguments of which tallied with the provisions of the royal *cédula* issued on 28 February.⁵¹

Philip Allwood, the agent of Baker and Dawson in Havana, had been convicted on charges of contraband trading and the Spanish authorities were opposed to encouraging additional contraband trade by renewing the Baker and Dawson *asiento*. This is evident in a letter from the British Minister in Madrid to Allwood:

It is sufficient to say that there lies against you a sentence, as yet unreversed, for contraband trade; that the Minister of Indies, through whose hands this affair must pass, is by no means persuaded of your innocence;- and that there exists a prejudice (perhaps but too well founded) that one great view in the proposal of negro contracts is the fraudulent introduction of uncustomed goods.⁵²

The terms of the renewal of the Baker–Dawson contract and fears of contraband trade were not the only reasons for the change in policy marked by this *cédula*. News had reached Madrid of the proposal to abolish the slave trade which was then before the British Parliament.⁵³ This illustrated again the dilemma of the Spanish position. Should Britain abolish the slave trade, Cuba and the other Spanish Caribbean possessions would be affected since they had no sources of supply apart from the British or other foreigners. Realizing their awkward situation, the Cuban planters took steps to improve it. The colonists' desire to take the slave trade into their own hands found a sympathetic hearing in Spain where more liberal views of commerce had been gaining ground. The *Reglamento* of 12 October 1778 which completed the process of opening Spanish colonial trade to all Spanish and colonial seaports and to all Spanish subjects, although not to foreigners, also has been credited with influencing the abolition of the slave trade monopoly.⁵⁴

From its opening statement the *cédula* emphasized the great importance of the slave trade to the agricultural development of the Spanish Caribbean colonies which it was designed to stimulate.⁵⁵ All Spanish subjects, whether from the peninsula or the colonies, were free to go to any foreign colony in order to buy slaves whom they could bring into designated ports free of duty. Foreigners were also permitted to import slaves into the *puertos habilitados* free of duty, but they were limited to twenty-four hours in port and their ships had to be under 300 tons. One third of the slaves brought in were to be female, and Spaniards and foreigners alike were forbidden to engage in any other foreign trade. At Havana either foreigners or Spaniards could import slaves, while at Santiago de Cuba, the only other Cuban port included, only Spaniards could engage in the slave trade. Unlike the former *asientos*, this *cédula* ruled out any price-fixing, stating that prices were to be agreed on by buyer and seller without any outside interference. As a further incentive to Spanish subjects to engage in the slave trade, a subsidy of 4 pesos was offered for each slave imported by a Spaniard in a Spanish ship. The owners of domestic slaves were to pay for this by contributing an annual *capitación* of 2 pesos for each slave in domestic labour.

The *cédula* of 28 February 1789 was to run for a trial period of two years which ended none too soon. For the confusion it caused among colonial officials who had to administer it necessitated a complete rewriting of its provisions.⁵⁶ Protests about the *capitación* resulted in a reduction by half even before the new *cédula* was published.⁵⁷ The

royal *cédula* of 24 November 1791, while continuing the liberalizing trend of its predecessor, also cleared up the remaining ambiguities.⁵⁸ Having proved unworkable, both the subsidy to Spanish slave traders and the *capitación* were abandoned. Similarly, the clause stating that one third of the slaves imported must be female was removed, and the tax on products exported to pay for slaves was standardized at 6%. Apparently not all the defects were removed. The Marquis of Yranda wrote to one of the Councillors of the Indies: 'I have carefully checked the second *cédula* on the slave trade. It has fewer defects than the first and I hope that when its successor emerges in due time it will be a *chef d'oeuvre*.'⁵⁹

Foreign and Spanish slave traders benefited anew from the provisions of the second *cédula*. The permission granted to foreigners to introduce slaves into the *puertos habilitados* was prolonged for a further six years under less stringent conditions. The tonnage limit on foreign ships was raised from 300 to 500, and they were now permitted to remain in port for eight days instead of the previous twenty-four hours. Spanish slave traders were given up to four months to visit foreign colonies in search of slaves and unlimited time if they were going to Africa. Three Cuban ports, Nuevitas, Batabano and Trinidad de Cuba, were added to the list of those at which Spaniards could carry on the slave trade. A fourth, Manzanillo near Bayamo, was later included by a royal order of 23 March 1794.⁶⁰ The ideas underlining the *cédula* of November 1791 appear again to coincide with the requirements of those Cuban planters represented by the *Apoderado General* of Havana in Madrid, Arango y Parreño. Havana still found itself dependent on foreign, especially British, slave traders and, recognizing the situation, Arango petitioned both for an extension of the privileges of the 1789 *cédula* and for greater latitude to the foreign slave traders who furnished Cuba's labour needs.⁶¹

These two *cédulas* marked the beginning of a decade of legislation intended to augment the number of African slaves in the Indies through the slave trade. The French, who were excluded from the provisions of the 1791 *cédula* as far as Havana was concerned, were included by a royal order of 9 June 1792.⁶² This may have been simply a recognition of an already large French participation since, according to Herbert Klein's calculations, 32 French slavers arrived in Havana from 1790 to 1792.⁶³ A royal order of November 1792 lengthened from eight to forty days the time in port permitted to foreign slave traders.⁶⁴ Cuban authorities had shown considerable ingenuity in getting around the eight-day restriction by forming a company which

bought the slaves from the foreign slave traders and then sold them to the planters.⁶⁵ Later decrees enlarged the list of articles which could be imported by Spaniards employed in the slave trade. Barrel hoops and staves were included in a royal order of 14 December 1794, while earlier permission to import machinery and tools for *ingenios* was repeated in a royal order of 19 March 1794.⁶⁶ Efforts of the Cuban authorities to promote Spanish slaving expeditions to Africa received peninsular encouragement in a royal order of 24 January 1793. This relieved Spanish expeditions on their way to Africa from paying any taxes on the goods they exported, provided that half the crew and the captain were Spanish.⁶⁷ The order also stated that foreign vessels purchased by Spaniards for African expeditions no longer had to pay a registry tax. The first direct Spanish slaving voyage to Africa under these new provisions occurred in the summer of 1792 when the *Cometa* arrived in Havana from the Guinea coast with 227 slaves.⁶⁸ There were altogether 11 royal decrees between 1789 and 1804 aimed at expanding the Cuban slave trade.

The increase in the supply of slave labour through the 'open' slave trade enabled Cuban planters to take advantage of the devastation of St Domingue. A modern Cuban historian has described the last decade of the eighteenth century as 'the dance of the millions', a reference to the extraordinary boom experienced by Cuba in the aftermath of the revolution in the French island.⁶⁹ Sugar and coffee prices skyrocketed after the downfall of St Domingue. Cuban planters quickly realized their good fortune and figures of the sugar exports from Havana in the 1790s show how they capitalized on this opportunity.⁷⁰ The fact that Cuban planters were able to seize the chance which the collapse of St Domingue presented was due also to a reforming mood among the planters themselves. With the inspiration of the Captain-General, Las Casas, a *Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País* and a *Real Consulado de Agricultura y Comercio* were founded in Havana in the 1790s, both dedicated to improving agriculture.⁷¹ It was with this spirit and under the auspices of one or both societies that men like the economist Arango y Parreño worked to make Cuban agriculture competitive with that of the other West Indian islands.⁷²

The royal decrees on the slave trade removed the hindering obstacles which formerly had faced the Spanish colonists in their search for an adequate supply of slave labour. Yet the basic pattern of the slave trade to Cuba was not materially changed. However great the desire of the Spanish authorities to diminish the colonists' dependence on foreign slave traders, the effect of the *cédulas* was to increase it.

From the publication of the royal *cédula* of 28 February 1789 to the end of June 1790, 2,507 slaves were brought to Havana by 17 slavers, half of them, carrying the majority of slaves, having come direct from Africa. In the same period 10 Spanish vessels carried 367 slaves back to Havana from foreign colonies.⁷³ A substantial number of slaves came to Havana from foreign colonies in the 1790s; an account drawn up by the *Administrador de Rentas* in Havana on 2 January 1795 showed a total of 5,279 imported from foreign colonies since September 1789.⁷⁴ The total number of slaves brought to Havana in this five year span has been given as over 35,500.⁷⁵ The majority of them came in foreign vessels either sailing direct from Africa or coming to Havana from foreign colonies. In asking for more privileges to be given to foreign slave traders, Arango y Parreño was trying to put Havana in a better position to compete with the other West Indian islands for the favour of the mainly foreign slave traders. As part of this effort to expand the Cuban slave trade, Arango y Parreño, accompanied by another Cuban planter, visited Portugal, Britain, Barbados and Jamaica in 1794 to learn how to apply the industrial revolution to sugar production and to pick up what direct knowledge he could about the slave trade.⁷⁶

Arango y Parreño made the point in his *representación* of 10 May 1791 that the slave trade to Havana was still largely run by the company which had held the *asiento* before 1789.⁷⁷ The Baker-Dawson partnership apparently dissolved in 1788–9 after the failure to renew their contract, but John Dawson, the largest slave trader in Liverpool in 1790 with a capital investment in ships, outfitting and cargo of over £150,000, continued in business with Philip Allwood as his Havana agent. Allwood reputedly imported or financed the importation of more slaves in the period 1790–95 than all other slave traders put together. He was so important to the island's economy that the Captain-General defied orders from Madrid to expel him as an undesirable foreigner.⁷⁸ Liverpool, and especially Dawson, thus dominated the slave trade to Cuba in the first half of the 1790s as they had in the 1780s. Indeed, as Professor Anstey has shown, British slave traders exported more slaves and earned higher profits in the decade 1791–1800 than in any other decade between 1760 and 1807.⁷⁹

The British were not the only foreigners to take advantage of Spain's new laws on the slave trade. The French, Americans and Danes all quickly moved into this new market for Caribbean trade, although, as has been seen, French participation declined rapidly after 1792. A recent analysis indicates that United States merchants, using the trade permission granted by the slave trade *cédulas* as a cover for a