

Cambridge University Press

0521660432 - A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the  
Creek Indians, 1733-1816

Claudio Saunt

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## *Introduction*

On the Flint River in June 1801 in what is now Crawford County, Georgia, a United States Indian agent named Benjamin Hawkins spoke to Creek leader Efau Hadjo about a pressing problem: obtaining “supplies for those who from age and old habits could not be immediately benefitted by the new order of things.” His concerns reflected a confidence in the future. He would attempt to smooth a rough road – to feed and clothe those lagging behind – but no matter how many were lost on the way, he was certain of the destination. Not all Creeks shared his conviction. Efau Hadjo told the agent that the “old Chiefs and their associates in opposition” not only failed to benefit from the “new order of things,” but they in fact hoped to destroy it.<sup>1</sup> This book is about the rise of the new order, a great transformation that overturned Creek lives in the three decades following the American Revolution.

Order and things, or power and property, are its subject. Before the Revolution, individual Creeks neither claimed nor asserted coercive power over their neighbors. Leaders created political order by persuasion rather than force. By the second decade of the nineteenth century, in contrast, a “national council” composed of a few dozen men asserted its rule over every Creek person. The council executed those who disobeyed its orders. A similarly dramatic change occurred in the realm of property. Before the Revolution, Creeks did not strive to accumulate significant amounts of material possessions or to protect and defend their belongings from their neighbors. Yet by the 1810s, a few people had thousands of dollars and hundreds of cattle and slaves. The kind

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Hawkins to Henry Dearborn, 1 June 1801, in C.L. Grant, ed., *Letters, Journals, and Writings of Benjamin Hawkins* (Savannah: Beehive Press, 1980), 1:359 (hereafter cited as *LBH*).

Cambridge University Press

0521660432 - A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the  
Creek Indians, 1733-1816

Claudio Saunt

Excerpt

[More information](#)

as well as the quantity of these new possessions reshaped the lives of Creeks.

In a general sense, the conflict between Creeks over the new order of things might be described in terms of assimilation and tradition, but these two oft-used words in Native American history obscure rather than clarify the tensions in Creek society. The simple dichotomy they present does not reflect the real problems that Creeks confronted. Creeks did not choose between moving forward or backward, or between “white” or Creek cultures. Instead, they faced complicated questions about how they should rule themselves and what kind of economy they should pursue. These fundamental problems extended into all areas of Creek life. Changes in power and property posed difficult questions about Creek identity, aggravated long-standing tensions between women and men, and fomented controversy over the responsibility of individuals toward an inchoate Creek “nation.” These and other related themes shape the chapters that follow.

One particular subject deserves to be mentioned at the outset. I argue that Creek mestizos had a profound and disruptive impact on Creek society, and consequently on occasion I point out that individuals had European and Indian heritage.<sup>2</sup> In so doing, I do not mean to imply that culture and biology are linked. Nevertheless, it appears incontrovertible to me that Creeks who were familiar and comfortable with the market economy, coercive power, and race slavery of colonial settlements were disruptive, and that more often than not these Creeks had acquired that familiarity and comfort from their European forebears.<sup>3</sup> Not all mestizos were disruptive, of course. Some rejected the influence of their Scottish fathers (two of the staunchest opponents of the new order were mestizos), and others never knew their fathers in the first place. Likewise, not all disruptive Creeks had European parentage. But despite these qualifications, a strong correlation exists between the response of Creeks to the new order and their family background. To illustrate this point, I use “mestizo” to refer solely to the children of European and

<sup>2</sup> One of the few books on Indian history to address the disruptive role of mestizos, albeit in a later period than the one examined here, is Melissa L. Meyer, *The White Earth Tragedy: Ethnicity and Dispossession at a Minnesota Anishinaabe Reservation, 1889–1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Aron points out that people who lived between American and Indian worlds were as much “cultural breakers” as “cultural brokers.” Aron, “Pigs and Hunters: ‘Rights in the Woods’ on the Trans-Appalachian Frontier,” in *Contact Points: American Frontiers from the Mohawk Valley to the Mississippi, 1750–1830*, ed. Andrew R. L. Cayton and Fredrika J. Teute (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998), 189.

Cambridge University Press

0521660432 - A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the  
Creek Indians, 1733-1816

Claudio Saunt

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Native American parents, understanding that early childhood influences rather than genetic material led many mestizos or Scots Creeks to become planters and ranchers.

Geographically, this book covers the broad region of the Deep South occupied by Creeks in the eighteenth century. This region – Creek country – stretched from the ridge dividing the Alabama and Tombigbee rivers east to the Savannah River, and south down the Florida peninsula, an area roughly defined by the present-day states of Alabama, Georgia, and Florida (see Fig. 1). To the north, beyond Creek country, lay the mountainous lands of the Cherokees; to the east, the encroaching settlements planted by Georgians; and to the west, the lands of the Choctaws and Chickasaws. To the south, sparsely populated settlements at St. Augustine and Pensacola gave the Spanish a tenuous but politically significant presence in the region.

Creek country for the most part has fallen under the rubric of Spanish borderlands history, a field pioneered by Herbert Eugene Bolton in the early twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> Bolton found a frontier unexamined by other historians who, influenced by Frederick Jackson Turner, imagined a westward-moving line between “wilderness” and “civilization.” Exploring long-neglected archives, Bolton recovered from historical anonymity a lost section of the continent, one stretching from California to Florida. Yet, despite Bolton’s efforts, Florida remained neglected by traditional colonialists who rarely strayed far from New England or the Chesapeake. Spanish borderlands history in fact became as historiographically marginal as its subject appeared to be geographically, though any map would reveal that California, Texas, and Florida, to name three areas of the “borderlands,” occupy a significant portion of North America.

Following Bolton’s lead, I found that the rich records of the Spanish empire still remain relatively unexplored. Spain claimed rights to Florida from 1513, when on Pascua Florida, or Easter Sunday, Juan Ponce de León landed on the unmapped “island,” to 1821, when it finally ceded the last of its much-diminished territory in the Southeast. Spanish officers left behind thousands of letters and reports documenting the colonization of this region. These records, familiar to historians of Spanish Florida, but scarcely used by scholars of Indian history and of the early Southeast, reveal new information

<sup>4</sup> John Francis Bannon has edited a useful selection of Bolton’s works: Herbert Eugene Bolton, *Bolton and the Spanish Borderlands* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1964).

Cambridge University Press

0521660432 - A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816

Claudio Saunt

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4

## A new order of things

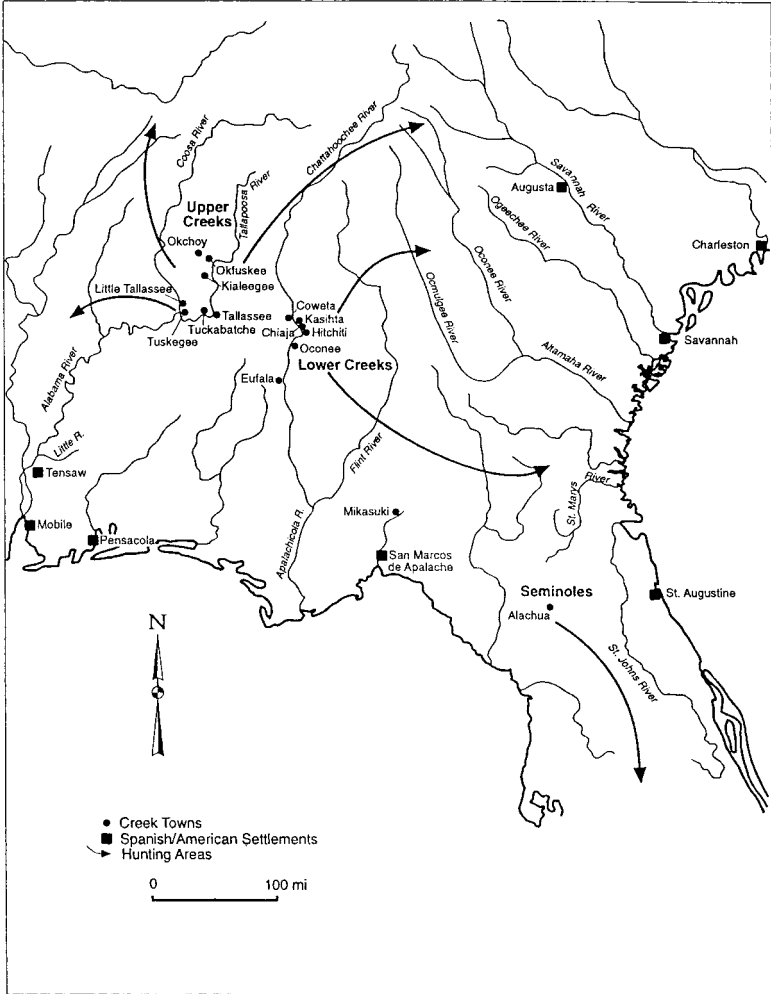


Figure 1. Creek country in the late eighteenth century. Map drawn by Mike Feeney, Campus Graphics and Photography, University of Georgia.

about the Creeks and Seminoles and have yet to divulge all of their secrets.

It is perhaps only the language of the sources that makes the south-eastern borderlands “Spanish.” Though Spain played a significant role in the history of the area, so too did France, Britain, and the Creeks. The Spanish-speaking population in Florida during the period here under

Cambridge University Press

0521660432 - A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816

Claudio Saunt

Excerpt

[More information](#)

study fluctuated between 2,500 and 3,500, while Native Americans numbered as many as 16,000 at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, the region was not in any significant sense Spanish. Nor was it a borderland, except from the narrow perspective of Spanish officials in Mexico City or slaveowners in Charleston, South Carolina. An early American history that includes native peoples must adopt less biased language.

Another tradition of scholarship, whose inheritors now call themselves ethnohistorians, has long recognized the presence of the people who populated Alabama, Georgia, and Florida before the nineteenth century. One leading figure in the study of southeastern Indians was John Swanton, an anthropologist active in the early twentieth century. His extensive work remains an important source of ethnographic data, though it scarcely recognizes historical change.<sup>6</sup> Other scholars with a more chronological bent soon followed Swanton's lead, focusing primarily on Creek removal in the 1830s and its aftermath.<sup>7</sup> Those few who have given the eighteenth century an intensive examination have generally

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Folch, "Journal of a Voyage to the Creek Nation from Pensacola in the year 1803," 5 May 1803, *Papeles Procedentes de Cuba* (hereafter cited as PC), Archivo General de Indias (hereafter cited as AGI), Seville, Spain, leg. 2372, 1, reel 436, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History (hereafter cited as PKY); Peter H. Wood, "The Changing Population of the Colonial South: An Overview by Race and Region, 1685-1790," in *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast*, ed. Peter H. Wood, Gregory A. Waselkov, and M. Thomas Hatley (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1989), 38. When Spain evacuated Pensacola and St. Augustine in 1763-1764, about 3,700 people were living in the two outposts. In the Second Spanish Period, between 1781 and 1821, the population was close to 2,500. Robert L. Gold, *Borderland Empires in Transition: The Triple-Nation Transfer of Florida* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1969), 66-69, 101; David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University, 1992), 276. For a detailed analysis of the population of Pensacola between 1784 and 1820, see Pablo Tornero Tinajero, "Estudio de la Población de Pensacola," *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* 34 (1977): 537-562. The low Spanish-speaking population in St. Augustine led this historian to apologize: "One should say that the small number of residents should not be surprising since Florida, both East and West, was practically unpopulated" (241n22). He neglected to consider Native Americans living in the region.

<sup>6</sup> Among his many works, see John R. Swanton, *Early History of the Creek Indians and Their Neighbors*, *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin* 73 (1922); *Social Organization and Social Usages of the Indians of the Creek Confederacy*, *42nd Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology* (1928): 23-472; and *Indians of the Southeastern United States*, *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin* 137 (1946).

<sup>7</sup> Grant Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1934), and Foreman, *Indian Removal: The Emigration of the Five Civilized Tribes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1952); Angie Debo, *The Road to Disappearance: A History of the Creek Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1941). More recently, Michael D. Green has provided an insightful analysis of Creek politics in the two decades preceding removal. His study begins with a concise and suggestive summary of Creek history in the eighteenth century. Green, *The Politics of Indian Removal: Creek Government and Society in Crisis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1982).

Cambridge University Press

0521660432 - A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816

Claudio Saunt

Excerpt

[More information](#)

failed to follow Bolton to the Spanish archives.<sup>8</sup> Their work has suggested new areas of research, but historians have been slow to travel down the unfamiliar paths leading into the heart of Alabama, Georgia, and Florida.

Once Creek country is rescued from the obscurity of the borderlands, we can begin to recognize the relevance of its history to the larger story of colonial expansion in North America. The transformation of the Deep South paralleled changes in regions throughout the continent and, to think even more broadly, throughout the Atlantic world. Historian Daniel Usner, for example, has described the frontier exchange economy in the lower Mississippi valley and pointed to its collapse beginning in 1763, and Richard White has written suggestively about the destruction of the “middle ground” in the Great Lakes region during the same time.<sup>9</sup> The connections between these two transformations are distant, yet real. After the Seven Years’ War, trade became increasingly commercialized in both regions, leaving Indians dissatisfied in Louisiana and the Great Lakes.<sup>10</sup> The dictates of empire came to control events, politically and economically. And in both regions, political and economic imperialism paralleled the expansion of biota – European migrants, wheat, white clover, and cattle around the Great Lakes, and European and African peoples, indigo, and sugarcane in Louisiana.<sup>11</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, the rapid pace of change around the Atlantic world was overturning earlier political, economic, and social relationships in the Great Lakes region and lower Mississippi valley.

<sup>8</sup> David Corkran has thoroughly explored English-language sources in his work, *The Creek Frontier, 1540–1783* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1962). So too has Kathryn E. Holland Braund in her excellent monograph on the deerskin trade, *Deerskins and Duffels: The Creek Indian Trade with Anglo-America, 1685–1815* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1993). J. Leitch Wright, Jr., used Spanish sources in his survey, *Creeks and Seminoles: The Destruction and Regeneration of the Muscogulge People* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1986), but did not do so systematically. Historian Howard F. Cline, working in 1959 for the Department of Justice to defend the United States in litigation brought before the Indian Claims Commission, also used Spanish sources, especially the East Florida Papers. Howard F. Cline, *Florida Indians I: Notes on Colonial Indians and Communities in Florida, 1700–1821* (New York: Garland, 1974); and Cline, *Florida Indians II: Provisional Historical Gazetteer with Locational Notes on Florida Colonial Communities* (New York: Garland, 1974).

<sup>9</sup> Daniel H. Usner, Jr., *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1992); Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (New York: Cambridge University, 1992). Peter C. Mancall similarly describes the transformation of the upper Susquehanna region in *Valley of Opportunity: Economic Culture along the Upper Susquehanna, 1700–1800* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 274; White, *The Middle Ground*, 264–266.

<sup>11</sup> Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 281–282; White, *The Middle Ground*, 493. More generally, see Alfred W. Crosby, Jr., *Ecological Imperialism and the Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1986). Regarding white clover, see Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*, 158.

Cambridge University Press

0521660432 - A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the  
Creek Indians, 1733-1816

Claudio Saunt

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Creek country is part of this larger story of dramatic change and disruption. Like other peoples around the Atlantic world, Indians in the Deep South were inextricably linked to far-reaching population movements and economic forces. Consequently, unexpected parallels exist between the experiences of diverse groups of Native and nonnative Americans in the late eighteenth century. When an expanding Atlantic economy pushed into the Carolina piedmont in the 1760s, for example, white hunters and subsistence farmers came under attack by “regulators” who demanded a more ordered market economy. Creeks later felt some of the same pressures when the Deep South fell under the pull of the Atlantic economy after the American Revolution. Tellingly, in the 1790s, the rhetoric of Creek proponents of the new order mirrored that of South Carolina regulators.<sup>12</sup> The same economic pressures were felt all through the Atlantic world.<sup>13</sup> It is not a coincidence, then, that in the 1780s, when a London locksmith named Joseph Bramah developed the first lock with movable wards,<sup>14</sup> Creeks were among those feeling an increased need for such extra security. And it is not surprising that in the 1810s some Creeks divided their Indian neighbors into the “idle” and the “industrious,” words familiar to London dock workers in the late eighteenth century.<sup>15</sup> Long after the 1783 Treaty of Paris between Britain and the United States, the forces that propelled the American Revolution continued to disrupt the lives of Creeks.<sup>16</sup> From this broad perspective, the rise of the new order of things in the Deep South is as much a part of the creation of the American republic as is the more familiar history of the independence of the first thirteen states.

<sup>12</sup> Rachel N. Klein, *Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760–1808* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, “The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, and the Atlantic Working Class in the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 3 (1990): 225–252.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University, 1992), 365.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 221–223.

<sup>16</sup> Edward Countryman, “Indians, the Colonial Order, and the Social Significance of the American Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 53 (1996): 359–362.

Cambridge University Press

0521660432 - A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the  
Creek Indians, 1733-1816

Claudio Saunt

Excerpt

[More information](#)

---

PART I

*Power and property before the new  
order, 1733–1783*



Cambridge University Press

0521660432 - A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816

Claudio Saunt

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 1

*Fair persuasions:  
Power among the Creeks*

In early summer 1735, nearly fifty Native Americans from the Chatahoochee River, which now separates the states of Georgia and Alabama, set out for a bluff near the mouth of the Savannah River where newcomers had established an outpost two years earlier. Already familiar with the Georgia colonists, they undertook the 300-mile trip only after a specific request from these new British neighbors. The colonists obligingly gave them “presents” on their arrival, but not before performing a military parade to reassure themselves and convince the Indians that the blankets and shirts were gifts rather than tribute. With ensigns flying and drums marking time, grenadiers and “gentlemen” volunteers marched into the central square of Savannah and fired forty-seven cannons.<sup>1</sup> The guests then responded with their own story about power and authority. Before an audience of “Sundry Gentlemen and Freeholders,” Chigellie and Antioche, who both lived in Coweta town, where Columbus, Georgia, now sits, held forth with a story that lasted for two days.

The meaning of the story was lost on the audience, even though Chigellie and Antioche sent an English translation, carefully written in red and black ink on a buffalo skin, to the Georgia trustees in London.<sup>2</sup> One listener described the content of the narrative as the “Rise and some

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Causton to the Trustees, 20 June 1735, in Kenneth Coleman, ed., *Colonial Records of the State of Georgia: Original Papers, Correspondence to the Trustees, James Oglethorpe, and Others, 1732–1735* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1982), 20:398–403 (hereafter cited as CRG). Type-script editions in the Georgia Department of Archives and History will be cited as CRG).

<sup>2</sup> Scholars long thought that this now-lost buffalo skin featured a pictograph of the history of the Kasihtas, but historian Rodney M. Baine has shown conclusively that it recounted the narrative in English. Baine, “Note and Document: The Myth of the Creek Pictograph,” *Atlanta History* 32 (1988): 43–52. For a structural analysis of this myth, see Amelia Bell Walker, “The Kasihta Myth,” *Anthropology Tomorrow* 12 (1979): 46–63.

Cambridge University Press

0521660432 - A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816

Claudio Saunt

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Particular adventures of the Cussitaws,” but the story actually told about the present politics of the inhabitants of the Deep South (including the Cussitaws or Kasihtas).<sup>3</sup> In the 1730s, a growing population of 8,000 people, most of whom spoke a language now known as Muskogee, lived in as many as forty towns in what is today Alabama and Georgia. The neighboring French and Spanish colonists, in contrast, occupied a few small outposts and struggled to keep their free and slave populations from dwindling. Spanish Florida, whose key towns were St. Augustine and Pensacola, had only about 2,000 non-Indian residents in the 1730s, and the French settlements in the lower Mississippi valley, notably New Orleans and Mobile, counted a little over 3,700 inhabitants, more than one-third of whom were slaves.<sup>4</sup> In Georgia, the initial 100 colonists who disembarked in 1733 grew to only 1,000 a decade later. Not until the 1760s would the separate colonial populations in the lower Mississippi valley and Georgia surpass the Native American population in the Deep South. In Florida, it would not do so until annexation by the United States in 1819.<sup>5</sup>

Pressing the colonial outposts against the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, the Native American towns of the Deep South lined the banks of two great river systems.<sup>6</sup> One drains what is now central Alabama, where the

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Causton to the Trustees, 20 June 1735, *CRG*, 20:398–403. Anthropologists and historians have tried unconvincingly to glean the early history of the peoples of the Deep South from this story. Frank T. Schnell, “The Beginning of the Creeks: Where Did They First ‘Sit Down?’” *Early Georgia* 17 (1989): 24–29.

<sup>4</sup> Wood, “The Changing Population of the Colonial South,” 38; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 48–49.

<sup>5</sup> Wood, “The Changing Population of the Colonial South,” 38; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 108–115; Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, 276–278; Kenneth Coleman, *Colonial Georgia: A History*. (New York: Scribner, 1976), 36–54, 223–230. The first territorial census of Florida in 1825 reported a population of 13,544. Five years later, the population had boomed to 34,730. Charlton W. Tebeau, *A History of Florida* (Coral Gables: University of Miami, 1971), 134.

<sup>6</sup> Peter H. Wood suggests that there were about 11,000 Indians in the Deep South in 1730, while J. Anthony Paredes and Kenneth J. Plante estimate there were a little over 7,000 Native Americans in the Deep South. The difference arises from Wood’s inclusion of 21 peripheral Indian villages from a 1715 South Carolina census. Paredes and Plante, “A Reexamination of Creek Indian Population Trends: 1738–1832,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 6:4 (1983):9; Wood, “The Changing Population of the Colonial South,” 38, 58–9. The most precise, if not most accurate, estimate of the Native American population at this time, a town-by-town census taken by the Spanish in 1738, lists 2,073 warriors, or about 7,255 men, women, and children. Given the common relocation and division of towns, it is probable that some settlements were omitted from this accounting. The 1715 census (used by Wood in his estimate) lists 42 towns, for example, while the 1738 Spanish census lists only 33. The average population per town in the 1715 census is 174 people, while for the 1738 census it is 220, so if the Spanish had indeed left out nine towns, the 1738 census may have undercounted as many as 2,000 people. Governor of Havana to Secretary Torrenueva, 28 May 1738, Stetson Collection (hereafter cited as ST), bnd. 5731, 87-1-3/48, Santo Domingo 2593, PKY.