

Praise for *Slavery and Freedom in Black Thought
in the Early Spanish Atlantic*

“This book is an astounding, sweeping, and beautifully written intellectual exploration of the rich, complicated, and worldly lives of people of African descent as they negotiated experiences of enslavement and emancipation in the early modern Iberian Atlantic. It charts an extraordinary intellectual cartography of early modern Black living that upends how scholars think of Black movement and agency at the dawn of and decades into the Atlantic slave trade.”

Yesenia Barragan, Rutgers University

“Ireton guides the reader through the early modern archive pointing to sources that bring into focus themes long held to be unimaginable. The narrative before us is a testament to archival presence engendered by the thoughts and actions of enslaved Africans and their early modern descendants. Ireton charts new ground in this brilliant study of slavery and freedom.”

Herman Bennett, author of *African Kings and Black Slaves: Sovereignty and Dispossession in the Early Modern Atlantic*

“If there was ever a body of early modern Hispanic Black Atlantic thought, as the archive of ideas on freedom, rights, and livelihood, Ireton provides its fullest account through the examination of the lives and thoughts of myriads of Black people born in Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Behind the letters, trials, and petitions examined in this book, readers can piece together the lives of these Black men and women in both metropolitan Spain and the colonies, in tandem, as never before.”

Alex Borucki, University of California, Irvine

“In her masterful exploration of a ‘lettered Black public sphere’ in the Spanish Atlantic, Ireton traces how Black subjects mobilized a transatlantic web of information to enact freedom. Her subjects gossip, litigate, acquire wealth, and theorize freedom as they circulate, spreading knowledge in surprising ways. Beautifully written, deeply researched, and centered in life stories, Ireton provocatively expands upon our knowledge of freedom and unfreedom.”

Karen Graubart, author of *Republics of Difference: Religious and Racial Self-Governance in the Spanish Atlantic World*

Cambridge University Press & Assessment

978-1-009-53348-5 — Slavery and Freedom in Black Thought in the Early Spanish Atlantic

Chloe L. Ireton

Frontmatter

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“Slavery and Freedom in Black Thought is a marvel of methodological inventiveness and scholarly rigor. Drawing on expansive archival material, Ireton grounds readers in the ‘thick spheres of communication’ that enslaved and free people of African descent engaged in to shape ideas and debates about slavery and freedom across the Spanish Empire.”

Tamara Walker, author of *Exquisite Slaves: Race, Clothing and Status in Colonial Lima*

“Extensively researched and creatively argued, this groundbreaking study is replete with richly detailed vignettes featuring the voices of Africans and people of African descent in sixteenth-century Sevilla and Spanish America. Ireton reminds us of Black individuals’ agency and dynamism within the early modern Iberian world, mustering a wealth of new evidence to document their multiform efforts to safeguard their liberties and loved ones.”

David Wheat, author of *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 1570–1640*

Slavery and Freedom in Black Thought in the Early Spanish Atlantic

Weaving together thousands of archival fragments, this study explores a shared Black Atlantic world where the meanings of slavery and freedom were fiercely contested and claimed. It recreates the worlds of extraordinary individuals and communities in the long sixteenth century, while mapping the development of early modern Black thought about slavery and freedom. From a free Black mother's embarkation license to cross the Atlantic Ocean, to an enslaved Sevillian woman's epistles to her freed husband in New Spain, to an enslaved man's negotiations with prospective buyers on the auction block in Mexico City, to a Black man's petition to reclaim his liberty after his illegitimate enslavement, Chloe L. Ireton explores how Africans and their descendants reckoned with laws and theological discourses that legitimized the enslavement of Black people and the varied meanings of freedom across legal jurisdictions. Their intellectual labor reimagined the epistemic worlds of slavery and freedom in the early modern Atlantic.

Chloe L. Ireton is Lecturer in the History of Iberia and the Iberian World 1500–1800 in the Department of History at University College London and a current British Academy Wolfson Fellow. This is her first book.

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Slavery and Freedom in Black Thought in the Early Spanish Atlantic

CHLOE L. IRETON

University College London



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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,
a department of the University of Cambridge.

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www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009533485

DOI: 10.1017/9781009533461

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When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI

10.1017/9781009533461

First published 2025

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

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

NAMES: Ireton, Chloe L., author.

TITLE: Slavery and freedom in Black thought in the early Spanish Atlantic /
Chloe L. Ireton.

DESCRIPTION: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY : Cambridge
University Press, 2025. | Series: Afro-Latin America | Includes bibliographical
references and index.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2024021485 | ISBN 9781009533485 (hardback) |
ISBN 9781009533461 (ebook)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Slavery – Latin America. | Enslaved persons – Intellectual life. |
Spain – Colonies – Intellectual life.

CLASSIFICATION: LCC HT1052.5 .174 2025 | DDC 306.3/62098-dc23/eng/20240607
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024021485>

ISBN 978-1-009-53348-5 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-009-53349-2 Paperback

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Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	page ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
Introduction	I
1 Proving Freedom: Documenting <i>Alhorría</i>	22
2 Imagining Freedom: Black Atlantic Communities in Sevilla	65
3 Purchasing Freedom: Economics of Liberty in New Spain	117
4 Defining Freedom: Infrastructures of Black Political Knowledge between Sevilla and Mexico City	151
5 Reclaiming Freedom: The Illegitimacy of Slavery in Black Thought	189
6 Practicing Freedom: Documenting Capital	228
Coda: Felipa de la Cruz’s World and Letters	252
<i>Bibliography</i>	265
<i>Index</i>	309

Figures

- 1.1 Abraham Ortelius, “Regni Hispaniae post omnium editiones locumplessima Descriptio” (detail of “Guadalquivir River [printed in illustration as *Guadalquivir Rio*] to Sevilla”). In *Hispaniae illustratae seu Rerum urbiumq. Hispaniae, Lusitaniae, Aethiopiae et Indiae scriptores varii. Partim editi nunc primum, partim aucti atque emendati*. Francofurti: Apud Claudium Marnium, & Hæredes Iohannis Aubrij, 1603. John Carter Brown Map Collection, b22212917. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library. page 32
- 1.2 Map of shipping routes in the sixteenth-century Spanish and Portuguese Atlantic world, principally depicting the Spanish crown’s *Carrera de Indias* routes, including the *Flota de la Nueva España* and the *Flota de Tierra Firme*, as well as broadly representing the principal shipping routes of European ships that forcibly displaced enslaved people from West Africa and West-Central Africa to Spanish and Portuguese Americas and Europe (often described as the “Middle Passage”). Map drawn by Cath D’Alton, Drawing Office, University College London. 33
- 2.1 Photograph of the present-day facade of the palace in Sevilla where Felipa de la Cruz was enslaved; known in the late sixteenth century as Casa-Palacio Fernández de Santillán, and presently known as Palacio del Marqués de la Motilla. Photograph by Miguel Ángel Rosales, 2024. Reproduced with permission from Miguel Ángel Rosales. 68

- 2.2 Location of the palace where Felipa de la Cruz was enslaved and an approximate outline of the parish where she resided (San Salvador), overlaid on Tomás López de Vargas Machuca, “Plano geométrico de la ciudad de Sevilla....” Tomás López: Madrid, 1788. David Rumsey Map Collection, List no. 10717.000, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries. Adaptation of the map by Cath D’Alton, Drawing Office, University College London. 70
- 2.3 Map of a fifteen-minute walk from Felipa de la Cruz’s dwelling to the House of Trade, overlaid onto Tomás López de Vargas Machuca, “Plano geométrico de la ciudad de Sevilla....” (detail). Tomás López: Madrid, 1788. David Rumsey Map Collection, List no. 10717.000, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries. Adaptation of the map by Cath D’Alton, Drawing Office, University College London. 72
- 2.4 Alonso Sánchez de Coello, “Vista de la ciudad de Sevilla,” late sixteenth century, oil on canvas, width: 295 cm, height: 146 cm (P004779). Prado Museum, Madrid. © Photographic Archive Museo Nacional del Prado. 84
- 2.5 Alonso Sánchez de Coello, “Vista de la ciudad de Sevilla,” (detail), late sixteenth century, oil on canvas, width: 295 cm, height: 146 cm (P004779). Prado Museum, Madrid. © Photographic Archive Museo Nacional del Prado. 86
- 2.6 Alonso Sánchez de Coello, “Vista de la ciudad de Sevilla,” (detail), late sixteenth century, oil on canvas, width: 295 cm, height: 146 cm (P004779). Prado Museum, Madrid. © Photographic Archive Museo Nacional del Prado. 87
- 3.1 Approximate routes along which Margarita de Sossa was forcibly displaced as an enslaved woman and latterly as a free woman. Map drawn by Cath D’Alton, Drawing Office, University College London, based on a map drawn by Alex Killough in Ball et al., *As If She Were Free*, 31. 120
- 3.2 Map of two royal trading routes in sixteenth-century New Spain between San Juan de Ulúa and Mexico City, known as *Camino de Veracruz* and *Camino Nuevo*. Map drawn by Cath D’Alton, Drawing Office, University College London, based on “Archipelague du Mexique où sont les isles de Cuba, Espagnole [Haïti], Jamaïque, etc. [Document cartographique].” Jean Covens et Corneille

List of Figures xi

	Mortier, Amsterdam, 1741. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, FRBNF40739006.	122
3.3	Juan Gómez de Trasmonte, “Forma y Levantado de La Ciudad de México.” A. Ruffoni: Florence, 1628. David Rumsey Map Collection, list no. 13213.000. David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries.	136
3.4	Juan Gómez de Trasmonte, “Forma y Levantado de La Ciudad de México” (detail). A. Ruffoni: Florence, 1628. David Rumsey Map Collection, list no. 13213.000. David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries.	136
4.1	Locations of Black and <i>mulato</i> brotherhoods and other sites where Black people gathered and worshiped in late sixteenth-century Sevilla, overlaid onto Tomás López de Vargas Machuca, “Plano geométrico de la ciudad de Sevilla...” (detail). Tomás López: Madrid, 1788. David Rumsey Map Collection, List no. 10717.000, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries. Adaptation of the map by Cath D’Alton, Drawing Office, University College London.	166
4.2	“Pleito entre la Hdad de Ntra Sra de la Antigua y la de los Ángeles que llaman la de los morenos con sede en San Roque extramuros” (detail of in-text edits to the declaration that the Black confraternity members made before their procurator, Bartolomé de Celada, on June 22, 1604), in Archivo General del Arzobispado de Sevilla (AGAS), Fondo Arzobispal, Sección III, Hermandades, sign. 09885, expte 1, fols. 14 ^{r-v} . © Cabildo Catedral de Sevilla.	170
4.3	“Pleito entre la Hdad de Ntra Sra de la Antigua y la de los Ángeles que llaman la de los morenos con sede en San Roque extramuros” (detail of in-text edits to the declaration that the Black confraternity members made before their procurator, Bartolomé de Celada, on June 22, 1604), in AGAS, Fondo Arzobispal, Sección III, Hermandades, sign. 09885, expte 1, fols. 14 ^{r-v} . © Cabildo Catedral de Sevilla.	170
4.4	Spanish transcription of Figures 4.2 and 4.3. Author’s illustration.	171
5.1	Map of the Southern Atlantic, with lines showing the enslavement and forcible displacements across the Atlantic of Domingo de <i>Gelofe</i> , Pedro de Carmona, and Francisco Martín. Map drawn by Cath D’Alton, Drawing Office, University College London.	191

xii	<i>List of Figures</i>	
C.1.1	Map of the social ties of a generation of free and liberated Black Sevillians in the late sixteenth century (c. 1569–1626). Map drawn by Cath D’Alton, Drawing Office, University College London. With thanks to Antonio Collantes de Terán Sánchez and Víctor Pérez de Escolano for granting me permission to redraw a map of Sevilla based on the maps that they each published in the following publications: Víctor de Pérez Escolano and Fernando Villanueva Sandino, eds., <i>Ordenanzas de Sevilla, facsímil de la edición de 1632</i> , impresa en Sevilla por Andrés Grande. Sevilla: OTAISA, 1975; Antonio Collantes de Terán Sánchez, <i>Sevilla en la baja Edad Media: La ciudad y sus hombres</i> . Sevilla: Sección de Publicaciones del Excmo. Ayuntamiento, 1977. Please note that the parish lines in the redrawn map are based on research by Antonio Collantes de Terán Sánchez into parish boundaries in sixteenth-century Sevilla and published in the above-mentioned publication.	254
C.1.2	Extended key for Figure C.1.1.	256

Acknowledgments

During the final stages of writing this book in January 2024, I happened to visit the monumental exhibition in London by Ghana-born, Nigeria-based sculptor El Anatsui, titled *Behind the Red Moon* that flooded floor to ceiling of the vast Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern. In this installation, El Anatsui offers a powerful contemplation on the histories of European imperialism and the violent history of the enslavement, dispossession, and displacement of millions of people from the shores of West Africa into the Atlantic world. Staged in three Acts, *Behind the Red Moon* is composed of thousands of metal bottle tops and fragments of plastic waste from the West that washes up on the shores of West Africa. Crumpling, crushing, and stitching these fragments of waste, El Anatsui composed three sculptures that evoke the sails of a slave ship and the horrors of the Middle Passage, while signaling the creativity and resilience of the global African diasporas across time. I would like to thank El Anatsui for his generosity in allowing me to reproduce a fragment of this magnificent artwork on the cover of this book.

The ideas and arguments for this book emerged slowly and in fragmentary form as I wrote and conducted archival research in different cities – I have thought about, researched, discussed, and written parts of this book in Austin, Sevilla, Mexico City, Bogotá, and London. In each site, I accrued debts in friendship and intellectual fellowship that I cannot hope to capture in these brief acknowledgments. I would, however, like to acknowledge the early emergence of this project while I conducted research for my PhD at the University of Texas at Austin. As an international student in the USA, I am indebted to this public university for funding my graduate education and professional training as a historian.

I am also indebted to Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra for serving as the director of my dissertation committee, and for our innumerable intellectual exchanges and friendship over the last thirteen years. In Austin, I made many lifelong friends whose friendships I cherish, including Ahmad Agbaria, Dharitri Bhattacharjee, Arup Chakraborty, Sandy Chang, Roni Chelben, Josh Denslow, Chris Brian Duncan, Kristie Flannery, Nicolás Alejandro González Quintero, Christopher Heaney, Altina Hoti, Jack Loveridge, Adrian Masters, Ernesto Mercado-Montero, Alex Mustafa, Nicholas Roland, Elizabeth O'Brien, Juan Carlos de Orellana, Edward Shore, Cameron Strang, Sonquo Tapia†, James Vaughn, Eyal Weinberg, Henry Weincek, and Pete Weiss. I am also grateful to my PhD dissertation committee for their support and guidance during my graduate studies: Susan Deans-Smith, Alison K. Frazier, Julie Hardwick, Jane G. Landers, and Erin K. Rowe.

Over the last six years, I have been privileged to conceptualize this book project while working in the Department of History at University College London. My debts within my department are too many to list here – I have innumerable colleagues who have offered friendship and fellowship – but I would like to thank Nicola Miller, in particular, for her continual support, encouragement, and mentorship of this book project, and the following departmental colleagues for their friendship and fellowship: Alessandro de Arcangelis, Jane Dinwoodie, Margot Finn, Alex Goodall, Angus Gowland, Rebecca Jennings, Ben Kaplan, Peter Jones, Patrick Lantschner, Jagjeet Lally, Elaine Leong, Anna Maguire, Thom Rath, María Ángeles Martín Romera, Jason Peacey, Benedetta Rossi, John Sabapathy, Will Selinger, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, Peter Schroeder, and Matthew J. Smith, as well as Eleanor Robson, and Antonio Sennis for their support as department chairs. I have also been intellectually enriched by working alongside Hannah Murphy, Liesbeth Corens, Zoltán Biedermann, and John Henderson as co-convenors of a vibrant IHR seminar on early modern history. In Sevilla, I am grateful to friends and colleagues, including Amalia Almorza Hidalgo, José Luis Belmonte Postigo, Enrique Camacho, Manuel Francisco Fernández Chávez, Esther González, Manuel Herrero Sánchez, José Manuel Manzano González, Rafael Mauricio Pérez García, Inés María Santos, Francisco Javier Molinero Rodríguez, and Bartolomé Yun Casalilla; and at the Archivo General de Indias, I thank Antonio Sánchez de Mora and the archivists for their assistance with the digitization of documents. In Mexico City, I thank the following friends for their fellowship during my stays in the city: Sarah Bak-Geller Corona, Rafael Castañeda García, Susan

Acknowledgments

xv

Deeds, Santiago Echeverri Gómez, Francisco Iván Escamilla González, Tracie Goode, Andrés Mendizabal, and Luis Fernando Tolentino García at the Archivo General de la Nación for his assistance during my various research trips. In Bogotá, I am particularly thankful to: Miguel Ángel Abadia, Liliana Aponte, John Bernal, Nelson Fernando González Martínez, Daniel Gutiérrez Ardila, Sergio Andrés Mejía Macia, Santiago Muñoz Arbeláez, Carlos Alberto Murgueito Manrique, Mauricio Nieto Olarte, Diana Peláez, Esteban Puyo, Carlos Luis Torres, Andrés Vargas, Lady Viviana Veloza Martínez, and María Uribe.

This work represents a symphony of discussions with scholars near and far whose generous and generative engagements with my research over the last ten years have shaped the questions and arguments that are threaded throughout this book. In particular, I thank the following scholars for their reading and incisive comments during a book manuscript workshop in January 2023: Herman L. Bennett, Zoltán Biedermann, Manuel Francisco Fernández Chaves, Pablo F. Gómez, Karen Graubart, Angus Gowland, Elaine Leong, Montaz Marché, Giuseppe Marcocci, Nicola Miller, Miles Ogborn, Jason Peacey, Benedetta Rossi, and Matthew J. Smith. Innumerable scholars have also generously engaged with my research throughout the cacophony of academic life by offering formal and informal comments on papers that I have presented, organizing panels, and inviting me to share my work in different settings. In particular, I thank: Ignacio Aguilo, George Reid Andrews, Berta Ares Queija, Francisco Bethencourt, Diana Berrueto-Sánchez, John Beusterein, Matthew Brown, Trevor Burnard†, Rina C. Cáceres, Pedro Cardim, Luis Castellví Laukamp, Stephanie M. Cavanaugh, Adriana Chira, José Eduardo Cornelio, Jesse Cromwell, Jo Crow, Andrew Devereux, María Camila Díaz, Paulo Drinot, Francisco A. Eissa-Barroso, Manuel Francisco Fernández Chaves, Laura Fernández-González, Bethan Fisk, Baltasar Fra-Molinero, Barbara Fuchs, Alejandro de la Fuente, Rafael García Castañeda, Martin van Gelderen, Carrie Gibson, Ximena Gómez, Nelson Fernando González Martínez, Toby Green, Tamar Herzog, Mark Hutchinson, Alejandra María Irigoin, Sebastian Kroup, Cezary Kuciewicz, Marc Lerner, Antonella Liuzzo Scorpo, Paul Lovejoy, Giuseppe Marcocci, Sinead McEneaney, Michelle A. McKinley, Erika Melek Delgado, Leonardo Moreno Álvarez, Jennifer L. Morgan, Andrea Mosquera-Guerrero, Santiago Muñoz Arbeláez, Lila O’Leary Chambers, Manuel Olmedo Gobante, Ana María Otero Claves, Rachel Sarah O’Toole, Jennifer L. Palmer, Adolfo Polo y la Borda, Miguel Ángel Rosales, Jesús Ruíz, Tatiana Seijas, Mark Thurner, Imaobong Umoren, Miguel A. Valerio, Peter Wade, Tamara Walker, David Wheat, Phil Whithington, Elizabeth Wright, and Jean-Paul Zuñiga.

Various funding bodies provided grants for archival research for this project. In particular, a British Academy Wolfson Fellowship (2023–2026) provided me with crucial time and resources to complete final research and revisions for this book. In addition, a British Academy/Leverhulme Small Research Grant and the interdisciplinary network, “The Making of Blackness in Early Modern Spain: A Process of Cultural and Social Negotiation from the Bottom-Up” (financed by Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación de España, Project ID PID2021-124893NA-I00, P.I. Diana Berrueto-Sánchez), provided funding for archival research. I also thank the Institute of Advanced Studies and Department of History at University College London for financial support towards a book manuscript workshop. During my graduate training, I also benefited from generous funding to undertake archival research from the following organizations: The Leverhulme Trust Study Abroad Studentship; Social Science Research Council, Andrew W. Mellon International Dissertation Research Fellowship; American Historical Association, Albert J. Beveridge Grant for Research in the Western Hemisphere; John Carter Brown Library, Helen Watson Bucker Memorial Fellowship; The Huntington Library, W. M. Keck Foundation Fellowship; Renaissance Society of America Research Grant; The James R. Scobie Memorial Award, Conference on Latin American History; and the Department of History and the Graduate School at University of Texas at Austin.

I would like to thank my editor at Cambridge University Press, Cecelia Cancellaro, and her editorial assistant, Victoria Phillips, and the three anonymous reviewers of the manuscript for their generous engagement with the work and valuable suggestions and critiques for final revisions. I am also grateful to Simon Fletcher for his careful work copy-editing the manuscript. I also thank John Beusterein and Baltasar Fra-Molinero who each offered helpful suggestions to improve my initial translations into English of the two letters that appear in the Coda, and to José María Álvarez Hernández for joining a separate coauthorship project to cotranscribe the two letters in Spanish. I also thank Cath D’Alton from the Department of Geography’s Drawing Office at University College London for her careful work illustrating eight maps for this book. Finally, a few parts of this work have also appeared in print elsewhere. The third section of Chapter 3 appeared as “Margarita de Sossa, Sixteenth-Century Puebla de los Ángeles, New Spain (Mexico),” in *As If She Were Free: A Collective Biography of Black Women and Emancipation in the Americas*, edited by Erica L. Ball, Tatiana Seijas, and Terri L. Snyder (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 27–42. Sections 1 and 3 of Chapter 5 have been

Acknowledgments

xvii

adapted and revised from my article “Black Africans’ Freedom Litigation Suits to Define Just War and Just Slavery in the Early Spanish Empire,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, 73(4), 1277–1319 (2020).

Finally, my family have been a source of continuous support during this project and have withstood many of my long absences. I would like to thank, in particular, my mum and dad, Tim and Pippa, and my siblings, Scarlet and Felix, and their families. I also thank Vinay for bringing so much joy, light, and love to my life while I wrote this book.