

Introduction

This book focuses on the peoples of Hispaniola and their deep, intimate, and persistent embrace of smuggling, and situates their story at the crossroads of the fields of colonial Latin American, Caribbean, and Atlantic history. Hispaniola residents traded extralegally in order to circumvent the increasingly marginal space the island occupied within the Spanish colonial system, one which left them on the fringes of lawful commercial connections. During the long seventeenth century (which I define as the years between the 1580s and 1690s), the Atlantic world was a growing network of interconnected port towns and cities and their hinterlands that developed simultaneously to the integration of those port cities into their own imperial systems. With this twin dynamic in mind, I argue that the inhabitants of the Spanish colony of Hispaniola overcame their peripheral status within the Spanish empire by embracing the possibilities that the people, networks, and goods of the nascent new Atlantic world provided. Elites wove themselves into the fabric of the trade and dominated it as they could: other residents also made their lives through the trade. By carefully navigating around Spanish imperial monopolistic expectations - or simply ignoring them -Hispaniola's residents turned the island into an Atlantic center in its own right. They pursued their short-term and intermediate social and economic goals, while also embracing cross-imperial contraband as an economically viable and morally acceptable livelihood for their own personal prosperity. In the process, steeped in the contraband networks that ruled the colony, Hispaniola residents transformed the



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political dynamics that ruled their relationship with the Spanish monarchy, giving themselves great control over the decision-making progress of the island as well as a good part of the Spanish Caribbean region.

This book offers a ground-up reconstruction of transimperial and interregional illicit trade, politics, and institutional history. Hispaniola residents instantiated what Jesse Cromwell, inspired by E. P. Thompson, identifies as a moral economy of smuggling. In Hispaniola, just as in coastal Venezuela, this social ethos also cut across race and class, unifying the great majority of society into a communal pact that normalized their practice of and benefits from contraband trade, while maintaining a deeply hierarchical society in which enslaved and free people of color, either willingly or forcedly, participated in the trade often as cogs within a smuggling machinery controlled by white elites. This process appeared in Hispaniola in the second half of the sixteenth century, over a century earlier than in Venezuela, and shows the deep roots of smuggling in coastal Caribbean communities. Islanders and Empire details efforts of local residents at every social level: those enslaved on plantations and in towns, free town residents, and especially the social and political machinations of the elite, who manipulated and benefitted most from the trade. It considers actions of the Spanish state – often ineffectual, sometimes brutal - the considerations of the Catholic Church, the dynamics of local rivalry, and the impact of non-Spanish networks and residents on the island, a factor that only continued to grow.

Next, and equally as important as the social and economic relationships related to illicit commerce, this study of the social ethos of smuggling in Hispaniola also reveals a progressive institutionalization of smuggling at the highest levels of colonial governance, which led to intimate and mutually beneficial interactions between colonial bureaucrats and some (but certainly not all) local inhabitants. Throughout the seventeenth century, Hispaniola elites' accumulated influence as smugglers permitted them to exert increasingly tight control over the reins of all local institutions. This local control not only allowed them to practice their illicit dealings without being prosecuted or punished for their actions, but gave them an outsized influence in the *Audiencia* of Santo Domingo. Local leverage over the machinery of power within the *Audiencia* allowed them

¹ Jesse Cromwell, *The Smugglers' World: Illicit Trade and Atlantic Communities in Eighteenth-Century Venezuela* (Williamsburg, Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 15–16.



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in turn to establish mutually beneficial connections with other renowned Caribbean smuggling regions such as Venezuela and New Granada. They did this with almost complete impunity, while using the royal treasury to finance their actions.

Local control over the Audiencia also had an important geostrategic dimension both for the island as part of the Spanish empire and for the region as a whole. During the late seventeenth century, the Caribbean became a heavily contested imperial frontier among European empires that were fighting to realize their own imperial ambitions while imposing commercial supremacy over the region. The ability of Hispaniola residents to steer the Audiencia of Santo Domingo and royal officials on the island to protect and expand their ability to conduct extralegal commerce had a significant impact on the implementation of Spanish imperial policy across a large part of the Caribbean, rendering most efforts from Madrid secondary to the interests of Hispaniola's power networks. At times, the Spanish crown managed to squash local efforts to cultivate multinational and transimperial contraband networks. In the depopulations of 1604-6, for example, the crown destroyed the smuggling villages of the north and west of the island: Puerto Plata, Montecristi, Bayahá, la Yaguana, and San Juan. The king's men destroyed all local resistance and caused considerable loss of life and property. Their actions resulted in great dislocation to both enslaved and free local inhabitants, who in the eyes of the crown were not only breaking the commercial laws, but were also dangerously confraternizing with proselytizing Lutherans. Despite the crown's punctual successes after 1606 in stifling unsanctioned commerce, Hispaniola – and the majority of the Spanish Caribbean possessions during the seventeenth century – established an early and increasingly fierce independence from Madrid's mandates. The marginal space that Hispaniola occupied in the mind of Spanish bureaucrats gave local peoples great latitude to mold imperial rule to their own ends, embracing what was useful for their own socioeconomic prosperity, absorbing institutional power, and disregarding some of the most onerous aspects of colonial governance.

This book opens with a chapter on the history of Hispaniola or Ayiti, as the indigenous Arawak people called it, from Cristóbal Colón's arrival to the second half of the sixteenth century.² The main narrative, however, begins in the 1580s when plantation agriculture had been in decline for at

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² I have chosen to use Christopher Columbus' Spanish name instead of its anglicized version. I will do the same with the names of kings and queens like Isabel and Fernando, Carlos, Felipe, etc.



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least thirty years and contraband had increased as an alternative economic activity. *Islanders and Empire* ends with the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697, with Spanish recognition of French dominion over Hispaniola's western lands. The treaty divided the island into the two polities of French Saint-Domingue and Spanish Santo Domingo, and despite the tensions over land and plunder, people from both sides had enjoyed a thriving contraband activity for more than a decade by this point. This illicit trade became one of the defining features in the relationship between the two colonies in the next century and beyond.

Although *Islanders and Empire* reflects the participation in contraband trade of all residents of Hispaniola, it highlights the paths of the members of the local Hispaniola-born elites. They dominated the overt smuggling on the island, even as many other actors participated. Portuguese and other foreigners, enslaved and free peoples of African descent, and Spanish officials also engaged in the consumption and trade of contraband goods, which included the purchase of African captives. In the beginning of this prosperous contraband trade in the second half of the sixteenth century, people of all ranks and backgrounds actively participated in exchanges with foreign traders along the sparsely populated shores and bays of Hispaniola. The depopulations of 1604-6 marked a watershed moment in the ability of a great part of the population to participate in the extralegal trade: access to smuggled goods became limited to a small group of individuals who took advantage of their location and/or their rank within the island's political and military structure to restrict access to these goods, thus becoming gatekeepers. This position allowed them to benefit economically from their access, while at the same time creating important patronage networks that allowed their members to obtain these goods, as well as African captives, and the wealth associated with these exchanges. By the end of the seventeenth century, the unequal access to smuggled goods created a social and political hierarchy on the island. Both crown officials and local municipal leaders in towns like Santo Domingo and Santiago de los Caballeros became direct providers of smuggled goods and centers of powerful (and often competing) contraband networks. This overt local economic defiance of imperial rules established a pattern that would continue until the end of the Spanish colonial period.

Islanders and Empire brings to bear important implications for the wider understanding of Spanish colonialism beyond the island. Despite the best attempts of the Spanish monarchy to curb contraband trade and reassert control of Santo Domingo's commerce and institutions, its efforts were ultimately thwarted by local interests bent on pursuing the path that



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suited their social and economic ambitions. The study of a colonial per-

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iphery such as Hispaniola in the seventeenth century demonstrates how local peoples actively negotiated and transformed the meaning and reach of imperial bureaucracies and institutions for their own benefit. In Santo Domingo, local actors managed to undermine and co-opt the powers of imperial bureaucracies, either by absorbing them into their own patronage networks or by confronting them with the strength that their colonial isolation granted them. Smuggling became a common activity in which all sectors of society directly or indirectly participated, including those who, at least theoretically, represented the crown's interests.

Additionally, *Islanders and Empire* demonstrates that improvisation and resistance to the mandates of Madrid occurred even in seats of empire as embattled and contradictory as the early colonial Caribbean. Besieged by Spanish enemies, the crown needed to control this region to ensure its transatlantic communication with the bullion-rich mainland of Mexico and Peru. Yet during most of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, from a colonial standpoint, the Caribbean remained largely unprofitable and very far down on the list of priorities of the Spanish crown. During this long seventeenth century, Spain formally retained control of Hispaniola, but in practice, it was the alliance of colonial administrators and local groups that controlled the destiny of the island, even as they performed their loyalty to the king in letters and treatises to Madrid. Local groups accommodated Spanish rule not just because of historical inertia (doing what their parents did before them) or abject loyalty – they did so because Madrid rarely interfered with local designs. When it did, local dominance of imperial institutions rendered most of those attempts unsuccessful. Even when the crown managed to impose its will, local peoples rendered these triumphs moot and short-lived. Hispaniola thus provides a model to study most Spanish imperial peripheries during this period, which is to say, most of the Spanish empire.

By co-opting the governing and judicial powers of local and imperial institutions on the island and prioritizing their own short- and mediumterm goals (including wealth acquisition, social recognition, and privileges), the residents of Hispaniola were able to take advantage of and even dominate the contraband trade that reached the island's shores. In doing so, they altered the course of European interimperial struggles in the Caribbean by limiting, redirecting, or suppressing the Spanish crown's policies, while seeking to advance their own social and economic interests. Hispaniola's decline in state-sanctioned commercial importance and the demise of its plantation agriculture ruined the social, political, and



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economic backbone of the island's economy. Smuggling represented a viable livelihood and even an opportunity for a certain level of prosperity and conspicuous consumption for Hispaniola residents. It often involved the co-optation of institutions and individuals with the power to punish contraband as an illicit activity. Thinking about the history of Hispaniola in this way allows for an examination of the pursuits of individual actors with in the otherwise abstract process of imperial and economic decline. The island's seventeenth-century past also elucidates the meaning and impact of that so-called decline, as well as its effects in colonial governance, from an on-the-ground peripheral perspective.

NARRATIVE EXCLUSIONS

The Spanish Caribbean islands in general, and Hispaniola in particular, have often been sidelined from the main historical narratives of the Caribbean and Atlantic world during the seventeenth century. This omission has multiple explanations. One is that the history of the Caribbean during this period has traditionally been told with an emphasis on those aspects that scholars identified as defining features of the region in later periods, such as the importance of sugar and the rise of plantation societies. As a result, the study of the seventeenth-century Caribbean has often been filtered by scholarly interest in the plantation societies that flourished, at horrible human costs, in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In United States academia in particular, this has led to an expansive historiographical production concerning plantation societies in the Caribbean and Atlantic world and their connection to the rise of Western (mostly English, French or Dutch) capitalism. Unfortunately, such an approach has also led to completely ignoring entire regions of the Caribbean that did not fit into this teleological narrative.³ Ironically, Hispaniola was home to the first plantation society in the Americas, but this first plantation cycle failed to be

³ For more on this critique, see Alejandro de la Fuente (with the collaboration of César García del Pino and Bernardo Iglesias Delgado), *Havana and the Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 226; David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean*, 1570–1640 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 8; Alberto Abello Vives and Ernesto Bassi Arévalo, "Un Caribe por fuera de la ruta de plantación," in *Un Caribe sin plantación*, ed. Alberto Abello Vives (San Andrés: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2006), 11–43. For a wonderful roundup of recent contributions to refute the plantation teleology and redirect the study of the Caribbean, see Jesse Cromwell, "More Than Slaves and Sugar: Recent Historiography of the Trans-imperial Caribbean and Its Sinew Populations," *History Compass*, vol. 12, n. 10 (2014): 770–83.



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included with what historians have identified as the definitive rise of plantations in the Caribbean by the end of the seventeenth century, no doubt contributing to the island's historiographical obscurity. ⁴ Academic interest in the study of the island after 1550s has been even more scarce, possibly due to the decline of the sugar plantations. Many African and indigenous enslaved captives escaped the Spanish farms and formed maroon communities, while many of those who stayed in bondage found a form of freedom associated with subsistence agriculture and cattle ranching instead of plantation work. In most general histories of the region, the people living in the Spanish islands of the Caribbean are only described as active participants in the earliest stages of colonization. As soon as the English, French, and Dutch settlers arrive, Spanish settlers recede to the background, where they appear to remain exclusively as victims of pirates and other forms of North European aggression. Pirate narratives celebrate northcoast smugglers only obliquely. In this telling, the European nations and their Atlantic extensions were the real protagonists in the rise of the Caribbean to preeminence as one of the central nodes of the early modern Atlantic world.6

- ⁴ There are some exceptions, like Genaro Rodríguez Morel, *Orígenes de la economía de plantación de La Española* (Santo Domingo: Editora Nacional, 2012); Genaro Rodríguez Morel, "The Sugar Economy in Hispaniola in the Sixteenth Century," in Stuart B. Schwartz, ed., *Tropical Babylons: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450–1680* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 85–114. Lynne A. Guitar, "Cultural Genesis: Relationships Among Indians, Africans, and Spaniards in Rural Hispaniola, First Half of the Sixteenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1998).
- ⁵ This is something that Raymundo González has observed for the eighteenth century, but it was certainly happening since the late sixteenth century. Raymundo González, *De esclavos a campesinos: vida rural en Santo Domingo colonial* (Santo Domingo: Archivo General de la Nación, 2011).
- ⁶ An early example of this historical narrative turn can be found in Eric E. Williams, From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean 1492-1969 (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1970), but more recent histories of the Caribbean and the Atlantic repeat the same model. See, for instance, James Ferguson, A Traveller's History of the Caribbean (Northampton: Interlink, 2008); Jan Rogozinski, A Brief History of the Caribbean: From the Arawak and Carib to the Present (New York: Plume, 2000), B. W. Higman, A Concise History of the Caribbean (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Gad Heuman, The Caribbean: A Brief History (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014). A welcome exception to this trend is Stephan Palmié and Francisco Scarano, eds. The Caribbean: A History of the Region and Its Peoples (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011). General books about the Atlantic word also tend to follow the same path. See, for instance, Douglas Egerton, Alison Games, et al., eds., The Atlantic World, A History, 1400-1888 (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, 2007); Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan, eds., Atlantic History, A Critical Appraisal (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Thomas Benjamin, The Atlantic World: Europeans, Africans, Indians, and Their Shared History, 1400-1900 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Ida Altman and

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Focusing more narrowly on the historiography of the Spanish colonial world, scholars interested in Hispaniola have spent most of their energies on the first fifty years of European colonization of the Americas. Known sometimes as the Caribbean phase of Spanish colonial expansion, this period has attracted the attention of academics interested in the origins of European colonization of the New World, as well as its earlier protagonists. The European exploration and colonization of the Caribbean basin, the exploitation and enslavement of indigenous peoples, and the introduction of African enslaved men and women continue to be some of the most active areas of research of the early colonial period of the region. In these studies, Hispaniola society (with Santo Domingo as its most important urban center) has featured prominently as the center of this expanding Spanish early colonial world in the Americas.

David Wheat have made a similar point recently about the reluctance of historians to see the sixteenth-century Caribbean beyond mere backdrop for the rise of other Western empires. Ida Altman and David Wheat, eds., *The Spanish Caribbean & the Atlantic World in the Long Sixteenth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019), xvi.

- ⁷ The historiography on Colón is vast. See, for instance, Consuelo Varela Bueno and Isabel Aguirre Landa, La caída de Cristóbal Colón: el juicio de Bobadilla (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2013) and Troy S. Floyd, The Columbus Dynasty in the Caribbean, 1492–1526 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973); for early colonization, see Roberto Cassá, Los taínos de la Española (Santo Domingo: Editorial Caribe, 1974); Samuel Wilson, Hispaniola: Caribbean Chiefdoms in the Age of Columbus (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990); Francisco Moscoso, Caguas en la conquista española del siglo 16 (Puerto Rico: Gaviota, 2016); Esteban Mira Caballos, El indio antillano: repartimientos, encomienda y esclavitud, 1492–1542 (Sevilla: Editorial Muñoz Moya, 1997); Esteban Mira Caballos, Nicolás de Ovando y los orígenes del sistema colonial español, 1502–1509 (Santo Domingo: Patronato de la Ciudad Colonial de Santo Domingo, 2000); Ida Altman, "Marriage, Family, and Ethnicity in the Early Spanish Caribbean." The William and Mary Quarterly, vol. 70, n. 2 (2013): 225–50; Frank Moya Pons, Después de Colón: Trabajo, sociedad y política en la economía del oro (Madrid: Alianza, 1987).
- Apart from some of the examples and authors cited in previous note, see also Altman and Wheat, *The Spanish Caribbean*; Ida Altman. "The Revolt of Enriquillo and the Historiography of Early Spanish America." *The Americas*, vol. 63, n. 4 (2007): 587–614; Corinne Hofman et al., "Stage of Encounters: Migration, Mobility, and Interaction in the Pre-Colonial and Early Colonial Caribbean." *World Archaeology*, vol. 46 n. 4 (2014): 599–600; Fernando Santos-Granero, *Vital Enemies: Slavery, Predation, and the Amerindian Political Economy of Life* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009); Molly A. Warsh, *American Baroque, Pearls and the Nature of Empire, 1492–1700* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Erin Woodruff Stone, "America's First Slave Revolt: Indians and African Slaves in Española, 1500–1534." *Ethnohistory*, vol. 60, n. 2 (Spring 2013): 195–217; Erin Stone, "Slave Raiders Vs. Friars: Tierra Firme, 1513–1522." *The Americas*, vol. 74, no. 2 (2017): 139–70.



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Just as Madrid focused most of its energies and resources in the exploitation and development of their expanding mainland vicerovalties of Mexico and Peru, most historians seem to have abandoned the Spanish Caribbean for those new Spanish lands and their inhabitants. Santo Domingo, Hispaniola, and most of the first cities that were so important in the initial Spanish expansion through the Caribbean became marginalized in histories of the region. Starting in the late sixteenth century, Spanish Caribbean ports cities were described as a chain of poorly administered, supplied, and defended garrison towns besieged by corsairs and pirates.9 This view is not necessarily erroneous, but its focus solely on Spanish imperial needs ignores the internal processes of these colonial societies, the lives of their inhabitants, and how, beyond their defensive needs, the peoples of these locales had an impact upon Spanish imperial plans in the hemisphere. Even Dominican and Spanish scholars seem to have taken this view of seventeenth century decline as a reason to sideline the study of this period. When forced to provide an analysis of Hispaniola society during this century, they merely join the chorus of voices that decry the poverty of the period with little insightful analysis of local society beyond these tropes. 10 This is evident in almost every collection of primary sources and general histories of the Dominican Republic that tries to tackle the seventeenth century, making them very limited in their ability to provide an extensive portrait of Hispaniola society during this period. ¹¹

Other scholars have focused on the history of Hispaniola in the eighteenth century, studying the configuration of island society, economy, the role of smuggling, the lives and struggles of African enslaved labor, its status as an imperial frontier with the French colony of Saint Domingue,

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⁹ For instance, Paul E. Hoffman, *The Spanish Crown and the Defense of the Caribbean*, 1535–1585 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1980), or Bibiano Torres Ramírez, *La armada de Barlovento* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos de Sevilla, 1081)

One of the few exceptions to this rule is Juana Gil-Bermejo García, La Española. Anotaciones históricas (1600–1650), (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispanoamericanos, 1983).

Frank Moya Pons, The Dominican Republic, a National History (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2010); Frank Moya Pons, coord., Historia de la República Dominicana (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2010); Eric Paul Roorda, Lauren Derby, and Raymundo González, eds., The Dominican Republic Reader: History, Culture, Politics (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Ernesto Sagás and Orlando Inoa, The Dominican People, A Documentary History (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2003). Frank Moya Pons did write a colonial history of Santo Domingo, but he was limited to the sources available in the Dominican Republic at the time. Frank Moya Pons, Historia Colonial De Santo Domingo (Santiago: UCMM, 1976).



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and the consequences of the Haitian Revolution on the Spanish side of the island. The lack of attention to the seventeenth century has forced many of these historians to start their work *in media res*, without having an appropriate context cemented in the earlier period. Reading some of these works, Hispaniola seems to be an island without an immediate past and with only a remote and somewhat mythical memory of the sixteenth century. In this historiography, the division of the island into the Spanish and French colonies also appears as a fait accompli without process or change over time.¹²

SANTO DOMINGO: IMPERIAL PERIPHERY, IMPERIAL FRONTIER

The existing historiography of the Spanish Caribbean in the seventeenth century is scarce, with most of the existing work focusing on Havana and/ or Cartagena. Both of those cities have been at the center of an extraordinary historiographical renaissance in recent years that reflect their status as central nodes of the Spanish monarchy.¹³ That these recent

- 12 Some classic works on Hispaniola during this period are Antonio Gutiérrez Escudero, Población y Economía en Santo Domingo (1700-1746) (Sevilla: Diputación Provincial, 1985); M^a Rosario Sevilla Soler, Santo Domingo Tierra de Frontera (1750–1800) (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispanoamericanos, 1980). See also Christine D. Rivas, "Power, Race, Class and Gender in Colonial Santo Domingo: An Analysis of Spanish Dominican Marital Patters in the Archbishopric of Santo Domingo, 1701-1801." (Ph.D. diss. Carleton University, 2008). Regarding the study of slavery and Afrodescendants in eighteenthcentury Santo Domingo, the work of José Luis Belmonte Postigo is critical. See, for example, Jose Luis Belmonte Postigo, "Sobre esclavitud y otras formas de dominio. Gradaciones de libertad y estatus social en Santo Domingo a fines del periodo colonial," in José Antonio Piqueras e Imilcy Balboa Navarro, eds., Gente de color entre esclavos (Granada: Editorial Comares, 2019), 159-78; José Luis Belmonte Postigo, "Tratando de gobernar lo ingobernable. Leyes y proyectos esclavistas en Santo Domingo durante la centuria ilustrada," in Scarlett O'Phelan and Margarita Rodríguez, coord., El ocaso del Antiguo Régimen en los imperios ibéricos (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Fondo Editorial, 2017), 205-30; José Luis Belmonte Postigo, "Bajo el negro velo de la ilegalidad. Un análisis del mercado de esclavos dominicano, 1746-1821," Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos (online publication, 2016). See also González, De esclavos a campesinos. For the ramifications of the Haitian Revolution in the Spanish colony, and especially in Afrodescendants and the institution of slavery, see Graham T. Nessler, An Islandwide Struggle for Freedom: Revolution, Emancipation, and Reenslavement in Hispaniola, 1789–1809 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016); José Luis Belmonte Postigo, "Esclavitud y status social en Santo Domingo y Puerto Rico durante la diáspora de la Revolución Haitiana," in Jonis Freire and María Verónica Secreto, eds. Formas de Liberdade. Gratidão, condicionalidade e incertezas no mundo escravista nas Americas (Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Mauad, 2018), 71-102.
- ¹³ See Pablo Gómez, The Experiential Caribbean: Creating Knowledge and Healing in the Early Modern Atlantic (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017);