

Lynne Guitar
Apartado Postal Z-111
Zona Colonial
Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

(809) 685-8381, beeper 475-7279
E-mail: 110271.707@compuserve.com

**Red & Black Together: Re-examining the
demography of rural Hispaniola in the
first half of the sixteenth century**

Traditional histories of Spanish America write off the post-1519 period of Hispaniola in a few brief paragraphs as the era when the island, due to the severe decline of its gold and of its native population, combined with the emigration of its Spanish population, became a poverty-struck backwater. It was also, supposedly, the era when the population that remained, literally overnight, turned black because of the African slaves brought in to work the New World's first sugar *ingenios* ("plantations").¹ The island did lose much of its indigenous population, but not all of it, as well as much of its Spanish population, but not all of it; and the documents from the era appear to have focused attention on Africans for a variety of reasons, not necessarily because African slaves outnumbered Indian workers. It is true that the crown's attention shifted from Hispaniola to the

¹The word "ingenio," which literally means "ingenious," initially referred to the machinery that was used to press the juice from the sugar cane. By the time the processes were imported to Hispaniola, however, the phrase "ingenio azucarero," or "ingenio" alone, had come to encompass not only the presses, but the entire complex of lands, buildings and equipment devoted to sugar's growth, harvest and production.

mineral-rich, heavily populated mainland regions of Mexico and Peru, with the major Iberian-Antillean shipping route moving from Santo Domingo to Havana. That was a long drawn-out process, however, that culminated in the seventeenth century. And it is not true that the Spaniards who remained on Hispaniola were poor. The island of Hispaniola, at least throughout the first half of the sixteenth century, was far richer, both economically and in diversity of population, than anyone has been led to believe.

Unraveling the myth of Taíno extinction

From the beginning of the "encounter" era, a number of myths arose about the native peoples of Hispaniola, the Taínos. The first of those myths was that the Taínos were a "pacific" people. It was begun by Christopher Columbus, who wanted to convince the Catholic Monarchs that they were a people ripe for conversion to Catholicism. There are certainly enough examples in the documents and chronicles, however, to demonstrate that the Taínos, although generally peaceable and willing to negotiate with the Spaniards and even to adopt them into their noble families, were not complacent in the face of threats. They fought back² or, more frequently, they simply moved into areas that were not under Spanish control (even today, with the

²Columbus and his men fought off a fierce attack off Hispaniola's northeast coast on January 13, 1493; the cacique Caonabó killed the thirty-nine Spaniards Columbus left behind at Fort La Navidad in 1492; an entire army of professional Spanish soldiers, armed to the teeth and backed up by native warriors, nonetheless nearly lost the first major battle between Spaniards and Indians, that of La Vega in March of 1495....

island's population more than ten times higher than it most likely was in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, there are many isolated areas that one can only approach on foot or muleback). Indian flight was not the kind of information the Spaniards on Hispaniola liked to include in their official reports, for doing so was an admission that the island was not totally under their control. Yet every chronicle and a wide variety of documents from 1493 through the 1530s, contain evidence of Indians fleeing "so [that] they never have to sneak to Spaniards,"³ of Taínos who "fled" to the mountains and forests "hiding themselves so as not to suffer from that work [assigned by their Spanish encomenderos]."⁴

In 1514 there was a major redivision of the Taínos who had not fled, of those who were forced to labor for various Spanish encomenderos. The census that accompanied that redivision-- supported by Bartolomé de las Casas's outcries against the encomienda system, which he claimed was killing the Indians--are always cited as demographic proof that the Taínos were on the verge of extinction, for only 23,000 of working age appeared on

³Testimony of fourteen of Hispaniola's longest-term residents taken during the Jeronymite interrogatory, AGI, Indiferente General 1624; text available in César Herrera Cabral, Colección César Herrera, unpublished documents, Vol. 21, No. 335 (housed in the library of the Centro de Altos Estudios, Santo Domingo; some pages at the beginning are missing), and Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi, Los dominicos y las encomiendas de indios de la Isla Española (Santo Domingo: Editora del Caribe, 1971), 273-354.

⁴Peter Martyr D'Anghiera, Pedro Martir de Angleria, Primer Cronista de Indias: Decadas del Nuevo Mundo (Santo Domingo: Sociedad Dominicana de Bibliófilos, 1989) Fourth Decade, Book 10.

alongside the African cimarron captain Dieguillo de Ocampo.¹⁴

Africans trickle into Hispaniola

Many African slaves joined the indios cimarrones in the uncontrolled regions of Hispaniola throughout the first half of the sixteenth century--the first complaint about this was registered with the crown by Governor Nicolás de Ovando in 1503.¹⁵ "Ladinoized" Africans, both slaves and freedmen alike, had begun arriving on Hispaniola with Columbus's second voyage in 1493,¹⁶ and an indeterminate number of African slaves were imported, both legally and illegally, over the next several decades.

The year 1519, however, is usually presented as the date when the population on Hispaniola changed dramatically. That is the year that the Spanish Crown issued a license to the Governor of Bressa to ship 4,000 African bozales (slaves shipped directly from Africa who were not "ladinoized") to the Indies. During an interrogatory in Santo Domingo in June of 1521, however, dozens of witnesses testified that the slaves had not been shipped, but

¹⁴Letter dated Jul 23, 1549. Fray Cipriano de Utrera, Polémica de Enriquillo (Santo Domingo: Editora del Caribe, 1973), 486; also in Fray Cipriano de Utrera, Historia militar de Santo Domingo (Ciudad Trujillo: [no publisher listed], 1950), Vol. 1, 414.

¹⁵March 19, 1503, letter from crown responding to Ovando's complaint. DIU, Vol. 1 (1), 43-52; also available in Marté, Manuscritos de Muñoz, Vol. 1, 48-50.

¹⁶Because they had Spanish names, spoke Spanish, and lived by Spanish customs, they are virtually indistinguishable from Spaniards in the documents.

were trickling in "little by little, to gain time so as to sell them at a higher price."¹⁷ In mid-1526, seven years after the monopoly was signed and sealed, the full quantity of slaves had still not yet been delivered, evidenced by the multitude of new licenses that were issued to ship bozales contingent upon fulfillment of the earlier contract.¹⁸

Censuses and other documents with demographic information

Many documents inadvertently provide evidence that Indians survived well beyond 1519 and were working alongside African slaves in the gold mines and sugar ingenios of Hispaniola, but most do not specify numbers. For example, Diego Caballero's petition in 1538 for more land mentioned that his ingenio had a population of "more than twenty Spaniards and 150 Africans and Indians." It was not important for Caballero to differentiate among the Africans and Indians; what was important in his petition was to demonstrate that they were alike in their

¹⁷CDIA, Vol. 1, 366-467, question No. 21.

¹⁸See cédulas dated Feb 10, 1526--AGI, Indiferente General 420, L10, ff260r-260v for 100 slaves, ff260v-261r for fifty, and ff261r-261v for 100; also ff290r-290v, dated Mar 24, 1526, for 100 slaves; ff297r-298r dated Apr 12, 1526 for 100; ff323r-323v dated May 5, 1526 (this license is for a woman, María de Vilda, royal seamstress, who was permitted to bring twenty slaves to Hispaniola after Bressa fulfilled his contract); and Indiferente General 421, L11, ff5v-6v dated May 16, 1526, for fifty slaves, and ff63v-64r dated Jun 20, 1526 for 1,000 slaves. The 1519 permit must have been fulfilled by early 1528, however, for the crown issued another bulk permit for 4,000 bozales on Apr 22 of that year, with the proviso that the factors (Germans this time) first send fifty German miners to Hispaniola. AGI, Indiferente General 421, L13, ff98r-100v.

dependence on him as their patron. He may also have purposely avoided drawing attention to the Indians under his control, for Indian labor, whether forced or "voluntary," was strictly regulated by the crown. New, stricter laws than the Laws of Burgos regarding treatment of the Indians were promulgated from Granada in November of 1526.¹⁹ After 1537, it was even more detrimental for Spaniards to mention any Indians who were working for them because of the bull issued by Pope Paul III declaring that all of the Indians of the New World were free and that no one could "compel them except by preaching and good example."²⁰

Despite Spaniards' efforts to avoid providing any specific information about Indians, however, three extant documents provide some demographic clues. The first is from a law suit that was initiated between the civil and ecclesiastical cabildos on Santo Domingo. It includes counts of the workers on nineteen of Hispaniola's ingenios in 1530, plus a scattering of small estates (see Appendix A-1 and Table 1). The total includes 1,870 Africans, most of whom were probably slaves, and 427 Spaniards. Although the count includes "some" Indians working on the ingenios, the only specific quantity provided is for five ingenios on the river Nigua that, combined, had 200. No quantities of Indians are supplied on the other ingenios, just question marks, although 700 "others" are accounted for.

¹⁹The "Laws of Granada" are available in CDIA, Vol. 1, 450-455.

²⁰AGI, Patronato 1, N38, dated June 2, 1537 (in Latin). Patronato 1, N36 is a Spanish translation.

Clearly, no one wanted to release specific numbers of Indians connected to their estates.²¹

In July 1533, Alonso de Avila of Santo Domingo prepared a relación for the crown concerning the founding of chapels on sugar ingenios and the assignment of clergy to them. He included information about the populations of twenty-three ingenios and surrounding regions (see Appendix A-2). Avila gave a specific count of 1,880 Africans, 412 Spaniards, and 200 Indians. That is the kind of ratio that other historians have cited. Avila also, however, accounted for 1,525 persons of unspecified category, who he noted included Spaniards, Africans and Indians, as well as "some" uncounted "others." Most of the "others" he identified as Indians.²²

In 1545, twelve years after Avila's relación, a report sent to Emperor Charles from the incoming governor, Alonso de Fuenmayor, provides details about several of the same ingenios, as well as others (see Appendix A-3). One would expect fewer, if any, Indian laborers on Hispaniola's ingenios in 1545 than there had been in 1530 or 1533. Fuenmayor's report, however, demonstrates the opposite. Africans only outnumbered the indigenous workforce on nine of the twenty-nine ingenios in 1545.

²¹AGI, Justicia 12, N1, R2, as cited in Esteban Mira Caballos, El indio antillano: Repartimiento, encomienda y esclavitud (1492-1542) (Seville: Ediciones ALFIL, July 1997), 155.

²²AGI, Justicia 12, 149, ff10v-15; full text in José Luis Saez, La iglesia y el esclavo negro en Santo Domingo: Una historia de tres siglos (Santo Domingo: Patronato de la Ciudad Colonial de Santo Domingo, Colección Quinto Centenario, 1994), 267-272.

The total count was 9,210+ workers, forty-one percent of whom were Africans and fifty-nine percent of whom were Indians. Note that these were not small, impoverished ingenios, either. Seven of them had populations of more than 100 workers, three more than 200, eight more than 300, four more than 400, three more than 500, and Yamán, founded by the royal factor Juan de Ampies, had 610.²³

Fluid categories and manipulation of numbers

Even a cursory analysis of the era's documents demonstrates how slippery all of this demographic information is--one can tear down others' calculations but not reconstruct the actual numbers and categories. Part of the problem is that there are no categories at all for mixed-blood peoples, only for Spaniards,

²³The información's data is from Luis Joseph Peguero, Historia de la Conquista de la Isla Española de Santo Domingo trasumptada el año de 1762: Traducida de la Historia General de las Indias escrita por Antonio de Herrera coronista mayor de su Magestad, y de las Indias, y de Castilla; y de otros autores que han escrito sobre el particular (Santo Domingo: Publicaciones del Museo de Las Casas Reales, 1975; originally published 1763), 217-221. Peguero claims to have had access to the document written by Fuenmayor, who began compiling the information when he arrived on Hispaniola for his second term in office on Aug 3, 1545; but Peguero does not say how or where he encountered it. The document may have been in a private collection. I have not been able to locate the original document or a copy of it in the AGI in Seville, nor in the AGN in Santo Domingo, nor in other collections or published sources. Peguero noted that Fuenmayor's información took the ingenios' locations and their owners from the 1536 description in Oviedo's Historia (Book 4, Chp. 8). Oviedo, however, did not list quantities of workers and he had one additional ingenio listed, one called Yaguete, owned by Francisco de Tapia, that Peguero/Fuenmayor did not mention.

Indians and Africans, or for slaves (and/or commended Indians) as opposed to free people. This did not change until the 1580s, although clearly racial mixture had been taking place since Columbus's ships first landed in 1492.²⁴

"Race," as we define it today, was not an important marker to Hispaniola's early-sixteenth-century colonists, to the census takers, nor to the crown or the church and their advisors back in Spain.²⁵ Birthright, social status, and economic and political clout were the categoric differentiators; the difference between an "Indian" man and a "Spanish" man, for example, was determined, more often than not, by whether or not his Spanish father legally recognized him, with whom he lived, what language he spoke, how he was educated, how he dressed, etc. One law suit, initiated in 1547 by Hernando Botello of Santo Domingo, illustrates just how

²⁴Fray Juan González de Mendoza's Historia de las cosas más notables, ritos y costumbres del gran Reyno de la China (Madrid, 1586) wrote that fewer than 200 Indians still lived on Hispaniola, where "most [residents] are mestizos, sons of indias and Spaniards, or negroes." The first census in Cuba listing mestizos was in 1582. Franklin W. Knight, The Caribbean: Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 44-45.

²⁵Ida Altman notes that, in Spain, "Society was still sufficiently fluid even at the highest levels that integration of illegitimate children into the main line of the family was common. Especially if there were no legitimate heirs." Ida Altman, Emigrants and Society: Extremadura and America in the Sixteenth Century (Los Angeles: University Of California Press, 1989), 151-152. Society was even more fluid in frontier colonies like Hispaniola. See Elizabeth Anne Kuznesof, "Ethnic and Gender Influences on 'Spanish' Creole Society in Colonial Spanish America," in Colonial Latin American Review 4(1), 1995: 153-175; and Colin M. Maclaughlin, "the Eagle and the Serpent: male over Female in Tenochtitlán," in Pacific Coast Conference on Latin American Studies Proceedings 5 (1976): 45-56. Note, too, that the status of slave or free, according to Spanish law, was determined by the status of the father, now by that of the mother.

fluid "ethnicity" was in frontier Hispaniola. He accused Francisco Alvarez of raping his daughter. The cover page of the law suit initially stated that his daughter was "La India Uamada." But this was crossed out and the words, "Ines Ursula, mestiza" were written above it, demonstrating that although the term "mestizo" was very seldom used in the era's documentation, the concept carried more political and social clout than the "Indian" stereotype.²⁶

Other documents abound that also illustrate how racial or ethnic categories and quantities were manipulated in early-sixteenth-century Hispaniola to achieve specific aims. As mentioned earlier, Spaniards under reported Indians in their petitions for African slaves. Others over reported the numbers. For example, reports and letters connected to the auction of Hernando Gorjón's ingenio in 1545 strongly suggest that he had been manipulating the numbers of both his Indian and African slaves because he had been illegally selling them off for thirteen years.²⁷ And the widow of the sugar lord Juan de Villoria testified that her husband had treated the Indians in his care so well that he had all 200 that had been commended to him in 1514 "until his death." Furthermore, she testified that

²⁶AGI, Justicia 829, N4. Dated Dec 1, 1547-Sep 26, 1548.

²⁷Two documents in particular suggest fraud. One is a letter to the emperor from Governor Alonso López de Cerrato dated Dec 18, 1547, which has been transcribed in Marté, Manuscritos de Juan Bautista Muñoz, Vol. 1, 418-421. The other is a letter from the emperor to Hispaniola's royal officials dated Dec 19, 1550, transcribed in Incháustegui, Reales cédulas y correspondencia, Vol. 1, 258-260.

she still had them all in 1540--an impossibility over a twenty-six-year period. Villoria's widow inflated the numbers because she was petitioning for a mayorazgo for their eldest son, and she wanted him to inherit as much as possible.²⁸

A particularly revealing example is the report that Barrionuevo made to the crown about his visit to Enriquillo's hideout in Bahoruco. Barrionuevo observed that, in the rural regions of the island, "there are many mestizos, sons of Spaniards and indias, who generally are born on the small farms and depopulated towns." Continuing, he made the seemingly paradoxical statement that: "Outside of this city [Santo Domingo], you could say that everything is depopulated."²⁹ He meant, of course, that outside of Santo Domingo there were few Spaniards in residence and that the mestizos he had seen there lived like Indians, thus they were politically and economically powerless. They were not worth counting. Barrionuevo's contemporaries would not have found his two statements paradoxical.

More research needed

The most important category of people on Hispaniola after 1519, next to Spaniards, of course, was Africans. Africans increasingly dominated the attention of the Spaniards taking the

²⁸Investigation order dated Sep 9, 1540. AGI, Audiencia de Santo Domingo 868, LI, f272.

²⁹Barrionuevo's report to the crown dated Aug 26, 1533. Marté, Manuscritos de Juan Bautista Muñoz, Vol. 1, 1533.

research is needed to carry the re-examination of Hispaniola's demographic documents past the middle of the sixteenth century.

³¹CDIU, Vol. 18, 10. Consejo de Indias advisory dated Jul 31, 1556.