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The Monarchical Caribbean: Tomas Wood, Exiles, and Royalist Strongholds during the Spanish American Independence Wars

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Unlike most of the American continental territories, the Caribbean islands – except Haiti – maintained their loyalty to the European Crowns during the Age of Atlantic Revolutions (1775–1825).¹ The Spanish, British, French, and the Dutch Caribbean mostly opposed revolutionary movements, supported slavery, and aided royalist causes in the Atlantic World. Although the Caribbean was resistant to revolutionary changes, it was deeply involved in the conflicts ignited throughout the continent. Indeed, both royalists and insurgents built some of their most prominent networks of support in this area. The Caribbean became a critical theater for the success of the revolutions on the mainland. Insurgents recruited privateers and adventurers that provided extensive logistical support for patriot armies on the continent. However, the region remained under colonial rule during that period. Why did this trans-imperial space that participated in the continental and the Haitian revolutions remain so committed to royalism and slavery during the Age of Atlantic Revolutions?

Thousands of exiles arrived in the Caribbean isles as a result of the British, the Haitian, and the Spanish American Revolutions. They brought expertise, capital, and their knowledge and experiences about the revolutions to these islands. The massive exodus of these exiles to the Caribbean facilitated the formation of a monarchical space in this area, which was committed to royalism and slavery during the Age of Atlantic Revolutions. Exiles became the rearguard of empire in the Caribbean by widely defending colonial rule in the continent and by carrying new ideas on how to preserve the Antilles under imperial control. This paper uses the life of Tomas Wood, an Irish merchant and émigré located in the Caribbean, to show how loyalist exiles and merchants actively defended colonial rule in the northern part of the South American coast and prevented the expansion of revolution to the Antilles during the Spanish American Revolutions. The arrival of exiles in the Caribbean extended the War to this area beginning in the early 1810s. The interactions among merchants, exiles, and royal officers facilitated the formation of what I call the "monarchical Caribbean," a space where these actors sought to preserve imperial power by providing logistical support and by transporting refugees across the Circum-Caribbean, i.e., the lands within and surrounding the Caribbean Sea.

This article has two parts. First, it shows how the Caribbean remained royalist during the Age of Atlantic Revolutions. This section illustrates how the region's isles were heavily involved in the wars produced by revolutionary upheavals both in the Antilles and the continent. While some isles' support for revolutionary causes owed to geopolitical and commercial interests, most of the region became a stronghold of royalism in the hemisphere. Moreover, it shows how the belated entrance of the Spanish Empire in the political economy of massive slavery set the scenario for the responses of the Antilles to the Spanish American Revolutions. Second, it reconstructs the life of Tomas Wood to analyze how colonial merchants, loyalist exiles, and Spanish officers in the Circum-Caribbean became the rearguard of the Empire during the expansion of the revolution in the northern part of the South American continent. The movement of exiles into the Caribbean islands not only eased the creation of new networks of support for the Crown's armies but also involved the Antillean populations into the war. Scattered across the region, loyalist exiles, colonial merchants, and

Antillean elites transformed the Caribbean into one of the longest-lasting royalist strongholds in the hemisphere.

The Revolutionary and Antirevolutionary Caribbean

The Caribbean islands saw paradoxical political movements in the Age of Atlantic Revolutions. According to David Geggus, "the Caribbean was home to the most transformative revolution of the age," but "revolution was not necessarily the most transformative force at work in the region."² Today, isles such as Guadeloupe and Martinique are still French possessions; Curaçao is still Dutch; and West Indian territories such as the Bahamas, Jamaica, and Barbados, which obtained their independence in the 1960s and 1970s, are still part of the Commonwealth. For that reason, Geggus claimed, "imperial rule remained secure and (outside of Cuba) essentially unchallenged."³ Except for Haiti, the Caribbean resiliently embraced colonialism and plantation slavery. However, the Caribbean was also deeply involved in the wars produced by Atlantic Revolutions. Smugglers, colonial officers, and merchants in the area supported both revolutionaries and loyalists according to their commercial and political interests, becoming critical actors in these wars' development.

Despite the Haitian and continental anti-colonial movements, the Caribbean reinforced its loyalty to European empires during the Age of Atlantic Revolutions. By this, I do not mean that the Caribbean did not experience rebellions against colonial elites or independence projects, for the region faced different plans for reformation and political participation. What I mean is that despite the various responses to anti-colonial movement in the mainland, the Caribbean was mainly a royalist stronghold during this period. Colonial authorities in the Caribbean tried to undermine its imperial competitors while they sought to maintain and expand their control of the region. The responses of the Caribbean islands to the revolutionary movements on the mainland and Haiti illustrate this.

The British, the French, and the Dutch Caribbean provide examples of how the region reacted to the Age of the Atlantic Revolutions. The British West Indies did not rebel during the American Revolution. Their cultural and social ties with Britain, the dependence of white planters on imperial military protection against slave revolts, and the existence of sugar plantations increased West Indies' colonial elites' support for the British cause. The Caribbean region played a key role in the War of the American Revolution. British interest in defending the West Indies contributed to the defeat of British royal armies on the continent. Furthermore, smugglers from the French islands of Saint-Domingue, Guadeloupe, and Martinique and the Dutch isles of St. Eustatius and Curaçao sent supplies and weapons to the American mainland. The end of the war also profoundly affected the region by disturbing the trade relations of the West Indies and by increasing French interests over Jamaica, Dominica, and Grenada.⁴ On the other hand, the arrival of exiles – both white planters and black American loyalists – brought conflicts, tensions, and changes in the how the colonial government would govern over Jamaica and Bahamas.⁵

The French Caribbean provides another case of colonialism's resilience in the face of the attempted reforms of elites, free blacks, and slaves. In his analysis of the isles of Guadalupe and Martinique, Laurent Dubois shows how Caribbean slaves used the republican language and the promise of individual liberty after the French Revolution to promote their new status as citizens. Partly in response to the slaves' claims for new universal rights, a new colonial order emerged after the Haitian revolution. This revolution was the most significant political transformation of this period, expanding citizenship rights to slaves despite the massive investment by colonial elites and metropolitan authorities in the system of slavery.⁶ Yet as Dubois brilliantly argues, "the period of Atlantic revolution involved both the demolition of oppressive political hierarchies and the creation of new forms of political exclusion."⁷ Fears of losing the rest of the French colonies after the fall of Saint-Domingue motivated the re-enslavement of black populations on Guadalupe and Martinique and the ascent of a "republican racism" that excluded slaves from full equality.

The response of the Spanish Caribbean to the Haitian Revolution – the only successful revolutionary upheaval in the region – provides the most striking case of the reactions of islander elites to anti-colonial movements and their impact on the islands. Ada Ferrer demonstrates how the Haitian Revolution had a

profound effect on the rise of Cuban slavery. On the one hand, Cuba benefited from the crisis produced by the fall of Saint-Domingue. Thousands of exiles arrived to the island, expanding sugar production with their expertise and capital. On the other hand, Cuba actively participated in revolutionary and counterrevolutionary efforts in Haiti. First, Spaniards in Santo Domingo recruited slave rebels, and Cuban soldiers traveled to the island to join them and fight against French troops during the Revolution. This situation changed, however, during the counterrevolutionary resurgence of slavery in the French Empire. The rise of robust black leadership in Haiti alarmed Cuban elites, who feared a possible expansion of revolutionary upheaval to the islands' growing plantations.⁸ Looking to defend this booming business, Cuban elites and officers compromised with royalist and counterrevolutionary efforts in the Atlantic.

These three cases illustrate how inter-imperial competition, the increasing number of exiles traveling throughout the region, and the increasingly large and profitable system of slavery in the Spanish Antilles created a new kind of entanglement between the European empires in the region. Collaboration among colonial officers, the circulation of exiles in the region, and the need to reform the slavery system in the islands after the Haitian Revolution shaped the Caribbean as a space in which governing elites and loyal vassals defended slavery and monarchical rule.⁹ The new entanglement was particularly important for the Spanish Antilles, which belatedly entered to the massive slave trade at a time when it was decreasing in the British and the French Caribbean. In that way, Spanish Antillean elites and officers became some of the main defenders and promoters of a new political economy that sought to expand plantation economies and slavery in places such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, the South of the United States, and the Southern Iberian Atlantic – especially Brazil and Río de la Plata.¹⁰

The Spanish Empire increasingly invested in the massive slave trade during the second half of the eighteenth century. Both internal and external reasons drove this change. The demands of colonial planters and miners to increase the number of slave plantations on the continent and in the Antilles, and the condemnation of slave labor and slave trafficking and the rise of abolitionism in other parts of the Atlantic world, facilitated the expansion of slavery in the Spanish Empire.¹¹ The Spanish imperial economic model started to shift from the mining of precious metals to the formation of slave plantations, especially in the Caribbean and the South Atlantic. The increase of slave labor in the Spanish possessions restructured the balance of power between the colonies and the metropolis, encouraging colonial elites to promote mercantilist reforms that benefited them.¹² The Spanish Crown liberalized the slave trade with Africa and other American colonies in 1789 when most of the European empires were experiencing a severe crisis in their territories in the hemisphere. Then, the Spanish Empire committed to slavery and plantation slavery to increase their revenues for inter-imperial warfare and their possibilities of preserving their possessions in the Americas.¹³

Slavery, Equality, and Revolution in Mainland Spanish America

The Spanish American revolutions in the continent became a threat to this new slave-based economic system. After the French invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in 1808, the Spanish American colonies created governing assemblies, seeking to defend the sovereignty of the king and to obtain more political autonomy.¹⁴ The crisis encouraged Spanish authorities to summon the Cortes – an ancient regime body of parliamentary representation – in 1810 to draft a constitution for the monarchy.¹⁵ Some of the most important discussions within the Cortes were related to the citizenship status of indigenous and mixed (*pardo*) populations in the colonies. Seeking to expand the number of Spanish American deputies proportionally to the number of citizens, Spanish American representatives employed a discourse of racial harmony that influenced not only the discussions within the Cortes but also the subsequent development of a rhetoric of republican equality.¹⁶ In spite of Spanish American representatives' attempts, Spanish liberals placated the Cuban planters, who sought to maintain the slave trade and slavery as a vital imperial institution.¹⁷ After the liberal Cadiz Constitution failed in resolving issues around Spanish American representation, citizenship, and the political status of these territories, independent movements in the continent gained more traction, and the idea of full citizenship for *pardos* and blacks turned into one of the major issues dividing Spaniards from American patriots.¹⁸

The discussions around racial equality and harmony had consequences on the ground. Early on, revolutionaries realized that they needed slave power to fight royalist armies and guerrillas, especially in areas such as New Granada and Venezuela. Royalist authorities had offered freedom to those slaves who fought for the Crown. Relying on Hispanic traditions of rights and freedom, some slaves became royalists.¹⁹ However, both insurgent elites and free *pardos* and slaves used the rhetoric of racial harmony to legitimize the revolutionary cause and to pressure for the expansion of citizenship rights for black populations.²⁰ Moreover, warfare undermined slavery, unleashing a movement of slave runaways and increasing the recruitment of slaves by revolutionary forces.²¹ For that reason, Christopher Schmidt-Nowara argued that the war transformed the racial hierarchies of the continent and put the question of slavery and racial equality at the forefront of discussions around Spanish American revolutions and the defense of Spanish possessions in the Caribbean.²²

Tomas Wood and Other Émigré Royalists in the Caribbean

The case of Tomas Wood, an Irish merchant and émigré located in the Antilles and who served under the Spanish Crown, provides an example of how exiles and colonial officers across the Antilles became the rearguard of the Spanish Empire during the revolutionary upheavals in the northern coast of the South American continent. These actors shaped the Spanish Caribbean into a monarchical space by supporting loyalist troops and by transporting refugees to the Antilles during the war. Scattered across the Caribbean, exiles and royalist merchants widely participated in the Spanish American conflict in a time when colonial authorities and elites in the Antilles were committed to defending slavery. The response of exiles, colonial merchants, and Spanish officers in the Antilles to the Spanish American Revolutions deepens our understanding of the Caribbean as an entangled monarchical space that became the longest-lasting royalist stronghold in the hemisphere.

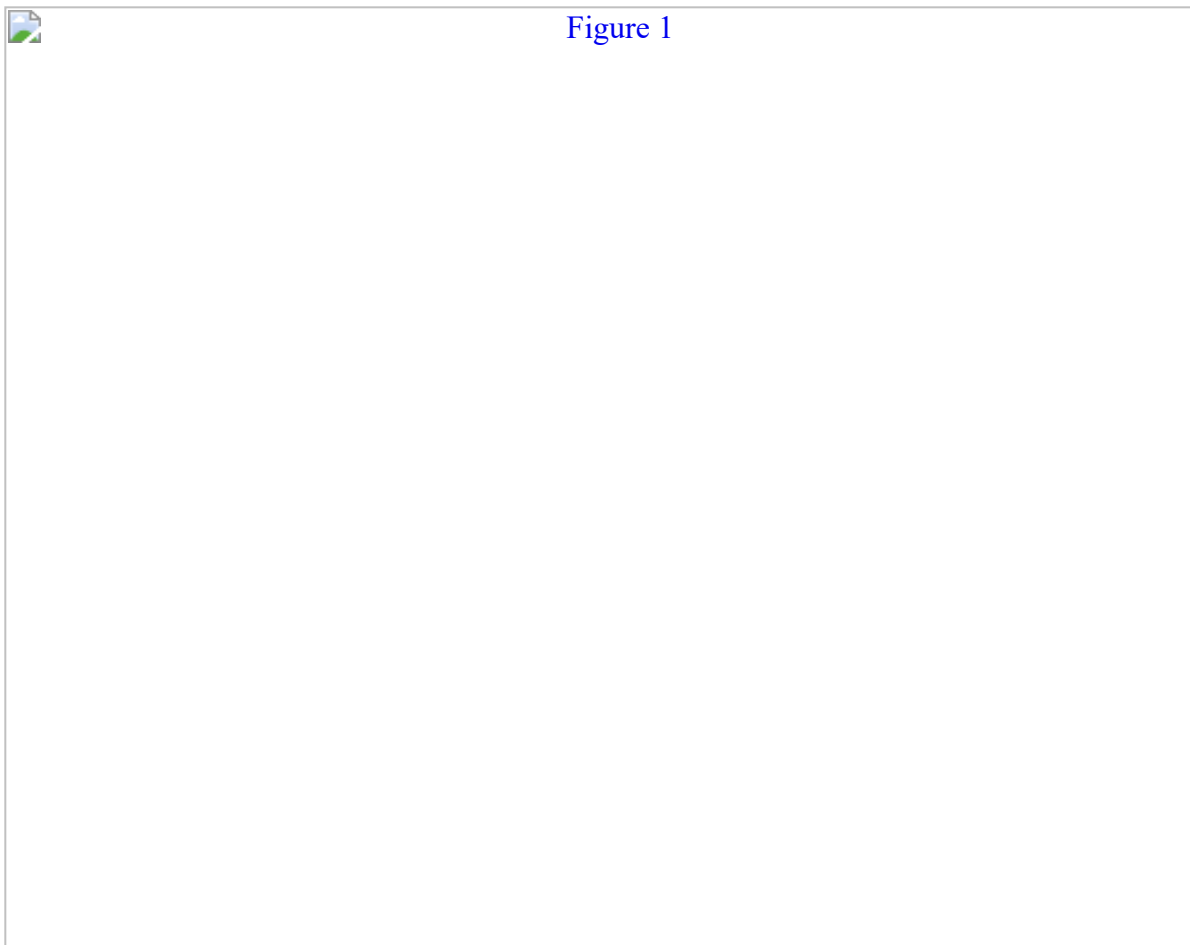


Figure 1: West Indies. Finley, Anthony, *A New General Atlas, Comprising a Complete Set of Maps, representing the Grand Divisions of the Globe, Together with the several Empires, Kingdoms and States in the World; Compiled from the Best Authorities, and corrected by the Most Recent Discoveries*, Philadelphia, 1827.

At the beginning of Spanish imperial crisis in 1808, Tomas Wood lived in a British possession in the Caribbean. Although there is no information of his life before this moment, it is plausible that Wood was working as a merchant in Curaçao, Trinidad, or one of the Lesser Antilles. In 1812, he was in Venezuela "when the ominous revolution arises, turning these beautiful countries into theaters of horror and desolation." Even though he saw "countless adventurers of different nations to ignite this fire and sought the fortune that they did not receive in their home countries," he chose to serve the Spanish Crown.²³ Claiming that he supported principles of justice, and harbored love for the Spanish Crown and its vassals, Wood decided to "consecrate his person, properties, ships, and interests to contribute to the end of such calamitous rebellion."²⁴ Wood's services in supplying Spanish troops and transporting refugees shed light on how exiles, royalist merchants, and Spanish officers scattered across the Caribbean played a crucial role in the war, keeping the region as a monarchical space that extensively supported the royal cause in the continent.

Seeing the continent immersed in a series of civil wars, thousands of Spanish American inhabitants decided to abandon their homelands, expanding connections between the mainland and other territories during the war.²⁵ Royalists and revolutionaries traveled to Europe, the United States, and Brazil.²⁶ Several exiles also emigrated to Caribbean islands such as Jamaica, Curaçao, Trinidad, and Saint-Thomas. The early arrival of exiles expanded the Spanish American Independence Wars to these areas. The travels of Simón Bolívar to

Curaçao in 1812, Jamaica in 1815, and Haiti in 1815 and 1816 are the most well-known examples of these relocations.²⁷ Nevertheless, the Caribbean islands also became a sanctuary for royalist exiles. Although these exiles mostly sought refuge in Cuba and Puerto Rico, loyalist émigrés also landed in Curaçao, Saint Thomas, Trinidad, among others.²⁸ Since the seventeenth century, the northern coast of South American and Caribbean islands such as Curaçao were interconnected by circuits of smuggling and contraband – especially of slaves, cacao, and livestock – led by Jewish smugglers, free blacks, and local communities.²⁹ Although the Spanish American Revolution limited smuggling and disrupted the trade among both territories, the arrival of exiles eased the formation of new ties between the northern coast and the Circum-Caribbean.³⁰ Then, Curaçao, Cuba, and Puerto Rico acquired a new relevance to the Spanish Crown, serving as ports of support and sustenance for the continental royalist cause.

From their positions in the Caribbean, exiles and merchants tried to influence mainland politics by supporting the king's armies, and by extending royalist contacts with other colonial territories. Merchants such as Tomas Wood gradually became critical actors in promoting the Spanish cause against the revolutionary troops and defending colonial rule in the hemisphere. After 1812, Wood bought a ship, the *Margarita*, and began to help the royal army on the mainland. During the conflict's escalation after the proclamation of Bolívar's War to the Death against the Spaniards, Wood broadly supported Guyana, a strategic area close to the Orinoco River, by bringing supplies, weapons, and provisions from the Caribbean. The Guyanese hinterland was vital to control the Orinoco and for access to maritime trade and the Venezuelan *llanos*.³¹ In the mid-1810s, the Guyanese hinterland was a highly disputed area, and royalists desperately fought to maintain it under their control. Wood claimed that he helped to save this zone "countless times from the invasions of the revolutionaries who were interested in its possession."³² Don Marias Ferrera, General of the Royal Army in Guyana, emphasized that Wood constantly traveled to "friendly foreign colonies," where he obtained various kind of war supplies to help defend this area.

Although royalists lost Guyana in 1817, individuals such as Wood became vital wartime assets as imperial armies struggled to control contested cities and regions in the northern coast of South America. During the monarchical restoration between 1816 and 1819 in New Granada and Venezuela, struggles among revolutionaries and monarchists reached a new peak of violence, producing critical shortages within royalist enclaves.³³ The monarchical areas of the coast received extensive supplies from exiles and royalist merchants such as Wood. According to Don Diego de Alegría and Don Juan Baylles y Sibori, ministers of Cumaná's royal treasure, between September of 1816 and October of 1818, Wood "transported in his ship from the ports of La Guaira, [Puerto] Cabello, Barcelona, Guayra, and Carupano, officers, troops, prisoners, sick people, food, and war supplies to this post [Cumaná] and from it to La Guayra." Alegría and Baylles also emphasized that Wood saved Cumaná from starvation, bringing hope to the "faithful defenders of His Majesty whom, full of joy, saw the enemy menace with the greatest contempt."³⁴ Wood claimed that not even his imprisonment by insurgent officers for five months in 1818 "diminish[ed] this fervent devotion to the cause of His Majesty."³⁵ Royalist officers widely recognized the importance of Wood's services to sustaining the Spanish military in the continent and maintain strategic positions in the Circum-Caribbean.

After being released from jail because of British intervention in 1819, Wood bought a new ship in Curaçao in order to continue his services, this time in a new theater: mitigating the losses of royalist cities within New Granada and Venezuela and the arrival of thousands of exiles into coastal towns such as Cartagena, Cumadná, and Puerto Cabello. The royal army retreated to those cities not only for its fortifications but also for its broader connections to Cuba and Puerto Rico, as well as with Curaçao, Saint-Thomas, and Trinidad. The royalist army slowly but persistently withered from the lack of reinforcements from the Iberian peninsula, inclement weather, and the increasing involvement of local populations and foreigners in favor of the revolutionary cause.³⁶ After supporting the royal cause in several locations across New Granada and Venezuela, royal officers, soldiers, bureaucrats, and civilians traveled with the rest of the expeditionary army to the coast.

The arrival of these populations increased the logistical pressures over these royalist cities. Officers such as Esteban Díaz Aguado in Puerto Cabello bemoaned in May of 1821 that "the incalculable influx of émigrés that had arrived in the city without anything" was undermining officials' efforts to feed the city's population. Although he feared a possible revolt, Díaz Aguado proposed to order a partial evacuation of the town.³⁷ The massive arrival of émigrés to royalist ports became a significant problem for Spanish officers, who lacked the resources to attend a population that was broadly affected by the violence and circumstances of the War.

Partial or total evacuations to other coastal cities of the Circum-Caribbean seemed a viable solution for royalist officials to save the Spanish cause in the mainland. At this moment, royalists kept their hopes in the massive transport of populations to the isles and the assistance of the nearby islands, notably Cuba and Curaçao. Between 1819 and 1823, Wood transported exiles not only across the northern coast of South America but also to the Caribbean islands. For instance, in the revolutionary siege of Cartagena, Wood assisted the city with supplies from Havana and helped to transport "numerous emigrations" to the "foreign Antilles" between June and July of 1821. Several officers praised Wood's labor in transporting officers and émigrés. Don Manuel Junguito, Colonel of the Royal Armies and Intendant of Maracaibo, highlighted Wood's role in moving families and public employees from Venezuela "who were seeking refuge," helping them to travel to "Curaçao without any interest and assisting everybody on board with food."³⁸ Junguito was part of this trip. Wood helped to transport thousands of exiles from Cartagena, Puerto Cabello, Cumaná, Maracaibo, and La Guaira to Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Curaçao.

Royalist Links between Mainland and the Caribbean

The increasing isolation of New Granadian and Venezuelan coastal cities, the presence of revolutionary corsairs in the Caribbean waters, and the worsening shortages of the Crown's armies forced royal officers to ask for support of Antillean authorities as well as from exiles and other colonies' civilians. Despite the travel of noncombatants to other locations, royalist cities such as Cumaná, Puerto Cabello, and Maracaibo continued to experience scarcities on numerous occasions. Revolutionary privateers had destroyed most Crown communication lines and support channels throughout the Caribbean.³⁹ Royalist merchants often used their ships and fleets to attack revolutionary corsairs or to aid royalist populations across the Circum-Caribbean region. Facing the possible defeat of the monarchical army and a possible revolutionary expansion to the Caribbean, islander inhabitants, merchants, and exiles decided to provide more sustenance to the royal troops given the exhaustion of local resources at the continent and the impossibility to receive reinforcements and supplies from the metropolis. Encouraged by Spanish officers in the Antilles, exiles and merchants sustained a significant part of the War efforts during the retreat of the royal army to the coast and the Caribbean.

Royalist officers sent emissaries to Cuba and Puerto Rico to ask for money, supplies, and reinforcements from island authorities and local elites.⁴⁰ Even though royalist officers and exiles in the Caribbean supported the army since the early 1810s, by the early 1820s the situation was desperate. Bolívar gained control of New Granada, and his troops were advancing to the Venezuelan coast. Members of the imperial army brought news of soldiers' fate to the Spanish Antilles and sought for food and money to attend royal troops in the continent.⁴¹ For instance, Narciso López, Commander of Maracaibo, argued in a petition to Cuban authorities in 1821 that these provisions would be crucial for "destroy[ing] the so-called republican, bringing back Venezuela to the peace and tranquility that their inhabitants desire." López claimed that Antillean support was "convenient to our national interests in defending the integrity of our territory and the general good of all the people that form the Monarchy."⁴² López was desperately calling Spanish Antillean authorities to back up royal troops on the Venezuelan coast to avoid any further expansion of the revolutionaries to the Caribbean. Puerto Rico's towns, officials, and merchants also supported royal armies on the mainland. Spanish officers traveled to the island to request money to shopkeepers, exiles, and local councils. Donations of money and supplies for the royal troops came from people in Aguadilla, Fajardo, Sabana Grande, Cabo Rojo, Rincón, Humacao, Patillas, Vega Baja, Juncos, Añaco, and Isabela.⁴³

Logistical and financial support did not come exclusively from the Spanish Antilles. Royalists in Curaçao broadly supported monarchical soldiers as well. The last royalist cities to fall in Venezuela, Puerto Cabello

and Maracaibo, partly resisted long revolutionary sieges because of the provisions, loans, and money sent by exiles in Curaçao.⁴⁴ For royalist officers such as the Colonel Manuel Junguito, exiles' presence in this island facilitated royal officers' efforts to obtain resources and funding because "all the contributors have their interests and they are expectant about the situation of the internal provinces and the capital of Venezuela."⁴⁵ Wealthy and powerful merchants gave credits of up to 25,000 pesos to General Francisco Tomas Morales for food, first-aid kits, and charter ships. For Morales, these resources would help to "defeat the revolutionary pride [...] our troops will get the victory, and we would continue with open commerce to sustain the calmness and desired peace of our inhabitants."⁴⁶ In a moment of financial crisis within the royal armies after the exhaustion of its funds on the mainland, Morales forged a strong alliance with these exiles. His troops largely depended on these loans.⁴⁷

Exiles in Curaçao also helped royalists to maintain communications with the South American mainland, an essential element in aiding the royalist resistance. Wood participated in this. After losing one of his ships as it carried émigrés from Cartagena to Havana, Wood bought a new one in Curaçao and started to transport correspondence between Puerto Rico and Venezuela. Spanish commercial houses in Curaçao such as the Casa de Austria and Labaca, led by merchants from Mexico and Venezuela, also helped transport mail and communications from the Caribbean to the northern coast of the continent.⁴⁸ For loyalist officers and troops, lack of news and communications turned into one of the main challenges amid the military confrontations. The impossibility of establishing a direct connection with troops in the northern mainland (Costa Firme) concerned Spanish authorities in the Antilles, who feared that revolutionaries used this issue to "extend the most terrible news about the state of the Peninsula," creating an "adverse influence on the public opinion."⁴⁹ Maintaining communications about the state of the royal army and the political situation of the Peninsula was fundamental for colonial officers in the Caribbean who sought to preserve imperial rule in the last strongholds of the Spanish Empire on the northern coast of Venezuela.

Imperial Tensions and Collaborations in the Caribbean

The massive movement of émigrés during the last stages of the war illustrates not only how exiles played a crucial role in the war on the continent but also how they affected the territories where they landed. Their landing produced a series of intra-imperial and trans-imperial pressures that threatened the political economy of the Caribbean. This situation was particularly crucial in Cuba, where elites and colonial officers were interested in expanding the slave plantation system within the island. The movement of these populations also sheds light on the consequences that the Circum-Caribbean region faced because of the conflict, and the new entanglement of the Antilles with the continent during and after the war.

The landing of exiles on the Caribbean islands produced a series of conflicts and negotiations between local and imperial authorities who were seeking to preserve the region as a monarchical space. In the case of Curaçao, the arrival of émigrés affected the relationship between Spanish and Dutch authorities in the early 1820s. Even though Dutch authorities often received refugees from Costa Firme, they tried to limit their numbers and to return some of them to the Venezuelan coast because of the shortages of food and water produced by their arrival. On the other hand, royalist authorities complained about the imprisonment of Spanish merchants in Curaçao because of their actions against Dutch ships that were smuggling supplies to revolutionary ports. Dutch authorities' detention of Spanish merchants in Curaçao blocked Spanish ships from traveling to other colonies such as Saint-Thomas to obtain more supplies for the royalist troops. Moreover, Spanish officers criticized Dutch authorities' reception of revolutionaries into the island, claiming that "any nation could not receive the traitors and rebels to the Patria [Fatherland] and the King without affronting the Spanish Nation." Royalists in Venezuela perceived this as an insult to the Spanish Crown and as a menace to the possibilities of maintaining royal armies' positions in Costa Firme.⁵⁰

If the arrival of exiles created tensions within Curaçao, their landing in Cuba produced even more. Thousands of exiles from the mainland arrived to the island in the early 1820s after insurgent soldiers entered cities such as Cumaná, Cartagena, and Santa Marta. Wood himself became part of this royalist diaspora to the Spanish Antilles. In 1823, he was in Maracaibo, supporting one of the last remnants of the royal army in the

coast. The Spanish Army confiscated Wood's ship to use it in defense of the city, a strategic location close to Lake Maracaibo. Insurgents won the battle and took control of the town. Then, Wood traveled to Cuba with the rest of the army. Once on the island, he sought payment of his services, something that several exiles were doing at that time.⁵¹ After losing their properties and positions in the mainland, exiles desperately sought for aid and relief in Cuban soil. This situation increased the suspicions and doubts of Cuban authorities, who saw émigrés both as a financial burden and as a threat to the political and economic stability of the island.



Figure 2: José María Espinosa. *Acción del Castillo de Maracaibo* (1823), circa 1840.

The arrival of these populations reveals the uncertainties of both metropolitan and Cuban authorities about the dangers that the Caribbean experienced because of the loss of Spanish territories at the northern part of the South American mainland. At that time, metropolitan and Antillean officers confronted the challenge of keeping Cuba and its slave plantation under Spanish control.⁵² While the Spanish Crown sought to attend to most of these exiles, they also feared that undercover Colombian or Mexican spies might infiltrate the island. On several occasions the Crown ordered officials to attend to these exiles, but Cuban authorities often dismissed these directives, alleging the bankruptcy of the island's treasury, as well as the possibility of a massive slave revolt organized by revolutionary spies.⁵³

Cuban authorities' refusal of these exiles forced Wood to travel to Madrid in 1824, where he asked the Crown for tax exemptions when introducing merchandise to the island or extracting it until he received the totality of the payment of 46,000 pesos. Wood's case impressed metropolitan authorities. They sought to reward the exiles who help to sustain the war efforts in the South American continent. After reading about Wood services, metropolitan authorities described him as "truly heroic and admirable, an example of loyalty

to the cause of the Spanish Crown that had not been that common in the *naturales*, and an example of a fervent desire to preserve our colonies, something that we can not take it for granted in a foreigner."⁵⁴ Convinced by Wood's potential utility in a possible recovery of the mainland, the Spanish Crown ordered the Cuban treasury to satisfy his claims. Havana's intendance only paid 28,000 pesos to Wood, alleging that the payment of war credits would destroy their treasury, and therefore, the monarchy's capacity to keep the Cuban plantation economy under Spanish control.

In order to face this menace and consolidate Spanish power over the island, Cuban elites, as well as local and metropolitan authorities, tried to attract the capital of landowners, merchants, and exiles from Florida, Mexico, New Granada, and Venezuela. On November 1822, the King sent a royal order to Havana to protect the properties of continental émigrés. Havana's intendance also invited Mexico's traders to move to Cuba, offering them tax discounts to do it.⁵⁵ While Cuban authorities repeatedly dismissed Wood's claim because of financial constraints, local officers tried to attract wealthy émigrés to the island to increase revenues. In the mid-1820s, Cuban elites and some island authorities considered that they had done enough to support the royal cause both in the mainland and in the Antilles and that they were not interested in paying war credits. Cuban elites believed that they had already spent sufficient resources in support of "Puerto Rico, the Floridas, Venezuela, Cartagena, Panamá, even Mexico, and lately San Juan de Úlua," and in "covering the growing expenses of two armies that have returned from Costa Firme and Mexico."⁵⁶ The King's orders to suspend the payment of war credits in April 1826 and October 1827 buttressed island authorities' decision to not pay these debts, revealing how the Spanish crown was also interested in replenishing the treasury and in expanding plantation economy within the island.

In the late 1820s, Cuba started to recover from its financial problems and the metropolis was looking for new strategies to keep the Caribbean under monarchical control. Maintaining good relationships with the officials of other European crowns in the area was vital for that purpose. Wood claimed in 1828 that other merchants who had supported the Crown during the war received their payments despite these royal orders. He argued that although he sacrificed his fortune for the Spanish nation any resolution to deny his payment did not apply to him. Wood claimed that "he had the privileges and the preferences given to the foreigners of Great Britain," and that his case was as special as the other merchants and exiles who helped the Crown to extend the war in the mainland and to preserve the Spanish Antilles under imperial rule. After this claim, the Crown ordered Cuban officials to pay Wood the rest of his debt in 1829, suggesting he "wait a while longer, and this prudent behavior will become a new and shining testimony of his recommendable and distinguished services."⁵⁷ In a time of decaying monarchies in the Americas and imperial reconfigurations and revolutions around the globe, the Spanish Monarchy saw Tomas Wood as a perfect example of trans-imperial collaboration and reciprocity between royal vassals that preserved the Caribbean as a monarchical space.⁵⁸

Conclusion

The Caribbean experienced a new type of entanglement during the Age of the Atlantic Revolutions. Despite their participation in the revolutions both in Haiti and the continent, most of the Caribbean isles did not rebel against imperial rule. On the contrary, the area became the last stronghold of royalism during that period. The massive arrival of exiles in the Caribbean and their alliances with merchants, colonial officers, and Antillean elites kept almost the entire region under imperial control. The confluence of their interests and the involvement of the Caribbean in the War facilitated a later theorization of empire and slavery in the area. Then, individuals such as Wood as well as some of his allies and collaborators shed light on how the Caribbean became the lasting slaveholding royalist stronghold in the Age of Atlantic Revolutions.

Tomas Wood's case allows us to understand the formation of the Spanish Caribbean as a monarchical space during the Age of Revolution. Like its British and French counterparts, the Spanish Caribbean actively participated in the Wars produced by the Atlantic Revolutions. In the case of the Spanish American revolution, slavery became one of the most significant issues in the conflict between royalists and insurgents in the mainland. Revolutionaries looking to legitimize their cause and receive the support of free *pardos* and slave populations raised discourses of racial harmony and equality, threatening the political economy of the

Caribbean. The conflict early on expanded into this area because of the arrival of refugees and exiles of both sides of the conflict. Scattered across the Caribbean, exiles and merchants such as Wood became the rearguard of Empire by actively defending the royalist cause in the hemisphere. By sustaining royal troops and by trying to stop insurgent armies' advances in the northern part of South America, they helped prevent the expansion of the revolution to the Antilles. Tomas Wood, an Irish merchant with strong contacts in Dutch territories and who served the Spanish Crown in the northern part South America, was part of this effort. In a sea of trans-imperial privateers and interlopers, the interactions of merchants and exiles with royalist officers facilitated the formation of the Caribbean as a monarchical space that defended colonial rule in the continent.

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Notes

¹ Wim Klooster, *Revolutions in the Atlantic World: A Comparative History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), presents a brilliant synthesis of the four Atlantic Revolutions—the American, the French, the Haitian, and the Spanish American.

² David Geggus, "The Caribbean in the Age of Revolution" in *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760–1840*, ed. David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2010), 83.

³ Geggus, "The Caribbean in the Age of Revolution," 84.

⁴ For a British perspective of the American Revolution see Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America: British Leadership, the American Revolution, and the Fate of the Empire*, Lewis Walpole Series in Eighteenth-Century Culture and History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013). The paragraph relies on Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *An empire divided: the American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000)

⁵ See Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World*, 1st ed (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 215–277.

⁶ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 3.

⁷ Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution & Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787–1804* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 7.

⁸ Ada Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁹ For recent historiography on exile during the Age of Revolution see Juan Luis Simal, *Emigrados. España y el exilio internacional, 1814–1834* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, 2012); Maurizio Isabella and Konstantina Zanou, ed., *Mediterranean Diasporas. Politics and Ideas in the Long 19th Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); Maurizio Isabella, *Risorgimento in Exile. Italian Émigrés and the Liberal*

International in the Post-Napoleonic Era (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Rafe Blaufarb, *Bonapartists in the Borderlands: French Exiles and Refugees on the Gulf Coast, 1815–1835* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2005); Rafael Rojas, *Las Repúblicas de Aire. Utopía y desencanto de Hispanoamérica* (México: Editorial Taurus, 2009); Gabriel Paquette, *Imperial Portugal in the Age of Atlantic Revolution: The Luso-Brazilian World, c.1770–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010); Sarah C. Chambers, *Families in War and Peace: Chile from Colony to Nation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Rebecca J. Scott and Jean M. Hébrard, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

¹⁰ Greg Grandin, *The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2014); also see Gabriel B. Paquette, *Imperial Portugal in the Age of Atlantic Revolutions: The Luso-Brazilian World, C. 1770–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); *Slavery and Antislavery in Spain's Atlantic Empire*, edited by Josep Maria Fradera and Christopher Schmidt-Nowara (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013); Jeremy Adelman. *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

¹¹ This section relies on Josep M. Fradera and Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, "Colonial Pioneer and Plantation Latecomer" in Fradera and Schmidt-Nowara, *Slavery and Antislavery in Spain's Atlantic Empire*.

¹² Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic*, 58. For the participation of colonial elites in process of reform in the Spanish Empire and the Southern Atlantic see Gabriel B. Paquette, *Enlightenment, Governance, and Reform in Spain and Its Empire, 1759–1808* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). For a broader Atlantic scale see Gabriel B. Paquette, ed., *Enlightened Reform in Southern Europe and Its Atlantic Colonies, c. 1750–1830* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009).

¹³ Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, *Slavery, Freedom, and Abolition in Latin America and the Atlantic World*, Diálogos (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2011), 86. Gabriel Paquette, "The Dissolution of the Spanish Atlantic Monarchy" *The Historical Journal* 52.1 (2009): 175–212.

¹⁴ François Xavier Guerra, *Modernidad e independencias: ensayo sobre las revoluciones hispánicas* (México: FCE, 1992); José María Portillo Valdés (2006). *Crisis atlántica: autonomía e independencia en la crisis de la monarquía hispana*. (Madrid: Fundación Carolina; Centro de Estudios Hispánicos e Iberoamericanos, 2006). Jordana Dym, *From Sovereignty Villages to National States: City, State, and Federation in Central America, 1759–1839* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006); Jaime E. Rodríguez. "We Are Now the True Spaniards" in *Sovereignty, Revolution, Independence, and the Emergence of the Federal Republic, 1808–1824* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

¹⁵ For recent scholarship on the transnational impact of the Cádiz Constitution see Scott Eastman and Natalia Sobrevilla Perea, eds., *The Rise of Constitutional Government in the Iberian Atlantic World: The Impact of the Cádiz Constitution of 1812* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2015).

¹⁶ Marixa Lasso, "Race War and Nation in Caribbean Gran Colombia, Cartagena, 1810–1832," *The American Historical Review* 111.2 (April 2006): 336–61; Marixa Lasso, *Myths of Harmony: Race and Republicanism during the Age of Revolution, Colombia 1795–1831* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007).

¹⁷ Schmidt-Nowara, *Slavery, Freedom, and Abolition*, 110.

¹⁸ Lasso, *Myths of Harmony: Race and Republicanism during the Age of Revolution*, 35.

¹⁹ Marcela Echeverri, *Indian and Slave Royalists in the Age of Revolution: Reform, Revolution, and Royalism in the Northern Andes, 1780–1825* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

²⁰ Lasso, *Myths of Harmony*.

²¹ Peter Blanchard, *Under the Flags of Freedom: Slave Soldiers and the Wars of Independence in Spanish South America* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008).

²² Schmidt-Nowara, *Slavery, Freedom, and Abolition*, 112.

²³ The reference to Tomas Wood's case came from Archivo General de Indias (AGI), Ultramar, 139, 40. For examples on revolutionary networks and their connections to privateers and adventurers in the Atlantic world see Rafe Blaufarb, "The Western Question: The Geopolitics of Latin American Independence" *The American Historical Review* 112.3 (June 1, 2007): 742–63; Matthew McCarthy, *Privateering, Piracy and British Policy in Spanish America, 1810–1830* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2013); Matthew Brown, *Adventuring through Spanish Colonies: Simón Bolívar, Foreign Mercenaries and the Birth of New Nations*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006); Matthew Brown, *The Struggle for Power in Post-Independence Colombia and Venezuela* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

²⁴ AGI, Ultramar, 139, 40.

²⁵ For the development of the wars on the mainland see Jaime Rodríguez, *La independencia de la América Española* (México: El Colegio de México-Fideicomiso Historia de las Américas, FCE, 2005); Michael Costeloe. *Response to Revolution: Imperial Spain and the Spanish American Revolutions, 1810–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Clément Thibaud, *Repúblicas En Armas: Los Ejércitos Bolivarianos En La Guerra de Independencia En Colombia Y Venezuela*, 1. ed. en español, Línea Del Horizonte, Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos, Lima (Bogotá: Planeta, 2003); Anthony McFarlane, *War and Independence in Spanish America* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Jeremy Adelman, "The Rites of Statehood: Violence and Sovereignty in Spanish America, 1789–1821," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 90.3 (August 2010), 391–422.

²⁶ Edmundo A. Heredia, *Los Vencidos: Un Estudio Sobre Los Realistas En La Guerra de Independencia Hispanoamericana* (Córdoba [Argentina]: Programa de Historia de las Relaciones Interamericanas CIFYH, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, 1997); Caitlin Fitz, *Our Sister Republics: The United States in an Age of American Revolutions*, (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2016), 46–79.

²⁷ John Lynch, *Simón Bolívar: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 88–102. Ernesto Bassi, *An Aqueous Territory: Sailor Geographies and New Granada's Transimperial Greater Caribbean World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 142–71.

²⁸ Christopher Schmidt-Nowara has explored how these islands received exiles from both sides according to swinging fate of the combats and how the War experiences shaped many exiles' perspectives in issues such as slavery and imperial-rivalry. See Christopher Schmidt-Nowara. "Continental Origins of Insular Proslavery: George Dawson Flinter in Curaçao, Venezuela, Britain, and Puerto Rico, 1810s–1830s", *Almanack, Guaralhos*, n. 08 (2014:2), 55–67; Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, "Entangled Irishman: George Dawson Flinter and Anglo-Spanish Imperial Rivalry," in Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, ed., *Entangled Empires: The Anglo-Iberian Atlantic, 1500–1830* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 124–40.

²⁹ See Linda Rupert, "Inter-colonial networks and revolutionary ferment in Eighteenth-century Curaçao and Tierra Firme" in Wim Klooster and Gert Oostindie, eds., *Curaçao in the Age of Revolutions, 1795–1800* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2011), 75–96. According to Linda Rupert, the inhabitants of Venezuela and Curaçao "treated the two areas as a single, well-integrated region, even when authorities mapped them in separate imperial spheres." See Linda Marguerite Rupert, *Creolization and Contraband: Curaçao in the Early modern Atlantic World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 11.

- [30](#) On the disruption of the trade in the Caribbean because of the war, see Reuben Zahler, "Heretics, Cadavers, and Capitalists. European Foreigners in Venezuela during the 1820s" in *Connections after Colonialism: Europe and Latin America in the 1820s*, ed. Matthew Brown and Gabriel Paquette (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013), 201.
- [31](#) McFarlane, *War and Independence in Spanish America*, 317.
- [32](#) AGI, Ultramar, 139, 40.
- [33](#) Rebecca Earle, *Spain and the Independence of Colombia 1810–1825* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), 57–130; Daniel Gutiérrez Ardila, *La Restauración En La Nueva Granada (1815–1819)* (Bogotá: Universidad Externado de Colombia, 2016).
- [34](#) AGI, Ultramar, 139, 40
- [35](#) Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, "Spanish Prisoners. War and Captivity in Spain's Imperial crisis" in Akiko Tsuchiya and William G. Acree, eds., *Empire's End: Transnational Connections in the Hispanic World* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2016), 131–147, examines how the imprisonment of Spaniards during the Napoleonic and the Spanish American wars shaped counterrevolutionary and pro-slavery ideas.
- [36](#) Blaufarb, "The Western Question: The Geopolitics of Latin American Independence"; McFarlane, *War and Independence in Spanish America*, 311–335; McFarlane; John Robert McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620–1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 276–287.
- [37](#) Archivo Histórico Nacional (AHN), Estado, 8725
- [38](#) AGI, Ultramar, 139, 40.
- [39](#) McFarlane, *War and Independence in Spanish America*, 422.
- [40](#) AGI, Cuba, 1989.
- [41](#) Archivo General de Puerto Rico (AGPR), Consules, Caja 27; AGI, Cuba, 1989;
- [42](#) Archivo Nacional de Cuba (ANC), Asuntos Políticos, 113, 45.
- [43](#) AGPR, Fondo de Gobernadores Españoles, Decretos Orgánicos, Caja 48.
- [44](#) AGI, Ultramar, 436, 13.
- [45](#) AHN, Estado, 8739.
- [46](#) ANC, Asuntos Políticos, 298, 29; AGI, Santo Domingo, 2336, No. 45.
- [47](#) AGI, Indiferente, 1570.
- [48](#) AGI, Ultramar, 435, 27.
- [49](#) AGI, Ultramar, 435, 27.
- [50](#) AHN, Estado, 8734, 218; AGPR, Consules, Caja 27.

[51](#) Sarah Chambers, "Rewarding Loyalty after the Wars of Independence in Spanish America: Displaced Bureaucrats in Cuba" in *War, Demobilization, and Memory. The Legacy of War in the Era of Atlantic Revolution*, ed. Alan Forrest, Karen Hagemann and Michael Rowe (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 238–53.

[52](#) David A. Sartorius, *Ever Faithful: Race, Loyalty, and the Ends of Empire in Spanish Cuba* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013) is an insightful analysis of Cuban loyalty to the Spanish Crown based on discussions about black populations' citizenship and their support for Spanish rule.

[53](#) AGI, Ultramar, 88.

[54](#) AGI, Ultramar, 139, 40.

[55](#) ANC, Asuntos Políticos, 21, 10;122, 146.

[56](#) AGI, Ultramar, 182.

[57](#) AGI, Ultramar, 139, 40.

[58](#) For the concept of imperial reconfiguration during the Age of Revolutions see Jeremy Adelman, "An Age of Imperial Revolutions," *The American Historical Review* 113.2 (April 2008): 319–40; The idea of an Age of Revolution in a global context is examined in David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Introduction: The Age of Revolutions, c. 1760–1840 Global Causation, Connection, and Comparison" in Armitage and Subrahmanyam, *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context*, xii–xxxii.

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