

# Using the Transatlantic Slave Database to shed more light on a historiographical debate

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In 1907, Hubert Aimes wrote that the British brought 10,700 slaves into Havana during the first 5 months of their occupation in 1762-63.<sup>1</sup> The figure of 10,000 slaves is still widely accepted and each repetition gives it greater credence and, despite Aimes's own assertion to the contrary, has led many authors to argue that British occupation was a turning point in the economic development of the island.<sup>2</sup> However, the official correspondence from the expedition's leader, Lord Albermarle, clearly states that one John Kennion, a slave-trader, would have the "*sole licence and liberty to bring Negroes into the Island of Cuba during the present war*". This licence allowed for the import of 2000 slaves.<sup>3</sup> This begs the question: why should Lord Albermarle give a licence and then allow four times as many slaves to be imported illegally, particularly as his administration was continuing the practice of charging an import tax of 40 dollars per slave? Given this apparent contradiction, further investigation may prove fruitful.

Aimes's figure of 10,700 was first challenged by Hugh Thomas in 1971. He checked Aimes's sources in *Archivo General de Indias* in Seville and found that, not only was the citation wrong, but that the figure in the correctly numbered document was 1,700.<sup>4</sup> This document written by López de Gamarra, the *Fiscal de la Real Hacienda*, dated the 21 April 1763, is still available in Seville and the figure is quite clearly written as 1 700.<sup>5</sup> This would fall within the 2000 for which Albermarle had issued the licence. Nevertheless, Thomas writes "*it would be false to suppose that the 1,700 'cabezas de negras bozales' here mentioned were all that the English sold, or even Kennion sold. No exact figure is likely to be found, though I would be surprised if it was under 4000*". He makes no justification for this statement. Manuel Moreno Fraginals takes this 4000 and agrees with it based on an extrapolation from the inventories of 11 *ingenios* in the Havana region. He speaks of the limitations of such a methodology, but sees no other option.<sup>6</sup> This figure of 4000 then became the new orthodoxy, although some authors such as Louis Prézécluz clung to the figure of 10,000.<sup>7</sup>

Starting from the taxation records, we see that when Lord Albermarle left Havana in December of 1762, he left an account which spoke of a 40 dollar tax on the import of slaves. This

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1 Aimes, Hubert, 1907, *A history of slavery in Cuba, 1511 to 1868*, New York and London: G. P. Putnam's sons p.33

2 eg. Guerra y Sánchez, Ramiro, 1935, *Azúcar y población en las Antillas*, Havana: Cultural, s. a p.70

Blackburn, Robin, 1963, "Prologue to the Cuban Revolution", *New Left Review*, vol.1 no.21, p.54

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Johnson, Sherry, May, 1997, "La Guerra Contra los Habitantes de los Arrabales: Changing Patterns of Land Use and Land Tenancy in and around Havana, 1763-1800", *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol.77 no.2, p.183

3 National Archive CO 117/1/99

4 Archivo de Indias Est.84 , Caj.7, Leg.13, Habana 21 April 1763 cited by Aimes. Thomas corrects this to be Leg.23, subsequently renumbered Santo Domingo 2210, Letter of Francisco López to Julián de Arriaga, 27 April 1763. all cited in Thomas, Hugh, 1971, *Cuba, the Pursuit of Freedom*, New York, San Francisco and London: Harper and Row p.50.

5 AGI, Santo Domingo 2210

6 Fraginals, Moreno, 1978, *El Ingenio, complejo económico social cubano del azúcar*, Havana: Cinecias Sociales, p.34-35

7 McNeill, John Robert, 1985, *Atlantic Empires of France and Spain, Louisbourg and Havana, 1700-1763* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press

Tomich, Dale, 1991, "World Slavery and Caribbean Capitalism: The Cuban Sugar Industry, 1760-1868", *Theory and Society*, vol.20 no.3, p.303

Murray, David R., 1980, *Odious commerce : Britain, Spain and the abolition of the Cuban slave trade* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p.4

Pérez, Louis, 1991, "Cuba and the United States: Origins and Antecedents of Relations", *Cuban Studies*, vol.1 no.21, p.61

had "lately amounted to" 92,176 *reales*. A further amount of 79,143 *reales* was raised by fines on those slaves who had been imported without paying the duty. This was also levied at 40 dollars a head.<sup>8</sup> This gives a total of 171,310 *reales*. At 8 *reales* to the dollar (pieces of eight) this indicates that taxes had been paid on 535 slaves up to that point. The regulations for the opening of the port of Havana had only been published the previous day, while William Michie had only just been appointed collector of taxes, so it is easy to see that tax collection before that point may have been haphazard. Also, given that the fine for not declaring a slave was the same as the import duty, there was not much incentive to comply with the law. Nevertheless, this figure is of a completely different order of magnitude to the 10,000 of Hubert Aimes or the later figure of 4000.<sup>9</sup>

Research into the data sources has advanced considerably since Moreno Friginals wrote in 1978 and we now have access to the on-line "Voyages" Transatlantic Slave Trade Database.<sup>10</sup> This gives details of the following slave ship arrivals in Havana for 1762, *The Africa*, 521 slaves, *The Elizabeth*, 185 slaves and the *Nancy*, 423 slaves, making 1129 in total for these three voyages. In

1763, up to the time of British departure at the beginning of July, the Voyages Database records the documented arrival of the *Experiment* carried 263 slaves, the *Blundell* carried 287, an additional 550. This gives us a total of 1679 slaves disembarked from documented ships.

As well as the totals from documented individual voyages, the "Voyages" database also makes estimates that adjust upwards the number of slaves imported each year, from those numbers found in the Voyages Database. The website states: "*Whereas the Voyages Database contains a large sample of data on the slave trade as documented in surviving historical records, the estimates data use algorithms based on data in the main database and on patterns of the slave trade over time to fill in gaps in the historical record and construct an estimate of the total slave trade*".<sup>11</sup>

There is documentary evidence for the arrival of a further 5 ships in 1763, following the departure of the British, *The Indian Queen*, the *Tryall*, the *Ranger*, the *Polly* and the *Bella*, brought another 1605, making a total of 2155 for that year for documented voyages. The estimate provided by the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database for total imports to Cuba for 1763 is 2342 compared to 2155 for the documented arrivals (see Table 1). It is therefore reasonable to adjust the figure of 550

documented before the British departure by a similar proportion, giving us 598 as an estimate of the number of arrivals for the part of 1763 preceding the British departure.<sup>12</sup> Add this to the 1289 estimated for 1762 and we arrive at a total figure for estimates arrivals from Africa during the British Occupation of 1887.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the slaves who arrived on transatlantic ships, Lord Albermarle's "Book of

	Spanish Americas	Totals
	Cuba	
1761	258	258
1762	1,289	1,289
1763	2,342	2,342
1764	2,888	2,888
1765	346	346
1766	573	573
1767	0	0
1768	512	512
1769	180	180
Totals	8,386	8,386

Table 1: Estimated total slave imports to Cuba

8 British National Archive (NA), CO 117/1/103

9 CO 117/1/98 & 101

10 <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces>

11 <http://slavevoyages.org/tast/database/methodology-14.faces>

12  $550 \times 2342 \div 2155 = 598$

$1289 + 598 = 1887$

13 NA, CO 117/1/103

Warrants" indicates that he purchased 97 slaves in Martinique and 273 in Antigua.<sup>14</sup> When he transferred command to his brother William Keppel he wrote that the "*Negroes bought for the Crown at Antigua ... be sent to some of the British Colonies to be disposed of, as it would be a hardship to sell them to the Spaniards contrary to their own inclinations. The French slaves bought at Martinica may be disposed of here to the best advantage*".<sup>15</sup> There is no surviving record of the death rate of the slaves, which must have been as high as that of the British soldiers and seamen, therefore the surviving slaves from the 97 from Martinique would push the total up a little.

*Tabla 1*

**ESCLAVOS INTRODUCIDOS EN LA HABANA  
POR JOHN KENNION DURANTE  
LA OCUPACION BRITANICA (1762-1763)**

<i>Sexos y clases</i>	<i>Cantidad</i>
<b>VARONES</b>	
Piezas de Indias .....	921
Mulecones .....	103
Muleques .....	315
Sin precisar clases .....	75
Subtotal .....	1.414
<b>HEMBRAS</b>	
Piezas de Indias .....	299
Muleconas .....	90
Mulecas .....	242
Sin precisar clases .....	31
Subtotal .....	662
Sin precisar sexos .....	127
Total .....	2.203

FUENTES: ANC. *Protocolos de La Habana*. Escribanía de Salinas, t. 1763, f. 57, 265, 426v, 742v. Escribanía de Regueira, t. 1762-63, f. 611, 612, 672. Escribanía de Pontón, t. 1763, f. 179. Escribanía de Galletti, t. 1763, f. 274v. Escribanía de Fornari, t. 1762, f. 115v, 481-484v, 487-491v, 493v, 498v, 502-519v, 529v, 532, 533, t. 1763, f. 1, 3v-5, 8-14, 16-18, 20-23v, 25v-30, 72, 77, 79, 81-87, 95v, 99-101, 165-167v, 171-172v, 174, 174v, 179v, 181v, 183v-185v, 187v, 188v, 190v-192v, 194, 242, 245, 246, 252, 255, 258, 261, 262, 265, 269, 271-273, 276-279v, 283v-285, 295-297, 299-301, 304-312v, 314v, 315v, 319, 320v, 327, 329-331, 337v, 341v, 343-345v, 348-351, 353, 355v, 357v, 359, 362, 365, 368v, 373v, 376, 386, 391, 396v, 398, 415v, 416v, 417, 420v, 421v, 423, 425, 434, 437, 451, 453-455v, 459v, 460v, 462v, 465, 469, 473-475, 477, 478, 480, 481, 483, 484, 486v, 490v-495v, 499, 503, 504, 507, 510-512, 516, 517v, 519v, 520, 524, 529-532, 535v, 536, 539, 551, 568v, 584, 611v, 615v, 666.

*Table 2: Lopez Mesa, Enrique, "Acerca de la introducción de esclavos en La Habana durante la ocupación británica (1762-1763)"*

bought by the Jesuits to the 1887 deduced above from the *Voyages* database, we reach a figure of

Enrique López Mesa has trawled through the National Archive in Habana Cuba and found evidence of John Kennion selling 2,203 slaves (see Table 2). He has also found evidence that that the Jesuits bought 312 slaves from the English, a number that, his documentary evidence is quite clear on this point, included some or most of the survivors of the 273 slaves from Antigua and the 97 from Martinique.<sup>16</sup> He concludes that William Keppel sold the Antigua slaves in Havana rather than in a British colony as he was instructed.<sup>17</sup> Whether he ignored his brother's written instruction or received new orders which have been lost we cannot tell on the basis of current evidence. It may even have been that the two brothers were acting together to deceive others; the idea that *milord* Albermarle would care for the "inclinations" of slaves is unlikely.

Albermarle was certainly under pressure to minimise the number of slaves imported into Cuba, as the then powerful West Indian Lobby were keen that the potential competition from Cuba should not affect the profits they were making from the British sugar islands in the Caribbean. Indeed, he gives the reason for restricting the imports to 2000 as: "*it might become hurtful and prejudicial to His Majesty's other Sugar Colonies not to confine in the strictest manner the number of Negroes to be admitted into this island*".<sup>18</sup>

It is reasonable to assume that, if the surviving slaves were sold in Havana, then William Keppel would have sold them through John Kennion. If we add these 312 slaves

14 Lord Albermarle "Book of Warrants" in Perez de la Riva, Juan, *Documentos inéditos de la toma de la Habana por los ingleses*, Havana: Biblioteca nacional José Martí pp. 42-45 & 58-59

15 NA, CO 117/1/102

16 Biblioteca Nacional "José Martí", Sala Cubana. *Colección de Manuscritos de Bachiller y Morales*, no. 308. "Estado que manifiesta los negros comprados por el Colegio de la Compañía de Jesus á la Nacion Ynglesa en tiempos de su dominacion en esta Plaza..." (14 de abril de 1768).

17 Lopez Mesa, Enrique, "Acerca de la introducción de esclavos en La Habana durante la ocupación británica (1762-1763)" *Rábida*, N°. 19, 2000, 29-40

18 NA, CO 117/1/99

2199, almost the same figure as Enrique Lopez finds from his investigations in the Havana *Archivo Nacional*.

There is another document in the Havana National Archive, dated 18th November 1763, written by the Conde de Ricla, the incoming Captain General after Havana was restored to the Spanish Crown, which speaks of 2727 slaves imported under British occupation.<sup>19</sup> He describes their origins as being in three groups, the major portion being imported by Kennion, some being purchased from Spaniards who had previously purchased them from Kennion and very few purchased from other English individuals. The purpose of this document is to record numbers of slaves that had been brought from the English and who were subsequently registered with the authorities upon the restoration of Spanish rule. Enrique Lopez Mesa speculates that a number of these may have been contraband bought after the previous amnesty in 1761 but before the British invasion and whose owners took advantage of this new *indulto* and the inevitable confusion arising from the change of sovereignty to legalize illegally held contraband slaves. This could account for the figure here being 500 more than the number he found elsewhere in the Havana Archives (see Table 2).<sup>20</sup>

Vessel name	Total slaves disembarked*
Pocock	85
Surprize	214
Meredith	313
King George	220
King of Bonny	379
Mentor	315
Albany	390
Rumbold	330
Britannia	470

*Table 3: Slave ships arriving in 1764*

In passing, it is worth noting that Daniel Walker claims that the slaves from Martinique and Antigua mentioned above were distributed amongst the British officers as spoils of war.<sup>21</sup> His reference for this is "The Diary of Major Joseph Gorman". However, there is no reference to slaves as spoils of war in this document and Major Gorman left Havana in October 1762, two months before Lord Albermarle issued the orders above. Why Daniel Walker made this claim remains a mystery. Most of Walker's article refers to the black troops and slaves brought from Jamaica and St Kitts. These do not concern this enquiry as they were either free or borrowed / rented from their owners and those who survived returned with the departing troops.<sup>22</sup> The British were obliged to pay an indemnity for those borrowed slaves who died in their service.

If we are considering the overall effect of the British occupation, it may be useful to look at the total figures for slave importations to Cuba for the years after the British Occupation. The level of slave imports started during the British occupation continued for the remainder of 1763 and, if anything, increased during 1764, before returning to its previously low level. Table 1 shows 2,888 for 1764 and Table 3, drawn from the "Voyages" database, gives a total of 2686 for documented voyages in that year. There is only one documented arrival in 1765, the *Sam* with 250, while Table 1 gives an estimate of 346.

In the immediate aftermath of the British occupation Ricla purchased slaves to work on rebuilding of the fortifications damaged by during the siege. The literature gives a figure of approximately 4400.<sup>23</sup> However, statistics gathered by Evelyn Jennings from the *Archivo General*

19 ANC Gobierno Superior Civil, 451/18574 *Ricla a Arriaga*. La Habana 18th November 1763.

20 Lopez Mesa, Enrique, "Acerca de la introducción de esclavos en La Habana durante la ocupación británica (1762-1763)" p.40

21 Walker, Daniel E., 1999, "Colony versus Crown: Raising Black Troops for the British Siege on Havana, 1762", *Journal of Caribbean History*, vol.33 no.1-2, p.74-83

Rodriguez, Amalia, *Cinco diarios del sitio de La Habana*, Havana: Biblioteca nacional José Martí p59

22 Riva, Juan, *Documentos inéditos de la toma de la Habana por los ingleses*, Havana: Biblioteca nacional José Martí p124.

*Papeles sobre la toma de la Habana por los ingleses en 1762*, Havana: Biblioteca nacional José Martí p103

23 Tornero Tinajero, Pablo, 1996, *Crecimiento economico y transformaciones sociales: esclavos, hacendados y*

	King's slaves	Prisoners	Total number of workers
1763	795	—	—
1764	1,967	—	—
1765	1,396	538	2,249
1766	—	—	—
1767	1,158	964	2,309
1768	1,072	773	2,004
1774	321	980	1,517
1775	319	837	1,318

Table 4: from Jennings (2005), *War as the "Forcing House of Change"* p.434

*de Indias* indicate that the highest number employed by the state was 1,967 in 1764 and that they started to sell slaves to raise money in 1765, with approximately 1400 employed in that year, reducing to 319 by 1772 (see Table 4).<sup>24</sup> The overwhelming majority of these slaves were said to have come directly from Africa.

There is a document in the *Archivo General de Indias* which gives a résumé of purchases and sales by the Spanish State over this period as part of the general costs of

repairing the damage to the fortifications caused by the British siege between July 1763 and December 1772.<sup>25</sup> This confirms Jennings figures of 4198 purchased by the state in 1763-5 and indicates that none were bought thereafter. This document also states that, between July 1763 and December 1772, 3,123, 647 reales (390,456 pesos) were recuperated by selling slaves and that only 423 state owned slaves remained in 1773 with a total value of 1,015,200 reales (126900 pesos) representing 300 pesos each. This document also speaks of the difference between the value of the slaves still in state possession in 1772 and the money spent purchasing the 4198. This is explained as being caused by the number that died and deserted - 99,432 pesos. The state was buying slaves at 150 pesos and valuing them in the inventory at 300, while the price paid by the public oscillated between 200 and 250. A rough calculation can be done with these figures. If 423 remained from 4198, that means that 3775 need to be accounted for. The 390,456 pesos raised by selling slaves would represent 1735 if an average price of 225 is assumed. This would lead us to assume that 2040 slaves had died or deserted during these 9 years of wall rebuilding.

Vessel name	Year arrived with slaves	Slaves disembarked in Cuba	
<i>Indian Queen</i>	1763	350	
<i>Tryall</i>	1763	321	
<i>Bella</i>	1763	288	
<i>Ranger</i>	1763	345	
<i>Polly</i>	1763	131	
<i>Cerberus</i>	1764	235	
<i>King of Bonny</i>	1764	270	
<i>Surprize</i>	1764	214	
<i>Mentor</i>	1764	315	
<i>Albany</i>	1764	290	
<i>Rumbold</i>	1764	257	
<i>Pocock</i>	1764	85	
<i>Meredith</i>	1764	313	
<i>King George</i>	1764	220	
<i>Britannia</i>	1764	470	Total 1763-1765 4247 (after British left)
<i>Sam</i>	1765	143	

Table 5: Documented voyages

The Voyages database states that 4247 slaves arrived on documented ships, a figure close enough to the 4198 to substantiate it.

These figures only concern themselves with the legal trade, the contraband trade would have gone on throughout this period, but the purpose of this exercise was to estimate the number of slaves imported both directly by the British and subsequently as a result of the decisions taken by the Spanish authorities in reaction to that British occupation.

*comerciantes en la Cuba colonial (1760-1840)* Madrid: Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social p.36

Pérez Guzmán, Francisco, 1997, *La Habana clave de un imperio* Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales p.66

24 Jennings, Evelyn Powell, 2005, "War as the 'Forcing House of Change': State Slavery in Late-Eighteenth-Century Cuba", *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol.62 Third Series no.3, p.430 wherein the following references:

"For slave totals in 1764, see legajo 2129, Santo Domingo, AGI. For the selling of enslaved unskilled workers, see, for instance, "Relación de cargo y Data de esta Thesoreria general," Nov. 5, 1765, listing receipts for March - August 31, sales of blacks at 220,960 reales out of a total of 11,362,086 reales (legajo I647, *ibid.*). For free workers and prisoners outnumbering the enslaved, see legajo 2122, *ibid.* "

25 AGI Santo Domingo 2129



I would therefore like to propose the following estimates:

Slaves imported directly during the British occupation: 2200

Slaves imported by the Spanish authorities for fortification work: 4200  
of which the around 1750 were subsequently sold to private owners

It has not been my intention, nor is it my field of expertise, to interpret the significance of these figures, but given the existence of the Voyages database, it would seem useful to compare its statistics with the primary sources in order to provide some, hopefully, more accurate data for the historical debate to base itself upon. I would argue that for too long historians have uncritically repeated the guesses and hunches of their predecessors without checking either their maths or their primary sources. Thus, in 1907, when Hubert Aimes appears to have copied the figure 1,700 as 10,700, he started a trend that lasted over a century.

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