

Title of Thesis:

SOCIAL CONTROL ON THE EVE OF A SLAVE
REVOLT: THE CASE OF CORO, 1795

Enrique Salvador Rivera, Master of Arts, 2013

Directed By:

Associate Professor Daryle Williams,
Department of History

Abstract: On May 10, 1795, a slave revolt broke out in Coro, a coastal region located in the Province of Caracas in the captaincy-general of Venezuela. The three-day revolt, that involved at least four hundred enslaved and free people of African descent, resulted in the destruction of several plantations and scores of deaths. Inspired in part by the French and Haitian Revolutions, the rebels demanded the abolition of slavery and the termination of taxes, but as was the case in most slave revolts, Coro's rebels ultimately failed to achieve their goals. This thesis is not about the Coro revolt, per se, but instead focuses on the preconditions to rebellion and weaknesses in social control in Coro at the time of the revolt. This study is engaged with the historiography of slave and peasant rebellion, and argues that weak mechanisms of surveillance and weak defenses were significant preconditions for the Coro revolt.

**SOCIAL CONTROL ON THE EVE OF A SLAVE REVOLT
THE CASE OF CORO, 1795**

Enrique Salvador Rivera

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
2013

Advisory Committee:
Associate Professor Daryle Williams, Chair
Assistant Professor David Sartorius
Associate Professor Marjoleine Kars

Acknowledgments

Primero le quiero dar gracias a Dios por salvarme la vida y por darme otra oportunidad. También quiero agradecerles a mis padres, María Ivonne y Enrique Stewart por apoyarme durante toda mi vida y también por ser un ejemplo de amor y compromiso social. Gracias por enseñarme tanto y por su apoyo y amor. También quiero agradecerle a mi padre todo su apoyo emocional e intelectual durante el proceso de escribir y editar esta tesis. Tu ayuda ha sido invaluable. También quiero darles las gracias a los demás miembros de mi familia inmediata: a mi hermana Heidi, mi tía Beatriz, mi prima Jazmín, mi titi Carmín, mi tío Tony, y a los demás familiares que me han apoyado en esta jornada. Quiero especialmente agradecerles a mis abuelos, José Salvador Pérez Gómez y Beatriz Chávez Benedetto. Abuelo, espero que estés descansando en paz y quiero agradecerte el apoyo y el cariño que me brindaste durante toda mi vida. Sé que estas aquí con nosotros, celebrando este logro. A mi abuela Beatriz, te quiero agradecer por ser una mujer valiente y fuerte. Gracias también por tu buen ejemplo, por tu humor y por tu amor.

I would also like to thank all my friends who have inspired and supported me throughout this journey. I especially want to thank Adrian and Mark for helping me save my life and for teaching me how to live. I also want to thank Brandon, Cody, Erika, Georgie, Hayley, Andre, Brittany, and Cara. Thank you for your love. To those who are no longer here, I would like to thank you too, particularly Walter Chávez. I'm sure you would be thrilled for me if you were here, and I constantly wonder where you would be today. Thank you for your kindness and love. I miss you. The too-early deaths of my dear cousin Monica Rivera, and my friends John "Cypress" Montoya, Dondi, and Ernie Brooks, among others,

have impacted me in ways that they could not have imagined. I'm so sorry that you are not here. You are surely missed.

I must also thank my faculty and friends at the University of Maryland. My advisor, Daryle Williams, encouraged me from the moment I arrived and has constantly challenged me to do better. Thank you for your kindness and your support during the past three years. This project might not have been developed, let alone completed, without the encouragement of David Sartorius, who suggested that I start on this project now, and whose thorough and thoughtful comments have taught me so much. I also want to thank Marjoleine Kars for taking the time to meet with me, give me suggestions, and for serving on my Master's Thesis Committee. Thank you for your generous support over the past few years. I also want to thank Ira Berlin for teaching me how to write, for teaching me so much about slavery in the Americas, and for walking me through the historiography. Your support has been a true gift. Thank you. I also want to thank Karin Roseblatt for consistently challenging me in the classroom, and for teaching me so much about theory, race, politics, and life. It has been a bumpy ride but it might not have been as enriching if it had been otherwise. I must also thank my comrades in the history department, particularly: Brandi Townsend, Jesse Zarley, Adolfo Polo y La Borda, Sonia Prescott, Lucien Holness, Ashley Towle, and David Irwin. Your friendship has been crucial for getting me through these past few years. None of this research would have been possible without the financial support of the Department of History and the Latin American Studies Center at the University of Maryland, College Park. Thank you for your generous support.

También les quiero agradecer a los archivistas y los trabajadores del Archivo General de Indias en Sevilla, La Biblioteca Oscar Bullón en Coro, y el Archivo Histórico del

Estado Falcón en Coro. Primero quiero agradecerles a Luis Dovale Prado y Nereyda Ferrer por su amistad, su apoyo, y su estimulación intelectual. También quiero enviarles mis agradecimientos a Eglá Charnell, Pedro Chirinos, Candelaria González, Carlos González Batista, Ana María Montero, Fluvia Polanco, y todos los estudiantes de post-grado en historia en la Universidad Francisco Miranda. También quiero extender mi más sincero agradecimiento a Ramón Aizpurúa, José Marcial Ramos Guedez, y María Cristiana Soriano, cuya gentileza me ha sido indispensable.

Finalmente quiero agradecer la inspiración del pueblo de Venezuela y el que me hayan hecho sentir como venezolano. Particularmente quiero agradecerles a Mirna Parra y William Guerrero por todo su amor. También quiero agradecerles a: Fequiere Nozaire, Daniela De Leon, Lilliani Romero, Irene Guerrero, Corina Guerrero, Gisele Guerrero, y a todo los trabajadores de la Posada de la Vida en Caracas. ¡Un abrazo para todos!

A Note on Translations

All translations are my own. The original Spanish-language quotes are provided in the footnotes. The spelling has been modified to reflect modern Spanish except for proper nouns and original titles.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: The Anatomy of Slave and Peasant Revolt.....	11
Preconditions of Slave and Peasant Rebellions.....	12
The Haitian Turn	22
Conclusion	32
Chapter Two: “It would be difficult to find fifty useful rifles:” Weak Defense and Surveillance in the Coro Revolt.....	34
Preconditions for Rebellion in Late Eighteenth-Century Coro.....	36
Comparisons.....	51
Conclusion	61
Chapter Three: Social Control in the Aftermath of The Coro Revolt.....	63
The Revolt.....	63
Chirino’s Execution.....	70
Subsequent Reforms	76
Conclusion	82
Conclusion	84
Bibliography	87
Primary Sources.....	87
Secondary Sources.....	87

Introduction

On May 10, 1795, a slave revolt broke out in Coro, a coastal region located in the Province of Caracas in the captaincy-general of Venezuela. The three-day revolt, that involved at least four hundred enslaved and free people of African descent, resulted in the destruction of several plantations and scores of deaths. Inspired in part by the French and Haitian Revolutions, the rebels demanded the abolition of slavery and the termination of taxes, but as was the case in most slave revolts, Coro's rebels ultimately failed to achieve their goals.

The Coro revolt was intricately planned, and done so well in advance. The revolt's leaders, José Leonardo Chirino and José Caridad González, were free men of African descent who had planned to raise arms on the night of May 10; González in the city center of Coro and Chirino in Coro's sierra or mountain range. The rebels' plan was to take control of the immediate region in order to take power from local authorities and abolish slavery and taxes. The first night, Chirino led slaves and free people in Coro's sierra, or mountain range, burning and sacking the properties of white slave owners, and killing the few whites who were there. As Chirino led slaves and free people in the sierra, González led a group of free black men to break into the city's weapons depot, but were caught and detained. Hundreds of rebels marched from the sierra to the city of Coro the next morning where a large battle ensued and the rebels were ultimately forced to retreat. Coro's authorities then executed dozens of rebels in the following days, including González. Chirino was able to escape, only

to be captured two months later, incarcerated for nearly a year and a half, and publicly executed in Caracas.¹

The Coro revolt had a significant impact on subsequent historical events in both the Caribbean and in Venezuela. It is linked to one of the largest slave revolts ever, one that occurred in nearby Dutch Curaçao just two months later.² The Coro revolt also served as inspiration for subsequent anticolonial movements in Venezuela, including the 1797 Gual y España Conspiracy.³ The city of Coro was also the last bastion of royal support during the Bolivarian wars of independence, an effect that can be traced back to reaction from the 1795 movement.⁴

The *ciudad* of Coro, where the rebellion took place, was a port city on the northern coast of South America that was subordinate to the Province of Caracas.⁵ It was the economic center of the expansive region of Coro that stretched ninety leagues wide and thirty leagues long and was inhabited by approximately 29,000 people.⁶ The region of Coro was under the ecclesiastical, jurisdictional and political authority of Caracas, which was weeks away by travel.⁷ As was the case in most of Venezuela at the close of the eighteenth century, free people of African descent comprised the majority of Coro's inhabitants. After the revolt, it was calculated that approximately 44% of the population was composed of free people of African descent, 30% were classified as Indians, 14% were classified as

¹ "Expediente sobre la insurrección de los negros, zambos y mulatos proyectada en el año 1795 a las inmediaciones de la ciudad de Coro, Provincia de Caracas," 1795, Caracas, 426, Archivo General de Indias.

² Linda Rupert, "Marronage, Manumission and Maritime Trade in the Early Modern Caribbean," *Slavery & Abolition* 30, no. 3 (2009): 361–382.

³ María Cristina Soriano, "Rumors of Change: Repercussions of Caribbean Turmoil and Social Conflicts in Venezuela (1790-1810)" (New York University, 2011).

⁴ John Lynch, *The Spanish American Revolutions, 1808-1826*. (New York: Norton, 1973); John Lynch, *Simón Bolívar: a Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

⁵ Soriano, "Rumors of Change."

⁶ "Expediente sobre la insurrección."

⁷ P. Michael McKinley, *Pre-revolutionary Caracas: Politics, Economy, and Society, 1777-1811* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); "Expediente Sobre La Insurrección."

white, and 12% were enslaved people of African descent.⁸ Although only 12% of the region's population was enslaved, this number skyrocketed in Coro's sierra, where the revolt was planned and where it erupted, although exact figures of the sierra's inhabitants are not known.

Many free people of African descent in Coro were known as *loangos*, which was often used as an ethnic marker in the Atlantic world during this period, and usually referenced people from the Congo region. In Coro, however, *loango* referred mostly to free people of African descent who were slaves before fleeing Curaçao. Hundreds of refugee slaves from Curaçao settled in Coro during the second half of the eighteenth century, taking advantage of Spanish policy that granted slaves from rival European empires the right to live free in Spanish territory.⁹ Many of these *loangos* were involved in the revolt, as were some Caquetio Indians.

González himself was a *loango* born in Africa, enslaved as a child, and who lived and worked as a slave in Curaçao. As a teenager, González fled Curaçao for nearby Coro, and became a leader of this community of *loangos*, litigating on their behalf. González even travelled to Spain to receive a Royal Order to the right over lands for *loangos* in Coro's sierra. González was arrested during the revolt after he and dozens of *loangos* arrived at Coro's weapons depot in an attempt to acquire weapons, claiming they wanted to protect the city. González was later shot dead after trying to escape, but not before several rebels

⁸"Expediente sobre la insurrección." These calculations are similar to those made by Spanish Bishop Mariano Martí in 1768 and found in Mariano Martí, Lino Gómez Canedo, and Juan Joseph Guzmán, *Obispo Mariano Martí: Documentos relativos a su visita pastoral de la Diócesis de Caracas, 1771-1784*. (Caracas: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 1969).

⁹ For more on enslaved and free people of African descent playing European empires off of each other see Jane Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

had implicated him in the plot.¹⁰ González's involvement in the plot has been the subject of controversy in the Venezuelan historiography, partly because he has been considered the key to unlocking the true ambitions of Coro's rebels. Historians who have argued that the Coro revolt was an emancipatory, proto-republican movement have tended to assert that González was a co-conspirator, while historians who have stressed the movement's local concerns have tended to view him as a scapegoat. González was one of the principal leaders of the revolt, but he should not be considered the only link to the Atlantic world during the Age of Revolutions.

Although his father was enslaved, Chirino was born free because his mother was indigenous.¹¹ Chirino's wife and children were enslaved, and he worked for their master, Josef de Tellería, as a merchant's assistant. Chirino regularly travelled with Tellería to engage in illegal trade with the nearby Dutch islands of Curaçao and Aruba, and he even made it as far as Saint-Domingue. Chirino was well travelled and was a leader in his community, constantly litigating on behalf of the poor in Coro's sierra.¹² As the leader of the rebels in Coro's sierra, one of Chirino's first orders was to have Tellería killed, making him one of the few Coro leaders that were specifically targeted to be killed.

Historians of the Coro revolt have generally argued over the motivations, leaders, and ideology of Coro's rebels. In 1910, Pedro Manuel Arcaya gave a lecture on the Coro revolt at Venezuela's Academia Nacional de la Historia.¹³ This would be one of the first and most in-depth studies on the Coro revolt, it was later published in Caracas in 1949. In

¹⁰ "Expediente sobre la insurrección."

¹¹ Pedro Manuel Arcaya, *Insurrección de los negros de la serranía de Coro*. (Caracas: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 1949).

¹² Tellería, "N. 15 Ynforma, al Real Consulado De Comercio de Venezuela, el diputado de Coro, lo que es esta provincia: las causas de la total desolacion en que se halla, y medios que le paracen adequados para su prosperidad y opulencia"; "Expediente Sobre La Insurrección."

¹³ Arcaya, *Insurrección de los negros*.

Insurrección de los negros de la serranía de Coro, Arcaya provides a close study of late eighteenth-century Coro and gives a narration of the revolt itself. Arcaya argues that Coro's rebels were inspired by the French and Haitian revolutions, which infused in them foreign ideas of liberty which the "primitive" rebels could not completely understand: "That's how I imagine ideas, as a sort of psychological stimulant. Nothing remains of them when they enter minds that are not prepared to receive them, except for verbal formulas in their memory."¹⁴ With these verbal formulas memorized, Arcaya argues that Coro's rebels in the sierra went on to destroy properties and kill indiscriminately until they were eventually captured and killed. Arcaya admits that he is unsure whether or not González was involved in the revolt, or if it was entirely Chirino's movement. He does write, however, that González was at Caracas's port of La Guayra just months before the revolt and that he could have met with revolutionaries there, both Venezuelan and French, to plan an insurrection that would be carried out upon his return to Coro. Arcaya also acknowledges, however, that González was killed before he could give testimony and that there is no way of knowing for sure whether or not González was involved.

La insurrección de los negros de la serranía coriana: 10 de Mayo de 1795 (Notas para la discusión), organized by Pedro A. Gil Rivas, Luis Dovale Prado, and Lidia Lusmila Bello, is one of the most thoroughly researched studies on the Coro revolt. *La insurrección* was originally an undergraduate thesis before it was revised and published in 1996 as part of the bicentennial celebration of the Coro revolt, spearheaded by the Universidad Central de Venezuela. The authors argue that the revolt was not a movement for independence tied to

¹⁴ Ibid., 21. "Así me figuro las ideas como una especie de excitante psicológico. No quedan de ellas al penetrar en espíritus no apropiados para recibirlas, sino fórmulas verbales en la memoria."

the revolutionary Atlantic, but was a movement strictly of “local-regional” origin.¹⁵ The authors go on to argue that the rebels were not motivated by republicanism, but were simply attempting to break free of their oppressive conditions. The authors reject Arcaya’s argument that Coro’s rebels were infused with outside ideas, and instead assert that the rebels were fighting their oppressive state, and that their goals were local, but blown out of proportion by authorities. The authors state that González was a scapegoat and use this position to argue that the Coro movement had no international outlook. *La insurrección* is an important work because of its erudition and because it was one of the first works to seriously consider the local concerns of Coro’s rebels. However, the authors do not adequately examine Coro’s international context, and this leads them to conclude that the rebels’ motivations were purely local.

María Cristina Soriano completed her dissertation, “Rumors of Change: Repercussions of Caribbean Turmoil and Social Conflicts in Venezuela (1790-1810),” in 2011.¹⁶ In it, she writes a chapter on the Coro revolt which combines ideas expressed by Gil, Dovale, and Bello and Arcaya, arguing that the Coro revolt was a local movement, concerned with local economic struggles and widespread discontent over taxes and the institution of slavery. What sets Soriano’s work apart, however, is that it is in dialogue with recent studies on the Haitian Revolution and its impact. She argues that Coro’s rebels were well aware of the Haitian Revolution, although they did not intend on establishing a republic, and that their concerns were ultimately local. Soriano writes that the rebels used the “menace” of Haiti as a “language of contention” in order for authorities to address their

¹⁵ Pedro A Gil Rivas, Luis Dovale Prado, and Lidia Lusmila Bello, *La insurrección de los negros de la sierra coriana, 10 de mayo de 1795 (Notas para la discusión)* (Caracas: Dirección de Cultura, Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1996), 124.

¹⁶ Soriano, “Rumors of Change.”

concerns, and consider their demands.¹⁷ Soriano agrees with Arcaya that González's participation in the rebellion is unclear, and does not attempt to argue one way or the other. My interpretation differs from Soriano's in that I believe that the rebels' intentions were not to negotiate, but to take power from local authorities. This explains why the rebels planned the insurrection well in advance, with international events in mind, and tried to kill everyone who stood in their way.¹⁸

Juan Ramón Lugo agreed with this assessment. Lugo was the co-founder of the Asociación Cultural José Leonardo Chirino, and in 2006 he published *A propósito de doscientos años de olvido: Trozos de la serranía, negra luz que aún hoy arde*.¹⁹ In it, Lugo provides an overview of the history of slavery in Coro and dedicates one chapter to the Coro revolt. Drawing on archival material that posits the direct involvement of *loangos* and of González in particular, Lugo convincingly argues that Coro's rebels attempted to take control of the sierra and city of Coro in order to establish an independent republic.

Memory of the Coro Revolt has been vivid throughout Venezuela, particularly in Coro proper, since the late eighteenth century.²⁰ In 1995, Coro's airport name was changed to José Leonardo Chirino and a statue of him was erected outside.²¹ Afro-descended cultural organizations such as the Asociación Cultural José Leonardo Chirino were instrumental in the airport naming. Other statues of Chirino were erected in Coro's sierra during the bicentennial celebrations of the Coro revolt, as were murals around the city of

¹⁷ Ibid., 189.

¹⁸ "Expediente Sobre La Insurrección." More on the planning of the revolt will be discussed in chapter 2.

¹⁹ Juan Ramón Lugo, *A propósito de doscientos años de olvido : trozos de la serranía, negra luz que aún hoy arde* (Caracas: Asociación Cultural José Leonardo Chirino, Red Venezolana, Capítulo Falcón, 2006).

²⁰ Soriano, "Rumors of Change."

²¹ Juan Ramón Lugo and Fulvia M Polanco B., *Reflexiones sobre el zambo José Leonardo y tradiciones de la sierra* (Venezuela: Asociación Cultural "José Leonardo Chirino" : CONAC, 1998).

Coro.²² Official investigations into the Coro revolt revealed that González was a co-conspirator in the revolt, and it is significant that the vivid local memory in Coro's sierra is in agreement.²³

This thesis is not about the Coro revolt, per se, but instead focuses on the preconditions to rebellion and weaknesses in social control in Coro at the time of the revolt. This study is engaged with the historiography of slave and peasant rebellion, and argues that weak mechanisms of surveillance and weak defenses were significant preconditions for the Coro revolt. These preconditions have generally been overlooked by scholars of slave and peasant revolt, but this study shows that they were integral for the Coro revolt, which could have implications for the study of late colonial rebellions in the Americas and for the study of mechanisms of social control during the same period.

The preconditions of rebellion can help answer why and how slave revolts occurred. It is obviously understood that enslaved people rebelled because they despised their condition as slaves, but not all enslaved people rebelled, and it is important to find out why and how the relatively few slaves did. The literature on preconditions for revolt provides important generalities that can further scholars' understandings of how and why rebellions occurred. This literature also helps illustrate the conditions under which Coro's rebels' took up arms in May of 1795.

The first chapter of this thesis will interrogate the literature on slave and peasant rebellion, paying particular attention to preconditions outlined in this literature, which provide lessons for the study of the Coro revolt. This chapter will then analyze recent scholarship on the Haitian Revolution and its impact, in order to better understand the

²² Ibid.

²³ "Expediente sobre la insurrección."; Lugo and Polanco B., *Reflexiones sobre el zambo*.

world in which the uprising in Coro transpired. The second chapter will concentrate on two archival sources: one is a detailed description of Coro written by Tellería the year before the Coro revolt, and the other is the Coro's revolt's *Expediente*, the three-year official investigation into its causes. These sources support this thesis's central argument by illustrating the weak mechanisms of surveillance and the weak defenses present in Coro at the time of the revolt. This chapter will then compare these mechanisms of social control to Coro's neighboring slave societies and other Spanish American colonies in order to illustrate how many of Coro's contemporary societies had better mechanisms of surveillance and defense, which further illustrates Coro's lack of these instruments of social control. The third and final chapter will use criminal cases from Coro's archives and the *Expediente* to show how authorities in Coro, closely in dialogue with authorities of the captaincy-general attempted to institute reforms to improve Coro's defense capabilities and the region's mechanisms of surveillance after the Coro revolt.

The *Expediente* and Tellería's description of Coro are sources that provide insightful illustrations of Coro at the time of the revolt, but these sources present certain limitations. Both sources were constructed by white elites at the time, and the voices of people of African descent, both enslaved and free, are largely missing. The *Expediente* was constructed in the midst of brutal violence that was aimed at exterminating the rebels and those who were suspected of supporting the rebellion. Because the accounts contained in the *Expediente* are largely by Coro's authorities and those of the Captaincy-General, there are biases present that are reflective of violently oppressive institutions. Despite these limitations, these sources do contain invaluable details about late eighteenth-century Coro. The details of Coro's environmental and governmental infrastructure found in documents

written before and after the revolt illustrate weak defenses and a weak surveillance apparatus. These details from the *Expediente* are mostly marginal to the document creators' primary motivations, and because of this, it can be assessed as accurate, particularly when it confirms descriptions of Coro made before the revolt erupted.

Chapter One: The Anatomy of Slave and Peasant Revolt

Plantation regimes dominated the lives of those who worked as slaves in the Americas. Yet, in rare episodes of collective violence, the enslaved were able to overcome the restrictions of plantation regimes and rebel in coordinated revolt, as happened in Coro. Scholars of slave and peasant rebellion have provided useful models that can provide answers as to why or how the Coro revolt occurred.¹

Starting with a theoretical framework based on positivist racial ideologies, such as those espoused by Pedro Manuel Arcaya, historians have been studying the “causes” of slave revolts for more than a century.² In an attempt to do away with the racist logic undergirding many previous works, but curious to find out why some slaves rebelled in open revolt while most did not, historians in the 1970s and 80s throughout the Americas began searching for preconditions that favored the rare, often deadly episodes of slave revolt.³ The Haitian Revolution has played a principal role in this historiography, with

¹ Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains : Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca [N.Y.]:Cornell University Press, 1982); Eugene D Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution : Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979); Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: International Publishers, 1969); Ranajit Guha and James Scott, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); James C Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); John Tutino, *From Insurrection to Revolution in Mexico: Social Bases of Agrarian Violence, 1750-1940* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986); E. J Hobsbawm and George F. E Rudé, *Captain Swing*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968); J. Bowyer Bell, *On Revolt: Strategies of National Liberation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976).

² Arcaya, *Insurrección de los negros*; James Curtis Ballagh, *A History of Slavery in Virginia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1902); Joshua Coffin and American Anti-Slavery Society, “An Account of Some of the Principal Slave Insurrections and Others Which Have Occurred or Been Attempted in the United States and Elsewhere During the Last Two Centuries with Various Remarks,” The American Anti Slavery Society, 1860.

³ Gil Rivas, Dovalé Prado, and Bello, *La insurrección de los negros de la sierra coriana*; Craton, *Testing the Chains*; Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution*.

scholars debating the impact of this grand slave rebellion on subsequent slave revolts. In recent years, Haiti and its emancipatory revolution has come to the forefront of scholarship on slavery in the Caribbean, and its impact has been the subject of a rejuvenated debate amongst scholars. This chapter will uncover most of the preconditions to the Coro revolt by dissecting the scholarship on slave and peasant rebellions. This literature provides theories on the preconditions for slave and peasant revolts in general, some of which provide insight into why Coro was primed for revolt in 1795. The chapter will then turn its attention to more recent works on the Haitian Revolution and its effects on slave insurrections in the Americas. This scholarship illustrates the transcolonial contexts surrounding Coro at the time of the revolt, another significant precondition for the revolt itself.

Preconditions of Slave and Peasant Rebellions

As historian Herbert Aptheker once stated, the cause of slave revolt was slavery. Conceding the obvious truth of Aptheker's remarks, others have carried the search for the causes of slave revolt still further. Eugene Genovese and Michael Craton's groundbreaking works specifically pointed out numerous societal conditions that led to slave revolts, such as economic downturn and the ratio of blacks to whites.⁴ Scholars of peasant rebellion have also outlined preconditions to revolt, but historians of slave revolts have tended to view peasant rebellion separately, despite the fact that many slave revolts, including the one in Coro, included the participation of the free black peasantry. This section will examine the

⁴ Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution*; Craton, *Testing the Chains*.

works on slave and peasant rebellions, paying particular attention to theories that can be applied to the case of Coro.

In his 1943 book, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, Aptheker argues against the notion dominant at the time that slaves were docile, asserting that slave insurrection and plots to revolt occurred with extreme frequency, counting 250 revolts and conspiracies in the history of mainland North America.⁵ Aptheker goes on to narrate, with the aid of an impressive amount of archival research, a dizzying account of these violent acts of resistance. Since Aptheker's work was published, historians have tempered his assessments, showing that what Aptheker and the authorities he studied saw as plots to kill whites and abolish slavery were mostly rumors, the product of paranoia on the part of whites at the time.⁶ In a recent work, David Brion Davis contends that slave rebellion was extremely rare, not only in the Americas, but in Ancient Greece and Mesopotamia as well.⁷ Revolt, Davis writes, was suicidal for slaves. But however rare, slaves did rebel in acts of collective violence—and historians have uncovered some answers as to how and why.

Aptheker may have been the first scholar to answer the how and why through a search for preconditions. Aptheker argued that an increase in the black population of an area compared with the white population, urbanization, and economic depression, were conditions that favored the eruption of slave revolt.⁸ An increase in the black population relative to the white population is a significant detail that has some merit, but Aptheker's point of a black population lacks specificity. It would probably be more accurate to say that

⁵ Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*.

⁶ For one such example, see: David Barry Gaspar, *Bondmen & Rebels: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua, with Implications for Colonial British America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

⁷ David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: the Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2006), 210.

⁸ Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 114.

an increase in the African slave population relative to the rest of the population is a significant precondition. Because urbanization was common to many slave societies and not necessarily a factor in some slave revolts, such as the rural plantation dominant society of Saint-Domingue, urbanization is Aptheker's least convincing precondition. Economic depression does appear to be an indicator for slave revolt, but as Craton points out, so is economic expansion. Therefore, economic *change* appears to be the most solid economic precondition for slave revolt.

Craton identifies four situations conducive for slave revolt: conditions of extreme oppression; the presence of unassimilable slaves; where control was weakened; and where slave expectations were not met. Several of Craton's conditions are messy. It is fair to say that all slaves lived under some form of extreme oppression (at least at some moments in their lives), yet not all slaves resisted through violent and coordinated revolt. The second condition assumes that culture or assimilation are monolithic entities when in reality "unassimilated Africans" were sometimes just as "creolized" as slaves born in the Americas, and American-born slaves could be quite as "African" as their peers born an ocean away. The latter two preconditions are useful, however, particularly to the study of Coro. A lack of control was evident during the planning stages of the Coro revolt, but it appears as if control was not weakened during a certain historical period but that control had always been generally weak. Also, if the expectations of slaves were not met, slaves could be more likely to rebel through coordinated revolt, something that scholars on peasant rebellion also note, and something that is evident in the case of Coro.

Genovese's list of preconditions is the most thorough of any scholar, and many of them are applicable to the case of Coro. In *From Rebellion to Revolution*, Genovese provides

an insightful eight-point list on the preconditions to slave revolt: owner absenteeism, economic distress, large slaveholding units, political divisions within the ruling class, a black majority, African slaves outnumbering creole slaves, a social structure that allowed autonomous black leadership, and the presence of maroon societies were conditions favorable to slave revolt.⁹ Taken together, Genovese contends “the probabilities for large-scale revolt rested heavily on some combination of these conditions.”¹⁰ Although not every one of the eight conditions were present in every American slave revolt, Genovese convincingly contends that the more conditions present, the more likely chances there were of revolt. All of the conditions Genovese lists were present in slave revolts in some combination or another, and most large-scale revolts, including Haiti (from which he may have based his formulation), included all of these preconditions.

Owner absenteeism did not always equal revolt but it could be an important contributing factor, as was the case in Coro. Absent owners tended to be wealthy proprietors of large plantations and owners of a large number of slaves. Overseers were placed in charge of an absent owner’s property and were notorious for over-working slaves in order to reach the lofty quotas set by their distant employers. Large slave holding units were common of plantations with absent owners and it is a common precondition for revolt due to the fact that people of African descent usually dominated whites, in terms of population. The confidence of having power in numbers was seen in the Coro revolt and slave revolts in Haiti, South Carolina, Jamaica, and Cuba.

Genovese also points out the significance that a maroon presence had on slave revolts, and this was also a central part of the Coro revolt. Maroons could serve as a

⁹ Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution*, 11-12.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

positive example of successful resistance, and not always but often, slave rebels believed that they could rely on the support of maroon communities. Sometimes, maroons were directly involved in slave revolts, as occurred during the Haitian Revolution, and in the Coro revolt.¹¹ However, maroons would sometimes collaborate with authorities to suppress slave rebellions as happened in the 1831 Baptist Revolt in Jamaica.¹²

Aptheker, Craton, and Genovese's works all contain a depth that goes beyond their respective models of preconditions, and this depth can shed light on the Coro revolt. Craton was pioneering in his study of "the African contribution to Afro-Caribbean slave resistance."¹³ This African component was important to Craton who held that, with plenty of exceptions, slaves with experience as soldiers in Africa were generally less willing to be enslaved than others.¹⁴ João José Reis has shown this to be the case for nineteenth-century Bahia as well.¹⁵ This was also the case for Coro, where some of the maroon rebels under the command of José Caridad González had origins in Western and West Central Africa.¹⁶

John Thornton has provided more depth to this notion by illustrating the importance of African military tradition and its influence on slave revolts in Haiti and Stono, South Carolina.¹⁷ In his article "African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion," Thornton convincingly shows how "Appreciating the African roots of the Stono Rebellion . .

¹¹ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World : the Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004).

¹² Craton, *Testing the Chains*.

¹³ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 23.

¹⁴ Craton. *Testing the Chains*, 26.

¹⁵ João José Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil : the Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

¹⁶ Soriano, "Rumors of Change"; Rupert, "Marronage, Manumission and Maritime Trade."

¹⁷ John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic world, 1400-1680*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); John K. Thornton, "African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion," *The American Historical Review*. 96 (1991): 1101-13; John K. Thornton, "African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution," in *Origins of the Black Atlantic*, ed. Laurent Dubois and Julius S. Scott (New York: Routledge, 2010), 195-213.

. requires a specific understanding of the kingdom of Kongo between 1680 and 1740 rather than simply a broad understanding of African culture.”¹⁸ In “African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution,” Thornton argues that many if not most of the rebel slaves in Saint Domingue had served in African armies.¹⁹ Thornton states that these slaves came from the coastal areas of Lower Guinea or Angola, both rife with civil war. Angola was torn by a civil war in the Kingdom of Kongo that reached its zenith around 1780, just eleven years before the outbreak of rebellion in Saint-Domingue. The Lower Guinea region experienced armed conflicts between the Kingdom of Dahomey, the Oyo Empire and smaller states on the coast. In these regions, prisoners of war were taken as slaves and sold to traders bound for the Americas. Many of the *loangos* that participated in the Coro revolt were born in Africa, and although more research is needed, these men probably experienced these wars and some may have done so as soldiers.²⁰

Slave revolts do appear to transpire in spurts—and historians have noted this. Aptheker argues that slave revolts occurred in bunches and within six periods: 1710 to 1722, 1730 to 1740, 1790 to 1802, 1819 to 1823, and 1850 to 1860. Aptheker has a point. Of these surges of slave rebellion, Aptheker’s designation of the 1730s and the 1790s are the most convincing.²¹ The 1730s saw the First Jamaican Maroon War, which involved the British colonial forces attempting to subdue the Windward Maroons on the interior of the island, and the Stono Rebellion in South Carolina.²² The late eighteenth century saw an onslaught of revolts following the Haitian Revolution, including insurrections in Guyana,

¹⁸ Thornton, “African Dimensions,” 1102.

¹⁹ Thornton, “African Soldiers,” 196.

²⁰ Soriano, “Rumors of Change”; Rupert, “Marronage, Manumission and Maritime Trade.”

²¹ Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 3.

²² Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 211-23.

Grenada, St. Vincent, Dominica, Tortola, St. Lucia, Curaçao, and Coro. Viewed from a macro perspective, the fact that slave revolts occurred with more frequency during particular periods of time points to a “weblike” model of the revolutionary Caribbean, a promising model that has recently been used by scholars who study the Haitian Revolution and its impact.²³ Seen in this light, Coro was part of the 1790s spurt of resistance in which enslaved people rebelled, in dialogue with neighboring slave societies in the Caribbean.

Aptheker’s timeline, however, overlooks some of the most influential periods of slave unrest and some of the potential connections they may share. Two of the largest slave revolts to occur outside of Haiti were those of Demerara in 1823 and the Baptist Revolt in Jamaica in 1831. Both of these revolts involved tens of thousands of rebel slaves inspired by egalitarian religious ideologies. In Demerara, between 10,000 and 12,000 slaves rose in a coordinated attempt to end the institution of slavery in the British colony that is Guyana today.²⁴ The revolt lasted several weeks and resulted in hundreds of deaths. These two revolts are also important because they could be seen as the driving force behind the abolition of slavery in Britain’s colonies. Therefore, there are many notable exceptions to these trends.

As in Coro, many large-scale slave revolts were comprised of free peasants of African descent as well as slaves. Free people of African descent also led many conspiracies and rebellions often classified as “slave revolts” in the historiography, such as the Coro revolt (1795), Gabriel’s Rebellion (1800), the Aponte rebellion (1812), and the Denmark Vesey Conspiracy (1822). Therefore, the literature on peasant revolts can provide some

²³ “Weblike” is a term used in: Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution : Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

²⁴ Emília Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: the Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

insight into how Coro erupted in revolt and how slave revolts occur more generally.²⁵ The works of James Scott, John Tutino, and Ranajit Guha are particularly useful because they include analyses of preconditions that are not fully considered in the literature on the preconditions of slave revolts.

Scott's classic, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, shows how peasants in Southeast Asia rebelled when their subsistence level or accustomed way of life was threatened. This is significant for the study of slave revolts because it deepens our understanding of the effects of economic decline, a precondition for slave revolt illustrated by Aptheker and Genovese.²⁶ Scott writes that peasants' "subsistence ethic" was "not just a problem of calories and income but is a question of peasant conceptions of social justice, of rights and obligations, of reciprocity."²⁷ Scott's notion of a subsistence ethic can be applied to enslaved people and peasants in Coro, many of whom worked small plots of land, cultivating crops for subsistence purposes. Late eighteenth-century Coro was suffering through an economic decline, which when combined with other economic factors, threatened enslaved and free peasant people's subsistence ethic.²⁸ Taxation could also be an important precipitator of collective peasant agitation. Scott explains, "claims on peasant incomes by landlords, moneylenders, or the state were never legitimate when they infringed on what was judged to be the minimal culturally defined subsistence level."²⁹ Coro's free and enslaved people were subject to taxes, particularly if they worked in port cities, where the transfer of goods

²⁵ Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*; Tutino, *From Insurrection to Revolution*; Guha and Scott, *Elementary Aspects*; Hobsbawm and Rudé, *Captain Swing*.

²⁶ Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*; Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution*.

²⁷ Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, vii.

²⁸ Tellería, "N. 15 Ynforma, al Real Consulado De Comercio." There will more on this in the second chapter.

²⁹ Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, 10.

and the exchange of money were more common.³⁰ In fact, the rebels' demands included the abolition of these taxes.

Works by Tutino and Guha show the importance that oppressive human actors play in the fomentation of revolt, which is seen in the Coro revolt. Tutino's *From Insurrection to Revolution in Mexico* provides insight into the preconditions of revolts in general, some of which can be applied to the Coro revolt. Tutino argues that in order for rebellion to occur, "peasant difficulties must be clearly perceived as caused by human actors—landed elites, the state, or both."³¹ Therefore, it is important for would-be rebels to be in contact with an agent of their oppression and to be able to identify a person or group of people as the exercisers of their oppression. This was certainly the case for Coro, where a corrupt tax collector and other local authorities and slave owners were targeted to be killed.³²

In *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Guha asserts the significance of class-consciousness in rural rebels who saw themselves as apart from the rich, the opposite or the "negation" of the upper class, something that was evident in Coro at the time of the revolt.³³ Many slave revolts also included a rebel base that saw itself as the negation of their enemy. In Coro, as was the case in Saint-Domingue, Bahia (1835), and Jamaica (1760), enslaved rebels saw themselves as the opposite of the master class.³⁴ This negation took on racial characteristics, most often white versus black; and also characteristics of class; such as free versus enslaved; or poor versus rich.

³⁰ Gil Rivas, Dovale Prado, and Bello, *La insurrección de los negros de la sierra coriana*; Soriano, "Rumors of Change."

³¹ Tutino, *From Insurrection to Revolution*, 22.

³² "Expediente sobre la insurrección."; Gil Rivas, Dovale Prado, and Lusmila Bello, *La insurrección de los negros de la sierra coriana*. More on this will follow in chapter two.

³³ Guha and Scott, *Elementary Aspects*. See chapter two for more on the racially coded class conflict in the Coro rebellion.

³⁴ For more on racial and class war during these rebellions, see Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*; Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil*; Craton, *Testing the Chains*.

Scholars have argued that rebellions often occur as a last resort, and this appears to have been the case in Coro as well. Guha writes “in many instances they tried at first to obtain justice from the authorities by deputation . . . petition . . . and peaceful demonstration and took up arms only as a last resort when all other means had failed.”³⁵ This point is significant for the study of slave revolts, particularly in Latin America, where enslaved people often squeezed through the miniscule opportunities that the law afforded them, in order to fight for their claims to justice and to negotiate the terms of their oppression.³⁶ In *Moral Economy*, Scott writes that “rebellion is one of the least likely consequences of exploitation,” adding that “for much of the rural population, the absence of alternatives and the difficulty of revolt tragically conspire to force a large measure of passive adaptation.”³⁷ In their classic *Captain Swing*, E.J. Hobsbawm and George Rudé write that peasants in eighteenth-century England rioted only after exhausting all options at their disposal, such as asking landlords to lower their rents and petitioning to Parliament to lower taxes.³⁸ Enslaved people rarely rebelled in large-scale coordinated rebellions, but more often fought in ways that the law afforded them, either in court, or in negotiating with their masters or overseers. This appears to have been the case in Coro as well, as both Chirino and González first attempted legal means of addressing their community’s complaints before rebelling in May of 1795.³⁹

³⁵ Guha and Scott, *Elementary Aspects*.

³⁶ For more on this point see: Alejandro de la Fuente, “Slave Law and Claims-Making in Cuba: The Tannenbaum Debate Revisited,” *Law and History Review* 22, no. 2 (2004): 339–369.

³⁷ Scott, *Moral Economy*, 193-205. Moral economy was a term coined by E.P. Thompson. See: E. P Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past & Present* no. 50 (1971): 76–136

³⁸ Hobsbawm and Rudé, *Captain Swing*, 9.

³⁹ Tellería, “N. 15 Ynforma, al Real Consulado De Comercio.”; Gil Rivas, Dovale Prado, and Bello, *La insurrección de los negros de la sierra coriana*. More on this in chapter two.

The scholarship on slave and peasant rebellion points to several significant preconditions of the Coro revolt which are critical in understanding Coro in the late eighteenth century. Following calculations made by Genovese and Scott, economic distress adversely affected the subsistence ethic of slaves and peasants in Coro who lived in a society with several key preconditions for slave revolt including: large slave holding units, a black majority, and the presence of maroon societies.⁴⁰ The Coro rebels may have also revolted as a last recourse, after attempting to address their grievances through legal means, and in a society that lacked state mechanisms for control.⁴¹ It is also significant that Coro's rebels took up arms just four years after the onset of the Haitian Revolution. Recent literature on the Haitian Revolution and its effects on slave holding societies in the Americas provide a deeper understanding of this crucial aspect of late eighteenth-century Coro.⁴²

The Haitian Turn

One of the most significant preconditions for the Coro revolt involved a revolution occurring hundreds of miles away. In August of 1791, thousands of slaves rebelled on

⁴⁰ Arcaya, *Insurrección de los negros.*; Gil Rivas, Dovale Prado, and Bello, *La insurrección de los negros de la sierra coriana.*"; Soriano, "Rumors of Change."

⁴¹ Tellería, "N. 15 Ynforma, al Real Consulado de Comercio."; "Expediente sobre la insurrección." More on this will follow in the second chapter.

⁴² Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Nick Nesbitt, *Universal Emancipation: the Haitian Revolution and the Radical Enlightenment* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008); White, *Encountering Revolution*; Sara Johnson, *The Fear of French Negroes: Transcolonial Collaboration in the Revolutionary Americas* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012); David Patrick Geggus and Norman Fiering, *The World of the Haitian Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Soriano, "Rumors of Change"; Ferrer A, "Haiti, free soil, and antislavery in the revolutionary Atlantic," *American Historical Review* 117, no. 1 (2012): 40–66; Doris Lorraine Garraway, *Tree of Liberty: Cultural Legacies of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008); Deborah Jenson, *Beyond the Slave Narrative: Politics, Sex, and Manuscripts in the Haitian Revolution* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011).

plantations in northern Saint Domingue, France's most profitable colony. Few whites in the colony could have foreseen that this initial insurrection would become an epoch-making revolution, culminating in the world's first black republic and the sole successful slave revolt in human history. What ensued from the initial insurrection was a complex, thirteen-year revolution and civil war that included switching alliances between rival forces, and the participation of troops from Spain, England, and France. A major turn occurred in 1803, when Napoleon Bonaparte's forces invaded Saint-Domingue with the goal of reinstating slavery. A movement for independence ensued and culminated with the defeat of French forces at the hands of former slaves and the establishment of Haiti, a black republic without slavery, named after the Taino Arawak name given to the island that European colonizers had called Hispaniola.⁴³

The Haitian turn has provided the much-needed historical context for the Coro revolt, one that is centered on the Haitian Revolution and its impact. Among other things, this scholarship has shown the significance of the Haitian Revolution during the Age of Revolutions, and enriched a scholarship that previously focused on the French and British American revolutions.⁴⁴ The Haitian turn has provided a more nuanced understanding of the Caribbean during the Age of Revolutions, showing that Afro-descended people were highly mobile and well travelled, and many shared ideas as they moved from territory to territory, regardless of which colonial metropolis governed it. Works by Julius Scott, María

⁴³ Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*.

⁴⁴ For examples see: Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1963); E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848*. (Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1962).

Cristina Soriano, Ramón Aizpurua, and Linda Rupert have shown that eighteenth-century Coro was part of this fluid world of the eighteenth-century Caribbean.⁴⁵

There is no doubt that the Haitian revolution had earth-shattering effects on the politics of enslaved people in the Americas. Historians have examined the exact nature of these effects for more than one hundred years.⁴⁶ One of the most provocative models came in Genovese's 1979 classic *From Rebellion to Revolution: African American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World*.⁴⁷ In the work, Genovese argues that the Haitian Revolution marked a watershed in the history of slave revolts, whereas before Haiti, slave revolts were "restorationist," or aimed to construct social models based on "as much of a traditional African way of life that could be remembered and copied."⁴⁸ Genovese argues that the rebel slaves in Saint-Domingue were originators of a general "bourgeois-democratic" ideological trend amongst rebel slaves who copied the ideologies emanating out of the Age of Revolutions.

The problem with Genovese's model is that it proposes too clean a break between "restorationist" and "bourgeois-democratic" rebellions. Many slave revolts that occurred after the Haitian Revolution did not espouse a "bourgeois-democratic" ideology. An example of this is the 1835 Malê revolt in Bahia, Brazil, whose Muslim leadership, planned to maintain a system of slavery that might have been organized along African, rather than

⁴⁵ Soriano, "Rumors of Change"; Ramón Aizpurua, "Revolution and Politics in Venezuela and Curaçao, 1795-1800," in *Curaçao in the Age of Revolutions, 1795-1800*, ed. Wim Klooster and Gert Oostindie. (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2011).; Rupert, "Marronage, Manumission and Maritime Trade"; Julius Sherrard Scott, "The Common Wind : Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1986).

⁴⁶ Arcaya, *Insurrección de los negros*.

⁴⁷ Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

European, models.⁴⁹ Also, slave rebellions in Demerara (1823) and Jamaica (1831) were largely inspired by Christianity, and utilized it as their primary ideology.⁵⁰ However, Genovese was right to characterize the revolution in Saint-Domingue as a watershed, although the linear nature of his paradigm must be complicated. Ideas in the revolutionary Caribbean did not spread in a linear fashion, but emerged simultaneously and organically.

For decades, historians have been conceptualizing the ideologies of slave revolts in a linear fashion, and many continue to do so.⁵¹ Genovese's model sees ideologies originating in Europe, transferring to Saint-Domingue, and then rapidly spreading across the Americas. Craton critiques Genovese's restorationist to bourgeois-democratic model, but nevertheless conceptualizes the politics of enslaved people as linear. Craton believes that rebel slaves utilized whatever ideology suited them in order to achieve their main objective—freedom. Therefore, whether it was Christianity or liberal democratic values, enslaved rebels would appropriate whatever ideology was readily available to them in order to escape bondage.⁵² The problem with Craton's model of appropriation is that it contrasts with the organicistic nature of ideological formation in the late eighteenth-century Caribbean. Craton's model comes into the same problem as Genovese's because it is a linear model that sees ideas originating in one place and travelling to another. Similar to Genovese, Craton conceives of ideas in this region and time period as originating from outside, then being appropriated by slaves who rebel.

⁴⁹ Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil*.

⁵⁰ Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory*; Craton, *Testing the Chains*.

⁵¹ For one such example of a linear model still in work, see Reis in Geggus and Fiering, *The World of the Haitian Revolution*.

⁵² Craton, *Testing the Chains*.

Scholars of the Haitian turn have called this linear model into question, and this has repercussions on how the Coro revolt should be viewed. Sibylle Fischer and Nick Nesbitt have rightly identified the Haitian Revolution not as an outgrowth of bourgeois-democratic politics coming from Europe, but as a radical egalitarian ideology unique to the slaves of Saint-Domingue. Nesbitt has characterized the Haitian revolutionaries as espousing the most radical ideas of the Enlightenment, ones that diverged sharply from European and Euro-American notions of “equality.” Fischer correctly asserts that these ideas were then appropriated or “disavowed” by the West and claimed as something of their own.⁵³ In *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic*, Ashli White critiques the scholarship on the Age of Revolutions, arguing that its “mechanistic” linear model of revolutionary sentiment traveling from one place to another ignores the fluidity of the age.⁵⁴ Instead, White encourages scholars to use a “weblike” model that highlights the influences one site had on another. In the case of *Encountering Revolution*, for example, events in Saint-Domingue/Haiti and the United States influence each other and revolutionary ideologies are intertwined, constantly in a metaphoric (and literal) discourse with one another. Therefore, for White, a linear model that sees events in the United States influencing those in Saint-Domingue is incorrect. Events in these sites were happening simultaneously and feeding off of one another. White’s conception of a weblike model is the best lens from which to look at slave revolts during and after the Haitian Revolution, including the one in Coro.

Although the circulation of ideas was weblike, it is important to note that there were numerous linear effects of the Haitian Revolution. One of the most obvious effects on

⁵³ Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*; Nesbitt, *Universal Emancipation*.

⁵⁴ White, *Encountering Revolution*, 6–7.

neighboring colonies was economic and demographic expansion, with Brazil and Cuba changing rapidly after the revolution's onset. The disruption in Saint-Domingue's slave based economy created a vacuum in plantation-produced commodities such as coffee and sugar whose international prices soared, and Cuban and Brazilian entrepreneurs jumped at this new opportunity. It is estimated that Cuba imported more than 700,000 slaves from 1789 to 1867, when the slave trade was formally abolished on the island, and Cuba quickly became one of the most valuable colonies in the world.⁵⁵ Likewise, Brazil saw a dramatic increase in slave imports, peaking from 1811-1856 when nearly two million slaves were imported.⁵⁶ Slave imports are indicative of the shift in economies of both Cuba and Brazil, both of which witnessed significant growth due to the increased value of sugar and coffee and the void in production left by the revolution in Saint-Domingue. Slaves were imported to produce these goods, which were in high demand around the world. These drastic demographic and economic changes in Cuba and Brazil were directly tied to the Haitian Revolution.

An issue that remains controversial is the extent to which the Haitian government was directly involved in slave insurrections or plots outside of Haiti, but this controversy should be kept in mind when looking at the Coro revolt. Earlier work that asked this question found that if the Haitian state was involved in antislavery conspiracies abroad, they did so long after independence in 1804. Around Christmas in 1843, a conspiracy by slaves, free people of color, nationalist white Cubans and foreign agents was purportedly uncovered. This discovery led to the execution of nearly one hundred Cubans, including the

⁵⁵ Childs, Matt D. and Manuel Barcia, "Cuba" in Robert L. Paquette and Mark M Smith, *The Oxford Handbook of Slavery in the Americas* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 97-103.

⁵⁶ Slenes, Robert W., "Brazil," in *Ibid.*, 115.

famous Cuban nationalist poet Plácido. The conspiracy is known as “La Escalera,” named after the method of torture used to extract testimony from suspects, most of whom were slaves. However, in *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba*, Robert Paquette argues that there was a vast conspiracy at work in Cuba and that it was led by British abolitionist David Turnbull, who had spent time in Havana.⁵⁷ Paquette also shows that Turnbull had met with Haitian President Jean-Pierre Boyer “about how ‘much valuable assistance to the cause of freedom and humanity’ Haiti might give.”⁵⁸ Paquette’s argument is persuasive and he is not the only scholar to suggest that the Haitian government assisted revolutionary movements in the Caribbean.

Recent works have shown that the Haitian state may have been directly involved in slave conspiracies and rebellions abroad, and this could have implications for the Coro revolt. In *Beyond the Slave Narrative: Politics, Sex, and Manuscripts in the Haitian Revolution*, Deborah Jenson compellingly argues that ignoring the “admittedly sparse evidence” about Haitian involvement in buttressing antislavery and anticolonial movements in the Americas leaves scholars with an incomplete understanding of the era.⁵⁹ Jenson points to several episodes involving Haitian Emperor Jean Jacques Dessalines in the brief period between Haitian independence (1804) and Dessalines’s death (1806). The first event was a complicated plot involving slave unrest in British St. Thomas, the French islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique, and the Spanish island of Trinidad. Jenson argues that there is strong evidence suggesting the existence of a plot to overthrow slavery, including private

⁵⁷ Robert L Paquette, *Sugar is Made with Blood : the Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict Between Empires Over Slavery in Cuba* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1988).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁵⁹ Jenson, *Beyond the Slave Narrative*, 162.

letters amongst colonial authorities of the time. She goes on to state that although the evidence is by no way definitive, there is an equal absence in evidence that suggests that a conspiracy did not exist. Jenson's argument is even more persuasive when she points to Venezuelan independence hero Francisco de Miranda and his month-long stay in Haiti. In this instance, Miranda was touring the world in an effort to find allies for his independence movement in Venezuela before he landed in Haiti. In each of his stops, Miranda met with high government officials, and Jenson argues that there is a strong possibility that Miranda met with Dessalines during his stay.⁶⁰ Soon after, Miranda would head back to South America to continue a long struggle for independence.

Although it is sparse, there is evidence that suggests direct links between revolutionary Saint-Domingue and the Coro revolt. Both Chirino and González were well travelled, and González was fluent in French.⁶¹ It is known that Chirino had visited Saint-Domingue before the Coro revolt, and it has been documented that French vessels were off the coast of Coro at the time of the revolt.⁶² It is beyond the scope of this project, but these potential connections should not be ignored.

Part of the reason why the possibility of an interventionist Haitian state should be taken seriously is because not all evidence regarding Haitian intervention is merely circumstantial. In "Haiti, Free Soil, and Intervention," Ada Ferrer convincingly shows how the Haitian government intervened to free slaves who reached Haitian land.⁶³ Ferrer uses an 1817 case of seven enslaved men from Jamaica who fled to Haiti and received legal protection from Haitian President Alexandre Pétion. After a bitterly contested battle that

⁶⁰ Ibid., 180.

⁶¹ Arcaya, *Insurrección de los negros*.

⁶² Ibid.; "Expediente sobre la insurrección."

⁶³ Ferrer, "Haiti, Free Soil, and Antislavery."

involved a Jamaican slave owner, and the British and Haitian governments, the men maintained their freedom, passing from slaves in Jamaica to citizens of Haiti. Ferrer's case study makes two significant contributions to the study of the international politics of the Haitian state. One is the fundamental contribution that the Haitian state made towards modern notions of citizenship, and the other is that the Haitian state did actively pursue freedom for enslaved people in the region. As for Coro, the direct impact of revolutionaries in Saint-Domingue cannot yet be confirmed but it would be premature to discount this possibility.

The Haitian turn has also highlighted the significance of migration from Saint-Domingue/Haiti after the onset of the revolution. Scholars have shown that in their daily lives, enslaved people in Venezuela and throughout the Americas came into contact with Haiti and Haitian news through the migration of slaves and slave owners. In *Encountering Revolution*, White illustrates how the presence and activity of the refugees from Saint-Domingue illustrated the unviability of the system of slavery.⁶⁴ Ferrer and Soriano have similarly shown how exiles from Saint-Domingue affected the dynamics between slaves and slave-owners in Cuba and Venezuela, respectively.⁶⁵ For Cuba, Ferrer shows how the presence of refugees from Saint-Domingue enhanced the spread of news about Haiti and the end of the slave regime.⁶⁶ For Venezuela, Soriano shows how the presence of free black men from French colonies in the aftermath of the 1794 French abolition of slavery, facilitated unrest among Venezuela's African-descended population, both slave and free.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ White, *Encountering Revolution*.

⁶⁵ Ferrer, Ada, "Speaking of Haiti: Slavery, Revolution, and Freedom in Cuban Slave Testimony," from Geggus and Fiering, *The World of the Haitian Revolution*, 223–247; Soriano, "Rumors of Change."

⁶⁶ Ferrer, "Speaking of Haiti."

⁶⁷ Soriano, "Rumors of Change."

Scholars have also shown that the movement of voices was just as powerful as the migration of people, and it is important to note this when looking at the Coro revolt. Scott's classic dissertation "A Common Wind" spearheaded a movement amongst scholars to track the revolutionary ideas circulating the Caribbean "from Virginia to Venezuela" in the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution.⁶⁸ Scott uses an extraordinary amount of archival research from three continents to weave a story of a shared revolutionary sentiment sweeping across Afro-America. Scott showed the interconnectedness of Caribbean port-cities during the age, and how revolutionary messages spread across the region by way of revolutionary writings and word of mouth that circulated through black sailors, merchants, and their assistants. It is significant for this study that Scott shows how Coro's rebels were part of this interconnected world.

In recent years, scholars of the Spanish Caribbean have built on the work that Scott began, and the data they have collected has contributed to a more nuanced understanding of the flow of ideas in the revolutionary Caribbean, of which Coro was a part. For Cuba, Ferrer provides indisputable evidence that news of Haiti was on the lips of not only the literate planter class, but among the illiterate slave masses as well.⁶⁹ Contrary to prior conceptualizations from scholars, the Spanish Crown was not vehement about suppressing news from revolutionary Saint-Domingue, as the *Gaceta de Madrid*, which circulated across Spanish America, regularly published updates on the revolution.⁷⁰ Ferrer shows how enslaved people in Cuba knew the names of Haiti's revolutionary heroes, and many held

⁶⁸ Scott, "The Common Wind."

⁶⁹ Ferrer, "Speaking of Haiti."

⁷⁰ Michel-Rolph Trouillot's classic argues that the revolt was "silenced" by authorities of the time. See: Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1995)

aspirations that the Haitian government would support them in the case of a rebellion.⁷¹

These insights help better understand the politics of enslaved people throughout the Caribbean, including Coro.

The rich and extensive historiography on the Haitian Revolution and its effects have brought its significance during the Age of Revolutions to the fore, returning the event back to the significance it had during the time of its occurrence. No discussion of the Age of Revolutions is complete without Haiti and the revolution is as significant as the French and American revolutions, if not more so, particularly for people of African descent in the Americas. Studying the effects of Haiti, however, must move past a linear paradigm of cause and effect that brings foreign ideas into locals, and towards a more nuanced interpretation that privileges the autochthonousness of local movements. With varying success, recent works have attempted to see the revolutionary Caribbean as a web in which the Haitian Revolution was at the center. Coro was one thread in this web.

Conclusion

Writing about the difference between rebellions, revolutions, and revolts, J. Bowyer Bell argues that in a revolt, the rebel “abrogates previous authority by recourse to armed force in an effort to seize power in the name of a denied legitimacy.”⁷² It appears that this denied legitimacy may have pushed Coro’s rebels to take up arms.

Taken together, the literature on the effects of the Haitian Revolution and the literature on slave and peasant revolt, illustrate the preconditions for revolt in late-

⁷¹ Ferrer, “Speaking of Haiti.”

⁷² Bell, *On Revolt*, 5.

eighteenth-century Coro and provide a portrait of the revolutionary Caribbean that enveloped Coro at the time. Borrowing the “web” model used by White and others, the Coro revolt can be viewed not as a movement that copied ideologies from France or Haiti, but as an autochthonous one born out of local concerns and possessing an ideology of its own, yet simultaneously one that shared interests with and were connected to those espoused in France and Haiti. The scholarship on slave and peasant revolts reveals much about the structural conditions that contributed to the opportunity of Coro’s rebels to plan and execute a revolution. This scholarship illustrates well the world of late eighteenth-century Coro, but they leave out one critical aspect of this society: weak mechanisms of surveillance and defense. The following chapter will be dedicated to illustrating this point and explaining its significance.

Chapter Two: “It would be difficult to find fifty useful rifles:” Weak Defense and Surveillance in the Coro Revolt

In the spring of 1794, Coro’s Solicitor General Don Josef de Tellería warned the King of Spain that Venezuela’s original capital, Coro, “is so unrecognizable, deserted, and defenseless that it would be difficult to find fifty useful rifles; resulting in that any enemy may occupy her quickly, defeating its resistance.”¹ Tellería added that the coast of Coro was “accessible to bursts: not having Veteran Troops nor loyal militias to defend them.”² The possibility of foreign attack was a concern for Tellería because Coro was located within a short distance of Dutch and French enemies of the Crown. Tellería’s worst fears would be confirmed within a year on May 10, 1795, but the threat came from within not from without, as hundreds of slaves and free people of African descent revolted, demanding the abolition of slavery. The weak defense of Coro, in fact, was one of the most significant preconditions that contributed to the outbreak of revolt in Coro, resulting in the deaths of many, including that of Tellería.

Tellería was one of Coro’s most elite residents. He was a wealthy landowner and purchased his position as Solicitor General of Coro, a position that afforded him a substantial amount of power in Coro and the surrounding region. He was a merchant and a planter who owned several properties, one in the city of Coro and three in Coro’s sierra.³ A

¹ Tellería, “N. 15 Ynforma, al Real Consulado de Comercio ,” ff. 27.” Venezuela’s capital moved to Caracas from Coro in 1578.

² Ibid, ff. 33-34.

³ Arcaya, *Insurrección de los negros*.

significant aspect of his wealth was concentrated in the ninety slaves he owned, most of whom worked on his haciendas in the sierra.⁴

Tellería wrote to the newly-formed Royal Council of Caracas to solicit material support from the capital.⁵ The document, titled “Las causas de la total desolacion en que se halla, y medios que le paracen adequados para su prosperidad y opulencia,” [The Causes of the Total Desolation Which is Found and the Appropriate Measures for its Prosperity and Opulence] provides a detailed description of Coro one year before the revolt that detailed the dire economic conditions in which the region found itself and the dissatisfaction of its inhabitants. In the treatise, Tellería contended that Coro could be prosperous if certain measures were implemented.

Tellería’s petition, along with other supporting evidence, shows that Coro lacked many of the mechanisms of social control necessary to prevent a large-scale rebellion. Coro also lacked the defense mechanisms necessary to dissuade a large number of discontented people from attempting a grab for power. Scholarship on slave societies in the Caribbean shows that many of Coro’s neighbors had more effective methods of social control, but this is largely because, unlike Coro, the institution of slavery dominated these societies. Because of this distinction between Coro and its neighboring slave societies, it is necessary to compare mechanisms of social control in Coro to other Spanish American societies as well. Through an analysis of primary source material relating to Coro, and through the examination of secondary source literature on some of Coro’s contemporary societies, this chapter will illustrate the weak nature of Coro’s mechanisms of social control.

⁴ Josef Tellería, “Testamentaria de Joseph de Tellería, diligencias sobre la venta de la mujer e hijos de Jose Leonardo Chirino,” 1798, Archivo Histórico del Estado de Falcón.

⁵ The Royal Council was established in 1793, as part of the Bourbon Reforms and Venezuela’s bureaucratic transformation during this period. For more, see: McKinley, *Pre-Revolutionary Caracas*.

Preconditions for Rebellion in Late Eighteenth-Century Coro

During the early eighteenth century, Spanish King Philip V (1700-1746), of the House of Bourbon, implemented a number of reforms aimed at raising revenue and increasing administrative efficiency at a time of decline in Spanish power. The Bourbon reforms had an uneven effect on Spain's American possessions, but its effects on Venezuela were monumental, particularly under the reign of Charles III (1759-1788) and Charles IV (1788-1808).⁶ Before 1776, Venezuela was mostly known as Tierra Firme and was under political control of the nearby Viceroyalty and Captaincy-General of Nueva Granada, and under judicial control of the Audiencias de Bogotá and Santo Domingo.⁷ Venezuela was granted status as a captaincy-general in 1777, which reflected its increasing economic importance for the Spanish Empire. The Audiencia de Caracas was created in 1786, which further strengthened the autonomy of Venezuela within the empire as a whole, and further cemented Caracas as the military, judicial, and political center of the entire Captaincy-General.⁸

The province of Caracas had about 350,000 inhabitants at the time of the 1795 revolt, approximately 60,000, or 17%, enslaved.⁹ Nearly half of the province's slaves lived and worked in and around the city of Caracas, most of who worked on plantations on the coast.¹⁰ A substantial minority of slaves, as high as 40% in certain areas, did not work on

⁶ Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture, 2nd ed., s.v. "Bourbon Reforms."

⁷ McKinley, *Pre-Revolutionary Caracas*, 4.

⁸ McKinley, *Pre-Revolutionary Caracas*.

⁹ Martí, Canedo, and Guzmán, *Obispo Mariano Martí*; McKinley, *Pre-Revolutionary Caracas*.

¹⁰ Miguel Acosta Saignes, *Vida de los esclavos negros en Venezuela* (La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1978); McKinley, *Pre-Revolutionary Caracas*.

plantations and were classified as domestic workers.¹¹ Although Venezuela relied on plantation labor for its agricultural economy, not all workers on Venezuela's plantations were slaves. Approximately 60% of Venezuelans at the close of the eighteenth century were of African descent, with the vast majority of them, approximately 43% of Venezuela's overall population, living free.¹² These free people of color were called *pardos*, *mulattos*, or *castas*, and worked as day laborers, exchanging their manual duties for a low sum of money.¹³ Many *pardos* also worked as plantation overseers and artisans in cities and towns.¹⁴ Therefore, Venezuela's labor system was diverse, as slaves and free people of color often worked side by side on rural plantations. Because free people of African descent were the largest social group in Venezuela and because they usually occupied the positions of plantation overseer, Venezuela did not have the stark black/white divide typical of its neighboring slave societies, such as Jamaica. This aspect of Venezuela's slave system made aspects of social control precarious for white authorities.

The *ciudad* of Coro, where the 1795 rebellion took place, was a port city on the northern coast of South America and governed under the Province of Caracas.¹⁵ It was the economic center of the expansive region of Coro that stretched ninety leagues wide and thirty leagues long and included twenty-two towns inhabited by approximately 29,000 people.¹⁶ The region of Coro was under the ecclesiastical, jurisdictional and political authority of Caracas, which was weeks away by travel, thus isolating Coro from its

¹¹ McKinley, *Pre-Revolutionary Caracas*, 22–23.

¹² *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁵ Soriano, "Rumors of Change"; Scott, "The common wind"; Tellería, "N. 15 Ynforma, al Real Consulado de Comercio."

¹⁶ "Expediente sobre la insurrección;" Tellería, "N. 15 Ynforma, al Real Consulado de Comercio."

administrative centers.¹⁷ After the revolt, it was calculated that approximately 44% of the population was comprised of free people of African descent, 30% were classified as Indians, 14% were classified as white, and 12% were enslaved people of African descent.¹⁸ Thus, the region of Coro was just as diverse as the province as a whole, but unlike Caracas, Coro was isolated from its administrative centers and each town in the region was rather isolated from one another. These aspects of Coro made authorities of the region isolated from financial and military support from the Crown.

The region's terrain was diverse, ranging from mountain ranges to deserts and tropical beaches. Most people of African descent made a living by growing crops, both for their own consumption and to sell at the market or to trade with merchants from the nearby island of Curaçao. Foodstuffs, along with cacao, sugar, tobacco, cattle, and leather were products of legal trade to other Spanish colonies, but were more profitable when sold illicitly to the nearby Dutch and French islands in the Caribbean.¹⁹ The latter practice of commerce was the base from which the local economy depended, and illicit trade operated with the complicity of local officials. Slaves and free people of color in the *sierra* or mountain range, located approximately 45 kilometers from Coro's city center, worked the plantations that grew much of these crops. Thus, the sierra itself, where the Coro revolt erupted, was isolated from the city of Coro and the population there was almost entirely of African descent, both free and enslaved.²⁰

¹⁷ McKinley, *Pre-Revolutionary Caracas*; "Expediente sobre la insurrección."

¹⁸ "Expediente sobre la insurrección." These calculations are similar to those made by Spanish Bishop Mariano Martí in 1768 and found in Martí, Canedo, and Guzmán, *Obispo Mariano Martí*.

¹⁹ Soriano, "Rumors of Change."

²⁰ There are no exact figures for the population of the sierra available at this time.

The labor system in Coro was as diverse as the region's terrain. Most free people of color were peasants who worked their own small plots of land, or worked on plantations, either as overseers or as day laborers.²¹ Some free *pardos* worked as artisans, sailors, and small merchants. Slave holding patterns were also diverse. Many homes in the city of Coro included just a few slaves. The sierra, however, had many *haciendas* that each housed dozens of slaves who worked on the haciendas' plantations. Free blacks, many of which were maroons from Curaçao, also worked on these plantations, as well as their own properties in the sierra.²² Enslaved people who lived and worked in the sierra would often have weekends off to work their own plots of land and sell their crops at the market in the city, much like their free black neighbors.²³ Everyone who sold and transported goods were subject to pay the *alcabala*, a tax on transported goods imposed at the entrances of each town.²⁴ In fact, the elimination of this tax would be one of the rebels' demands. It appears that most slaves lived in Coro's sierra, although free people of African descent who worked alongside slaves as field hands and overseers probably came close to equaling their numbers.

In varying degrees, these conditions contributed to the outbreak of the Coro revolt in 1795, and scholars have outlined many of these preconditions as ones that contributed to the outburst of slave and peasant rebellions in general.²⁵ The demographic dominance of people of African descent along with autonomous black leadership were two of many

²¹ Gil Rivas, Dovale Prado, and Bello, *La insurrección de los negros de la sierra coriana*; McKinley, *Pre-Revolutionary Caracas*; John V Lombardi, *People and Places in Colonial Venezuela* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

²² Soriano, "Rumors of Change," 197.

²³ *Ibid.*, 201.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 203.

²⁵ Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*; Craton, *Testing the Chains*; Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution*; Guha and Scott, *Elementary Aspects*; Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*; Tutino, *From Insurrection to Revolution in Mexico*; Hobsbawm and Rudé, *Captain Swing*.

significant preconditions. People of African descent comprised approximately 56% of the region of Coro, and the number was higher in Coro's sierra, where the revolt erupted. Genovese has pointed out the significance of maroon societies, and maroons were numerous in Coro at the time of the revolt. It is difficult to determine how many *loangos* lived in Coro at the time of the revolt, but between 1749 and 1775, an estimated 581 people fled slavery in Curaçao to live free in Coro. 86 percent of these refugees were men, many of whom were skilled workers.²⁶

Autonomous black leadership was another significant precondition of the Coro revolt.²⁷ González and Chirino, the two leaders of the revolt, were leaders in their respective communities. Chirino had worked with Tellería as a merchant's assistant and had travelled throughout the Caribbean, frequently visiting the Dutch islands of Aruba and Curaçao, and even reached as far as Saint-Domingue.²⁸ Chirino was also a leader among the free and enslaved people of the sierra, where he lobbied on their behalf to authorities such as Tellería.

González rose to a position of prominence within the *loango* community in Coro and in the wider region. One of his major accomplishments involved his representation of the *loango* community in a land dispute with some of Coro's leading white residents in the 1780s. The dispute centered on the fact that some of Coro's wealthiest landowners wanted to move the *loangos* out of an extension of land where he "and others of his class" had been living peacefully until the dispute arose.²⁹ To lobby on behalf of the *loangos'* rightful title to

²⁶ Soriano, "Rumors of Change," 198.

²⁷ This is a precondition identified by Genovese in: Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution*.

²⁸ Arcaya, *Insurrección de los negros*.

²⁹ Juan Guillemi, "Acusa recivo una Real Orden de Josef Caridad Gonzalez," May 12, 1792, Caracas, 93, Archivo General de Indias.

this land, González travelled first to Caracas and then to Spain, where he obtained a Royal Order granting the *loangos* the land that was in dispute.

On October 29, 1791, González obtained a *Real Orden* and that entitled him to receive “justice without having to undergo any inconvenience for having gone to Spain and lodged his appeal.”³⁰ Although he expected the Royal Order to resolve the confusion regarding the lands in dispute, González and the *loangos* continued to receive pressure from some of Coro’s wealthiest landowners to abandon the lands they were occupying. González had even attempted to set up a *loango* militia for Coro comprised of 45 of his fellow *loangos*. This idea was rejected by authorities in Caracas, however, who were already suspicious of González’s motivations.³¹

Economic distress was another significant precondition of the Coro revolt.³² In his letter to Venezuela’s Real Consulado del Comercio, Tellería tries to obtain financial support for Coro, and gives a long list of the *Causas de la total desolación* of the region.³³ Tellería describes the poverty in which Coro’s population lived and places the blame for this on a lack of agricultural production that had “ruined” Coro.³⁴ In the aftermath of the 1795 revolt, Venezuelan Governor Pedro Carbonell wrote the Crown to ask for financial support for Coro, in much the same way that Tellería did in 1794. Carbonell wrote, “in my judgment, the reestablishment of Coro must be based on removing it from ruin, which its previous backwardness and the calamitous event of the insurrection has led it to.”³⁵ Authorities

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ “Expediente sobre la insurrección.”

³² This precondition is identified in: Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution*; Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*.

³³ Tellería, “N. 15 Ynforma, al Real Consulado de Comercio”

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ “Expediente sobre la insurrección;” “juzgo debe fundarse el restablecimiento de Coro sacándolo de la ruina, a que le ha conducido su anterior atraso, y el calamitoso suceso de la insurrección.”

avoided blaming the exploitative system of slavery or acknowledging the legitimacy of the rebels' demands. Instead, in the aftermath of the rebellion, authorities found several excuses as to why the rebellion occurred. Here, Carbonell writes that the "backwards" conditions of Coro caused the rebellion.

Another significant precondition was that the expectations of Coro's enslaved and free peasant populations were not being met.³⁶ Enslaved and free people in Coro were taxed on the goods that many sold at market, and as part of the Bourbon reforms of the decade leading up to the revolt, Coro received an abusive new tax collector named Manuel Iturbe.³⁷ One year before the revolt, Tellería wrote authorities in Caracas in hopes that Iturbe's abuse would be curbed,

The poor farm worker, or [animal] keeper was the target of his shots; his things, and crops were seen cut down at each step; they were the only transgressors of the law, the authors or inciters of contraband; they tormented them with whippings and cruel punishments; and while the opulent illegal rider twirled about with impunity, those poor men were dragged to prisons and jails, adding the ruin of their miserable families caused by the confiscation of their goods to their own distress.³⁸

Coro's Teniente Justicia, Mariano Ramírez, agreed with Tellería's assessment in the aftermath of the 1795 rebellion, writing that Coro's poor had lodged formally complaints concerning, "the humiliations, abuse and violence that they endured because of the changes in the collection of income taxes that were introduced by the treasurer Don Juan Manuel de Yturbe against whom they lodged countless complaints, and especially by Don Josef de

³⁶ This precondition is elucidated in: Guha and Scott, *Elementary Aspects*; Tutino, *From Insurrection to Revolution*.

³⁷ Soriano, "Rumors of Change," 202.

³⁸ Tellería, "N. 15 Ynforma, al Real Consulado de Comercio;" "El pobre Labrador, o criador fueron el blanco de sus tiros: sus cosas, y cultivos se veían a cada paso talados: solo ellos eran transgresores de la ley, fautores, o fomentadores del contrabando: los atormentaban con azotes, y castigos inhumanos; y mientras el opulento trotante ilícito, giraba impugamente; aquellos pobres arrastrados alas prisiones, y cárceles, envolvían en sus aflicciones las ruinas de sus miserables familias por la confiscación de bienes."

Tellería.”³⁹ Iturbe was one of the few men that were specifically targeted by the rebels, who blamed some aspects of injustice on specific human actors such as Iturbe.⁴⁰

Coro’s rebels appeared to have taken arms only after exhausting the options available to them within the law.⁴¹ Chirino had complained to Tellería on behalf of himself and his community at least one year before the 1795 revolt. Tellería acknowledged this, writing in a manner that reflected his overall aim of obtaining more financial support from the Crown, “These deplorable events discouraged farming in a way that everything was reduced to what it is, still a quasi desert; they stopped working the best lands because they were far from the settlements, where because of the assistance of politician judges, the excesses were not repeated so frequently.”⁴² After having Tellería murdered, Chirino kidnapped his wife and children, taking them to the Macanillas plantation that had served as the rebels’ headquarters. While at Macanillas, Tellería’s widow, Maria Josefa berated Chirino and the other rebels who had occupied the *hacienda* and were using it as their headquarters, arguing that “they had been so ungrateful and traitors, that although Tellería was the father of all of them, these same people in his home, that he so much loved and helped, had gone out to kill him!”⁴³ Chirino replied that Tellería told him that no *zambo* could make him “govern,” implying that no one from such a low caste could demand

³⁹ “Expediente sobre la insurrección;” “Las vejaciones, atropellamientos y violencia que sufrían por las novedades, que en la recaudación de rentas, introdujo el tesorero Don Juan Manuel de Yturbe contra quien se promovieron un sin número de quejas, y especialmente por Don Josef de Tellería.”

⁴⁰ A similar point is made in Tutino, *From Insurrection to Revolution*.

⁴¹ Similar points are made in: Guha and Scott, *Elementary Aspects*; Hobsbawm and Rudé, *Captain Swing*.

⁴² Tellería, “N. 15 Ynforma, al Real Consulado de Comercio De Venezuela;” “Estos lamentables sucesos desanimaron de modo el cultivo, que todo se redujo como esta, aun cuasi desierto; se dejaron enmontar las mejores tierras trabajadas por estar distantes de las Poblaciones, donde por la asistencia de jueces políticos, no se repetían con tanta frecuencia los excesos.”

⁴³ “Expediente sobre la insurrección;” “como habían sido tan ingratos, y traidores que siendo Tellería padre de todos ellos habían salido a matarlo los mismos de su casa, a quienes tanto amaba y socorría!”

anything from a white man of his stature.⁴⁴ Chirino added that Tellería “had not prevented Coro’s accountant from charging them the *alcabalas* with so much excess and rigor” and therefore deserved to be killed.⁴⁵ Maria Josefa then told Chirino that Tellería had done everything within the law to stop the abuses to which Chirino replied that Tellería should have had the tax collector killed.⁴⁶ This episode shows that Coro’s rebels tried to address their grievances through legal mechanisms but that these legal mechanisms ultimately failed in addressing their concerns.

Coro’s rebels exhibited some elements of class-consciousness, seeing themselves as the opposite or the negation of the upper class.⁴⁷ The class-consciousness of Coro’s rebels is expressed not solely as class, but as class intersected with race or color. Coro’s rebel forces were ethnically diverse and came from both free and enslaved classes. The rebels consisted of tribute-paying indigenous people and free and enslaved people of African descent. Many of the rebels were classified as *zambo* and *pardo*, including Chirino, which points to the mixed background of many of Coro’s people of the time, particularly the rebels. *Zambos* were clearly defined as being half Indian and half black, but the designation of *pardo* was much more ambiguous. In eighteenth-century Coro, *pardo* was used to identify people that were too dark to be considered white and who had genealogical roots in Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Free blacks, *pardos*, *zambos*, and slaves all looked alike, making it difficult to distinguish between free and enslaved in Coro. That these groups also performed the same kind of work also blurred the lines between slave and free. Racial

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid. “no había impedido que el contador de Coro cobrase con tanto exceso, y rigor las alcabalas.”

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ A similar argument is made in: Guha and Scott, *Elementary Aspects*.

designations were fluid in Coro and were probably influenced by a person's profession and income.

Chirino's exchange with Maria Josefa at Macanillas serves as evidence for the racially inflected nature of class at the time of the rebellion. During this exchange, Chirino angrily told Maria Josefa that Tellería obstructed justice, rather than help facilitate it. Chirino stated "the whites were in cahoots with the accountant so that they would not have to pay, and to have all the weight of the taxes fall on the backs of the poor, so that now Coro could either be fixed or ruined."⁴⁸ Here, Chirino refers to himself, and the free and enslaved people of African and indigenous descent as "the poor," and the upper classes or the rich as "whites." This points to the fact that Coro's poor were either brown or black, and this color-coding made it easier to differentiate the poor from rich.

The weak mechanisms of surveillance and weak defenses present in some parts of Coro on the eve of the revolt were an especially significant precondition. Coro as a region was an isolated place. It took approximately six days of travel to the next major city, Mérida, and twelve days to travel from Coro to Caracas, which served as the administrative center of governance for the entire colony.⁴⁹ Also, colonial territories in Spanish America sometimes relied on the Catholic Church for surveillance, but Coro was under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Caracas, and the entire region of Coro only had nine priests, not enough to police or control the widely dispersed population of nearly 30,000.

Coro's towns were also isolated from each other, which made social control more difficult for authorities. Tellería described the situation well in his petition to the Crown:

⁴⁸ "Expediente sobre la insurrección;" "no era nada de eso, que los blancos estaban compuestos con el contador para no pagar ellos, y que cargase todo el peso de las contribuciones sobre los brazos de los pobres, y que ahora o se componía, o se arruinaba Coro."

⁴⁹ Tellería, "N. 15 Ynforma, al Real Consulado de Comercio."

“In the full expanse of this most fertile district, only five miserable settlements are believed to be lost, without a connection, or communication, inhabited by more or less one hundred fifty unfortunate families.”⁵⁰ This problem of governance came up nearly two years later during the investigation of the revolt and its causes. The report stated, “The city of Coro has a population of thirty thousand persons, but they are dispersed over the vast extension of over one hundred leagues of coast.”⁵¹ Because Coro’s towns were isolated from each other, it made it difficult for authorities to govern and police what took place in each town, and the towns were largely self-governing.

This isolation was largely due to the rough terrain and the poor infrastructure in place in order to ensure efficient travel from town to town. This is most evident when examining the isolation of Coro’s sierra, where the 1795 revolt was planned and where it originated. In his proposal to the Crown, Tellería wrote that the sierra was extremely isolated “it is necessary to repair the road built by uneven steps, and by the precipices of a high summit, that destroys a number of beasts and stops and even annuls traffic at certain intervals during the rainy season, damaging the country’s only agriculture, which is the one that they still do there.”⁵² The sierra’s terrain made it a valuable resource for growing crops, and because of this, Tellería presumed that the restoration of the roadway could provide more money for the city of Coro, and not coincidentally, his properties. Tellería added that restoring access of the city to the sierra would improve the morale of the

⁵⁰ Ibid., 5. “En toda la extensión de este fertilísimo distrito, solo se ven como perdidas cinco miserable Poblaciones distantes sin enlace, ni comunicación, habitadas poco mas o menos por ciento y cincuenta familias desdichadas.”

⁵¹ “Expediente sobre la insurrección;” “La ciudad de Coro contiene una población de treinta mil personas, pero dispersas en la basta extensión de mas de cien leguas de costa.”

⁵² Tellería, “N. 15 Ynforma, al Real Consulado de Comercio;” “es necesario componer el camino tirado por fragosos pasos, y precipicios de una alta cumbre, que en los tiempos de aguas, destruye porción de Bestias: detiene, y aun Anula, a intervalos, el trafico, con perjuicio de la única Agricultura del País, que es la que allí se conserva.”

sierra's inhabitants and asked for, "being able to obtain two hundred pesos for the repair of said roadway from the Royal Consulate and with their concurrence, which will be full of land owners and working people."⁵³ Tellería argued that this money would help alleviate the "misery" in which Coro's poor lived.⁵⁴

A lack of large-scale agricultural production contributed to the sierra's isolation. Tellería makes this point in his letter to the Crown: "The lands on the hills and abandoned were briefly unknown, even by their very owners, who were dedicated to that damned traffic, and only sought the rallying points to do it in the Coasts."⁵⁵ The sierra's workers produced rather independently from their bosses, another point that Tellería repeatedly comes to in his letter. Carbonell concurred with Tellería in his report to the Crown, arguing that the slaves in the sierra had lived and worked autonomously. According to Carbonell: "the main cause of the revolt was the indifference of the hacienda owners of the properties in the valley of Curimagua, and the abandonment to which they have subjected their slaves."⁵⁶ Although it is doubtful that the cause of the 1795 revolt was the freedom that slaves had away from their owners, Carbonell is right in asserting the significance of this relative autonomy. Carbonell's description suggests that people in the sierra were slaves in law, but that a white slave master did not dominate their daily lives. In fact, it appears as if the lives of slaves and free people of color in Coro's sierra were similar in many ways.

⁵³Expediente sobre la insurrección;" "doscientos pesos el Real Consulado para la reparación de dicho Camino, que se lograra, con ellos, y concurrencia, que estará prompta de Hacendados, y gente de trabajo."

⁵⁴ Expediente sobre la insurrección."

⁵⁵ Tellería, "N. 15 Ynforma, al Real Consulado de Comercio;" "Las tierras en montadas, y abandonadas, fueron bien breve desconocidas hasta: de sus mismos propietarios, que dedicados a aquel reprobado trafico, solo buscaban en las Costas los puntos de reunión para hacerlo."

⁵⁶ "Expediente sobre la insurrección;" "la indolencia de los dueños de las haciendas del valle de Curimagua, y al abandono que han tenido sus esclavos la principal causa de la sublevación."

Before the revolt, slaves and free people of color held a fair degree of control over the sierra, with little interference from whites or colonial authorities. This autonomy could be subject to intrusion if slave owners ventured to the sierra from Coro's city center, but these trips appear to have been infrequent.⁵⁷ Francisco Jacot, a military commander from Caracas sent to take control of Coro in the aftermath of the revolt, noted this situation after the revolt as well. One month after the revolt, Jacot wrote that free people of color controlled the sierra without any interference from authorities or "responsible" whites.⁵⁸ Jacot added that Chirino and at least eight other slaves and free people of color met regularly on the Macanillas to plan the revolt. The Macanillas plantation, like other plantations in the sierra, appears to have largely been controlled by free people of color and slaves, with the owner living away at the time. Therefore, Coro's sierra lacked the mechanisms of surveillance and control typical of other slave societies, a key fact that facilitated the planning and execution of a rebellion.

Weak mechanisms of surveillance were exacerbated by a lack of adequate mechanisms for defense, something Tellería warned about one year before the revolt.⁵⁹ Coro did not have a military or a militia, and would technically depend on militias from Caracas. One effect of this lack of policing on the coast was the dominance of illicit trade. Tellería was persistent about the need to police the coast in order to curb illicit trade, most of all to the Dutch island of Curaçao. Adding a military post and forming militias was another principal recommendation of the investigation into the 1795 revolt. Coro did not

⁵⁷ "Expediente sobre la insurrección." Arcaya, *Insurrección de los negros*. Arcaya's work and the *Expediente* describe Tellería's visit during the revolt as rare, and also describes the Macanillas plantation where the rebellion was planned as being isolated away from the plantation owner.

⁵⁸ "Expediente sobre la insurrección."

⁵⁹ Tellería, "N. 15 Ynforma, al Real Consulado de Comercio."

only lack an organized defense, but weapons themselves, as Tellería pointed out. In the official report on the Coro revolt, Valderrain again agreed with Tellería's assessment, writing that Coro was "defenseless because of a lack of weapons, powder, and ammunition."⁶⁰ When combined with weak mechanisms of surveillance as seen through Coro's isolation and the autonomy of slave and free people in Coro's sierra, these weak defenses made social control difficult for authorities.

This lack of troops and weapons would later become evident during the revolt, when Coro's authorities could only rely on help from nearby Indian towns. In his testimony on the 1795 revolt, Justice Administrator Mariano Valderrain stated: "I organized the few neighbors who had come, who consisted of Creoles as well as of white and mulatto outsiders, and a small number of Indians who arrived at that time, who were called during the afternoon from the towns of Carrizal and Guaybacoa."⁶¹ Valderrain goes on to explain the dependence he had on the neighboring Indian villages, both during battle and in pursuing the rebels after their defeat. Not much information exists on Coro's Indian towns, but it is known that Carrizal was a town of 450 Urubano Indians and that Guaybacoa was a town of about 450 Caiquetio Indians, who appear to have lived and governed themselves autonomously, with the only white authorities present being one priest in each respective town.⁶² Valderrain also relied on troops from Caracas's port of La Guaira, where 50 troops

⁶⁰ "Expediente sobre la insurrección;" "indefensa por falta de armas, pólvora, y munición."

⁶¹ Ibid. "formé los pocos vecinos que habían concurrido tanto de criollos como de forasteros blancos y mulatos, y un corto número de indios que me habían llegado a aquella hora, llamados por la tarde de los pueblos del Carrizal y Guaybacoa."

⁶² Angel de Altolaquirre y Duvale, *Relaciones geográficas de la obnación de Venezuela (1767-68) Con prólogo y notas* (Caracas: Ediciones de la Presidencia de la República de Venezuela, 1954), 182.

and 100 rifles were brought to take control of the situation, and help pursue suspects, although they did not make it in time to help crush the initial revolt.⁶³

Weak mechanisms of social control stemming from a lack of troops and weapons were exacerbated by Coro's overall weak infrastructure regarding taxing, policing, and justice. Although the rebels demanded the abolishment of the *alcabala* and complained about repeated abuse by Iturbe and his tax collectors, they appear to have been the only people singled out for such abuse since Coro had just one *aduana*, or tollhouse, and it was located at the entrance of the path connecting the sierra to the city center of Coro. Coro also had just one jail that was in the home of Valderraín, which also served as the region's weapons depot. In fact, Valderraín claimed that he executed rebels as they were captured, and without trial, because he did not have a place to put them. Although Valderraín surely executed the rebels in order to get rid of his opposition, it is true that Coro's authorities did not have the facilities required to imprison dozens of people. After the revolt, several locals such as Maria Nicolesa Gárces, a woman who lived in the city, volunteered their homes as jails, to keep suspected conspirators during the chaos that followed the initial revolt. Women such as Gárces provided support for authorities that lacked the means to imprison suspected accomplices of the rebellion.

It appears that the rebels were well aware of Coro's lack of adequate defenses, something that may have encouraged their decision to rebel. In the investigation into the causes of the revolt, Jacot wrote that the rebels, "began to cheer up in front of the Puerto de la Vela on April 20 of this year on the occasion of the arrival of a French pirate ship and the ease with which the city became upset when the residents unexpectedly discovered their

⁶³ "Expediente sobre la insurrección."

lack of weapons.”⁶⁴ Jacot was right in asserting that the rebels were aware of the total lack of defenses of the city. Given their ability to travel to the city and back to the sierra, the rebels knew the area well and knew exactly what type of opposition they faced. This awareness could have convinced the rebels that their movement could succeed.

Overall, much of Coro had weak mechanisms of surveillance and weak defenses, and these weaknesses were more pronounced in the sierra, where the rebellion was planned and where it began. This was largely due to the region’s distance from its major administrative and judicial centers. Coro’s sierra was also isolated from the city center due to the rough terrain that made it hard to reach. Coro’s defense mechanisms were also weak because they had a small number of arms, no militia, and no military presence. These characteristics were significant preconditions of the Coro revolt.

Comparisons

Coro’s weak mechanisms of social control become more glaring when comparing them to other eighteenth-century Caribbean slave societies. Unlike Coro, most slave societies in the Caribbean had effective methods of domination, surveillance, and strong defenses, all of which were utilized to control the population in a myriad of ways. These distinctions largely exist because Coro was a society with slaves, and not a slave society.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Ibid., 91. “Empezaron a animarse mas con la ocasión de la llegada de un corsario francés enfrente del Puerto de la Vela el día veinte de Abril de este año, y la facilidad con que se alteró la ciudad descubriendo incautamente los moradores su falta de armas.”

⁶⁵ One can argue that a slave society existed in Coro’s sierra, but Coro’s sierra was a particularly unique slave society, one with a great deal of autonomy for enslaved people.

Historian Ira Berlin has noted the importance of distinguishing between a slave society and a society with slaves.⁶⁶ For Berlin, on one hand, a slave society is a society that is dominated by plantation slavery, where “slavery stood at the center of economic production.”⁶⁷ On the other hand, a society with slaves was a society where “slavery was just one form of labor among many.”⁶⁸ Although Berlin’s model was placed within the context of seventeenth and eighteenth-century North America, his paradigm has been applied to elsewhere in the Americas as well.⁶⁹ Following this model, it can be determined that much of Venezuela, including Coro, was a society with slaves. This distinction is important because it partly explains the differences between Coro and its neighboring slave societies.

There are, however, some limitations to comparing a society with slaves to a slave society. Therefore, this section will also compare mechanisms of control in Coro to other societies of eighteenth-century Spanish America. Aspects of social control in other regions of Spanish America confirm the relatively weak mechanisms of surveillance and defense in Coro at the time of the revolt.

Continuing with Berlin’s model, most of Venezuela’s Caribbean neighbors would be classified as slave societies, but there remained many commonalities between slavery in Coro, Cuba, Jamaica, and Saint-Domingue. Although enslaved people only accounted for 12% of Coro’s population, this percentage skyrocketed in Coro’s sierra, which was home to

⁶⁶ Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: the First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ For one such example see: Herman L Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

several plantations, most of which held dozens of slaves each.⁷⁰ Slaves in Coro performed backbreaking labor and their legal status as slaves afforded them a subhuman status amongst the population. Technically, enslaved people in Coro were subject to similar laws and customs that were aimed at controlling their lives so that they could continue producing valuable commodities. However, Coro differed from its neighboring slave societies in many ways, including in mechanisms of social control.

Ideologies of natural hierarchy, which usually took the form of racism, were an integral mechanism of social control in plantation societies of the Caribbean. Historian Gwendolyn Midlo Hall is correct when she writes that “the person of the white had been made inviolate” in Saint-Domingue and Cuba during the eighteenth century with the growth of sciences that claimed the inherent inferiority of people of African descent.⁷¹ Although enslaved people were the victims of ruthless exploitation, Hall is correct when she asserts that social control in plantation systems relied heavily on consent from the enslaved, many of which felt they were powerless to change their lot.⁷² This mechanism of social control was not as strong in Coro’s sierra, which was dominated by enslaved and free people of African descent, and virtually void of white people.

Historian Trevor Burnard asserts that this was also the case in eighteenth-century Jamaica, where whites of all social strata ensured they were seen as a superior “tribe.”⁷³ Burnard writes that there was “a presumption of white egalitarianism . . . manifested

⁷⁰ Tellería, “Testamentaria de Joseph De Tellería.” The sierra’s exact demographics are not available, but there were several plantations that had a large number of slaves, including those of Tellería.

⁷¹ Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies; a Comparison of St. Domingue and Cuba*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), 79.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 153.

⁷³ Trevor G Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

principally in ostentatious hospitality.”⁷⁴ Burnard paints a brutally detailed picture of plantation life in eighteenth-century Jamaica using the diaries of the sadistic overseer turned planter Tom Thistlewood. In one instance, Burnard shows a case where Thistlewood gave the order to a slave of his to whip another, disorderly slave. The slave given the order did not comply with Thistlewood’s order because Thistlewood’s white assistant had told him to disregard it. Thistlewood writes in his diary that he publicly whipped the slave who he had initially given the order to for failing to follow his orders. Thistlewood did not reprimand his white assistant in public, but chose to do so in private, where he “informed him of the etiquette by which whites did not publicly contradict each other.”⁷⁵ These notions of white solidarity may not have been as strong in Coro where elite whites engaged in close personal and professional relationships with free people of color, many of who worked for them as merchant assistants or overseers.

Like Hall, Burnard also argues that a measure of consent was necessary to maintain a system of slavery in Jamaica, a tiny but overpopulated island where nine in ten people were enslaved during the late eighteenth century. Burnard believes that this compliance was due to the small plots of land on which enslaved people grew their food.⁷⁶ Slaves in Jamaica, as in much of the Caribbean, were allowed to grow their own crops to feed themselves. Slaves could also sell surplus goods to make a profit. These small plots of land, however, were not legally owned by enslaved people, but were dependent on the slave owner’s purported generosity. It appears that slave provision grounds did not have the

⁷⁴ Ibid., 151.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 152.

⁷⁶ Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*.

same effect in Coro's sierra. Slaves there did not depend on whites to feed themselves because their autonomy allowed them to grow food on their own.⁷⁷

Laws restricting the movement and activities of slaves were also common mechanisms of control throughout the Caribbean, and although these laws were in place in Coro, it appears that they were not enforced.⁷⁸ In both eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue and Cuba, "curfew laws, laws against assembly of slaves, pass laws, laws prohibiting slaves from owning arms and from riding horses, laws prohibiting the purchase of goods from a slave who did not have the written consent of his master," were all common.⁷⁹ Hall argues that for Saint-Domingue, the enforcement of these laws were uneven but could be enforced in times of stress, such as in the aftermath of the execution of Mackandal, a slave accused of poisoning whites.⁸⁰ In Cuba, slave codes enacted in the late eighteenth century required that ecclesiastics police plantations in order to ensure that slaves did not fraternize with free people of African descent.⁸¹ As was the case in all of Spanish America, laws restricting the movement of slaves were in effect in late eighteenth-century Coro, but they were not enforceable.⁸² By law, for example, slaves in Coro had to carry a pass with them if they ventured out alone, but because the majority of Coro's inhabitants were free people of color, the ability to distinguish between slave and free must have been difficult.

One of the most common and effective mechanisms of control in slave societies was physical torture, but it appears as if this occurred less frequently in Coro's sierra. Hall shows that fugitive slaves were severely punished when caught by whipping, mutilation,

⁷⁷ "Expediente sobre la insurrección."

⁷⁸ Acosta Saignes, *Vida de los esclavos negros*.

⁷⁹ Hall, *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies*, 77.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 78–79.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁸² Acosta Saignes, *Vida de los esclavos negros*.

and execution. Free people of African descent were also targeted for repression in both Cuba and Saint-Domingue, and could be re-enslaved if caught harboring a fugitive slave.⁸³ In his detailed study on Thistlewood, Burnard shows how brutal force was unleashed upon enslaved people daily, in order to achieve discipline. Burnard writes that at one of Thistlewood's first jobs as an overseer, "he whipped nearly two-thirds of the men and half of the women" on the plantation.⁸⁴ Thistlewood continued this trend for most of his life, where he "Whipped a slave on average more than once a week," and where each slave on his plantation "might expect to be physically punished at least once a year."⁸⁵ Public punishments were also enforced on repeated runaways who faced mutilation and execution. After the 1760 Tacky's Rebellion, over 100 slaves were publicly executed.⁸⁶ Public executions of slaves and the display of their mutilated body parts were common throughout the Caribbean during this period, and were intended to strike fear into the enslaved, while simultaneously buttressing the notion of white supremacy in order to discipline slaves into accepting their often tortuous lives.⁸⁷ However, there is no evidence of public executions in eighteenth-century Coro until rebels were executed during periods of respite during the revolt.

Prisons and workhouses were integral to maintaining the slave order in Jamaica, but were largely absent in Coro. Historian Diana Paton has shown how jails and prisons proliferated in Jamaica during the last decades of the eighteenth century.⁸⁸ Only one prison existed in Jamaica by 1759, but in the 1770s laws were passed to increase the penal system

⁸³ Hall, *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies.*, 75.

⁸⁴ Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*, 7.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 150–151.

⁸⁷ Hall, *Social control in Slave Plantation Societies.*, 80.

⁸⁸ Diana Paton, *No Bond But the Law: Punishment, Race, and Gender in Jamaican State Formation, 1780-1870* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

in order to buttress control over the enslaved population. By 1780, there were eleven jails in Jamaica, and by 1790 there were 19 across the island.⁸⁹ Coro only had one jail in the city, which was in the home of Valderrain.⁹⁰ This jail appears to have been used to temporarily hold suspected criminals until they could be sent to Caracas.

Mechanisms of defense were also relatively strong in the Caribbean during the late eighteenth century, but not in Coro. The British imperial navy was always on alert just off of Jamaica's shores and was deployed to fight maroons and crush slave revolts.⁹¹ British soldiers were such fixtures in eighteenth-century Jamaican society that they gained a reputation for their corruption.⁹² Eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue also had permanent troops stationed there, known as the *Maréchausée*. The *Maréchausée* were formed in 1717 and intended to enforce the laws implemented to control slave movement and behavior.⁹³ Militias were also common during in the eighteenth-century Caribbean. Slave-hunting militias were formed as early as the sixteenth-century in Cuba, and were known for their effective techniques of using savage hunting dogs to hunt down wanted slaves.⁹⁴ Jamaica also relied on militias to control its enslaved population, but there was no militia in all of Coro, nor were there any military troops stationed there before the revolt.⁹⁵

Looking at Coro's neighboring slave societies reveals distinctions in mechanisms of control between Coro and Caribbean slave societies. These distinctions largely exist because Coro was a society with slaves, and not a slave society, although one can argue that a slave society existed in Coro's sierra. Because there are limitations in comparing a society

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁹⁰ "Expediente sobre la insurrección"

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁹² Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*, 146.

⁹³ Hall, *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies.*, 76–78.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 75–76; Johnson, *The Fear of French Negroes*.

⁹⁵ Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*, 144.

with slaves to slave societies, it is important to compare mechanisms of control in Coro to those in similar societies of Spanish America.

There did exist a large military presence in Venezuela, but not in Coro. Venezuela had a rather sophisticated naval apparatus during the eighteenth century, particularly after the establishment of the *Compañía Guipuzcoana* in 1730, a Basque enterprise that provided security for Spanish shores.⁹⁶ In 1760, 15 armed ships and schooners guarded the shores of Caracas, and Maracaibo had four vessels off its shores that same year. In 1764, these ships were filled with over 500 military personnel, who could be called onto land in case of emergency.⁹⁷ There is no evidence, however, that suggests that Coro had any naval support off of its shores. Militias were used throughout Venezuela at the time of the revolt, although they have been characterized as “an abyss with respect to instruction.”⁹⁸ Despite their lack of professionalism, there did exist a substantial number of armed militias in Venezuela. In the year 1771, for example, there existed nearly 7,000 men enlisted in various militias in Caracas, Cumaná, Guayana, Maracaibo, Margarita, San Carlos, Valencia, and Valles de Aragua—but none in Coro.⁹⁹

Many parts of Spanish America also had the strong defenses and military presence that Coro lacked. Similar to eighteenth-century Jamaica and the major cities of Venezuela, Cartagena had Spanish vessels posted on the coast in order to disrupt contraband and to defend the coast from foreign enemies.¹⁰⁰ Guarding Cartagena, in fact, was a principal concern for the Crown. Historian Moisés Munive has found that for the year of 1774, the

⁹⁶ Santiago Gerardo Suarez, *Marina, milicias y ejército en la colonia* (Caracas: Autor, 1971).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 17–19.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 55. “un abismo en punto a instrucción.”

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 59–67.

¹⁰⁰ Moisés Munive, “Por el buen orden: el diario *Vivir en Cartagena y Mompox colonial*,” *Historia Crítica* (2003): 120-136.

colonial government of Cartagena spent 80% of its budget on military spending.¹⁰¹ Historian Steven W. Hackel has shown that the military had a substantial presence in colonial California as well. The military was used to police, hunt fugitives, and dish out punishment. For example, in the 1790s, New Spain's governor ordered the Franciscans in California to lighten their punishments to no more than twenty-five lashes, insisting that only the military could enforce over twenty-five lashes.¹⁰² Therefore, the military took over the disciplinary measures for the Franciscan priests and policed the territory surrounding the missions, "punishing Indians with great frequency."¹⁰³ Again, these tortuous mechanisms of social control appear to have been uncommon in Coro at the time of the revolt.

Much of late colonial Spanish America employed mechanisms of surveillance similar to those utilized in the slave societies of the Caribbean, but lacking in Coro. Munive has vividly illustrated the strong policing strategies that were effectively used in late colonial Colombia.¹⁰⁴ He writes, "the police missions had an ample space to maneuver. They located the huts and shacks where the criminals lived; they returned the natives to their home towns."¹⁰⁵ In ways that parallel contemporary practices of policing, the police in colonial Cartagena would make rounds at night, targeting areas with a reputation for illegal activity such as robbery, drunkenness, and contraband, particularly under the Bourbon reforms.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 131.

¹⁰² Steven W Hackel and Omohundro Institute of Early American History & Culture, *Children of Coyote, Missionaries of Saint Francis: Indian-Spanish Relations in Colonial California, 1769-1850* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 325.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 336.

¹⁰⁴ Munive, "Por el buen orden."

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 126. "las misiones de policía tuvieron un amplio espacio de acción. Se localizaban y destruían los cubes y rochelas donde vivían los malhechores, se reintegraban los indígenas a sus poblados."

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 126-128.

There were mechanisms of surveillance in late eighteenth-century Venezuela, but there was a void in Coro. The more strategically important cities and regions were heavily fortified, with military plazas or posts set up everywhere. However, there was not a single one in Coro.

Although jails and prisons were not commonly used in eighteenth-century Spanish America, there were some regions that had a more effective jail system than Coro. Big cities such as Buenos Aires, Lima, and México all had large-scale, highly organized prison systems.¹⁰⁷ Many smaller cities and towns also had some detention centers such as municipal jails and at police and military stations, but Coro only had one small jail, which was in the home of the Justice Administrator.¹⁰⁸

The Catholic Church played a large role in governing large swathes of territory in eighteenth-century Spanish America, but there was only one church and only a handful of priests in all of Coro.¹⁰⁹ Hackel has shown how whipping was the preferred method of discipline by Franciscans and their Indian assistants in colonial California, and was ubiquitous on the San Carlos mission where Indians could be punished “for a range of actions, including seemingly innocent mistakes and minor acts of disobedience.”¹¹⁰ Hackel argues that the Franciscan’s willingness to whip indigenous peasants was tied to their conceptions of Indians as children, with Church officials representing their fathers. The relegation of indigenous people to the status of children was buttressed by a legal system that officially categorized them as such. Colonial Spanish America could be “all

¹⁰⁷ Carlos Aguirre, “Cárcel y sociedad en América Latina: 1800-1940” in Eduardo Kingman Garcés, *Historia social urbana: espacios y flujos* (Quito: FLACSO Ecuador : Ministerio de Cultura, 2009).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ “Expediente sobre la insurrección.”

¹¹⁰ Hackel, *Children of Coyote*, 327.

encompassing” for its inhabitants, but Coro lacked the mechanisms of social control that other Spanish American societies had.¹¹¹

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that weak mechanisms of surveillance and of defense were present at the time of the Coro revolt, and that these characteristics of Coro were significant preconditions for the 1795 revolt. Coro’s territory was immense and its population dispersed in isolated towns. These towns were also isolated from Caracas, the seat of the Captaincy-General’s government, its military and its Church. Many of these towns, such as those in the sierra, were largely self-governed by people of African descent, many of whom were enslaved.

Looking at mechanisms of social control that were typical of Caribbean slave societies and other Spanish American colonies of the period also points to the lack of adequate mechanisms of surveillance and defense of Coro during the late eighteenth century. Cuba, Jamaica, and Saint-Domingue all had rather sophisticated mechanisms of surveillance that were buttressed by physical torture intended to maintain control over its enslaved people. These Caribbean societies also had strong military presences, which helped maintain order. Many places in Spanish America also had sophisticated mechanisms of domination supported by policing, military support, and torture. Coro’s mechanisms of control and defense, however, were relatively weak. The following chapter will investigate the ways in which authorities of the Captaincy-General of Venezuela, in conjunction with

¹¹¹ Ibid., 11.

local authorities in Coro, attempted to address these weak mechanisms of surveillance and defense in the aftermath of the Coro revolt.

Chapter Three: Social Control in the Aftermath of The Coro Revolt

The previous chapter argued that the weakness of Coro's mechanisms of surveillance and defense conditioned the outbreak of social unrest in late colonial Coro. Such weaknesses did not disappear once the revolt started, as authorities later addressed these weaknesses in the aftermath of the revolt. The public torture and execution of Chirino, and the subsequent mutilation of his body, were intended to strike fear in free and enslaved people of African descent in all of Venezuela, particularly in Coro. Because this practice was new to Coro, these technologies and mindsets were largely drawn from those already existing across the Atlantic. Authorities also implemented a slew of reforms intended to solidify Coro's spotty defense mechanisms, and to control the movements and activities of its people.

The Revolt

On the night of May 10, 1795, Chirino and González led an intricately coordinated rebellion in the sierra and in the city center of Coro. The rebels were in dialogue with the French and Haitian Revolutions, particularly the abolition of slavery decreed by Léger-Félicité Sonthonax and Étienne Polverel in Saint-Domingue in 1793, and approved in Paris

the following year. The aim of the revolutionaries was to take control of the immediate region in order to take power and abolish slavery and taxes.¹

On the night of May 10, rebels gathered on the *hacienda* of Macanillas, a plantation with an absentee owner, and where meetings regularly took place to plan the rebellion. A large number of slaves and free people of African descent marched to a nearby plantation, sacked and burned the house there, and killed two white men. Two other white men, including Tellería's eldest son, suffered fatal injuries. The rebels then continued their march towards different homes in the sierra, as they recruited more rebels, and robbed and burned several properties as they advanced in their aim to occupy the sierra.

Anticipating Tellería's arrival early the next morning, Chirino directed twelve rebels under his command to form a *guardía* to intercept and kill him. Armed with guns, machetes, and spears, the rebels accosted Tellería, his wife María Josefa de Rosillo, their three children, as well as Maria Josefa's brother, Pedro Francisco de Rosillo. The twelve rebels killed both Pedro Francisco and Tellería, who had briefly escaped during the attack but was eventually chased down and killed. The rebels then took Maria Josefa and her children as prisoners, escorting them back to Macanillas, which was now firmly under rebel control.

The plan to take Coro was put into action that night. Chirino sent a group of rebels to the city as González and twenty-one other Loangos sought to break into a weapons cache at Mariano Ramirez Valderraín's house, which doubled as the Justice Administrator's (Justicia Mayor) headquarters. This attempt was quickly foiled and González and his crew were jailed on the spot. This encounter would shape the revolt's unfolding and was the first of

¹ "Expediente sobre la insurrección."

many decisive failures on the part of Coro's rebels. Meanwhile, guards at a customs stop at Caujarao intercepted Chirino's squad approximately three and a half miles away from Coro's city center. A small battle ensued where three city guards were killed and two were injured.

Without a militia, Valderrain was forced to improvise and he was effective in doing so. On the first day of the defense of Coro, Valderrain was only able to get help from local residents with little or no battle training. Therefore, Valderrain sent nine men to different parts of Venezuela to ask for emergency military aid. He sent some to as far as Caracas and Maracaybo and others to closer towns such as Paraguaná, and the indigenous villages of Guaybacoa, and Carrizal.² Luckily for Valderrain, reinforcements from these nearby indigenous communities arrived quickly, and provided the soldiers and weapons that Coro lacked.³

Shortly after González's failed raid, Valderrain gathered this random group of followers to intercept a suspected rebel attack on the city. Although Valderrain did not have many rifles, he did have two cannons and arrows from his Indian allies, which would prove invaluable for his defense of Coro. With the two cannons by their side, the motley crew waited.⁴ Valderrain later stated, "I kept this state of readiness until six in the morning and when it seemed that they were not coming, I tried to move away towards the center of the city - where the weapons depot is - but as I was reaching the first houses, they showed

² Mariano Valderrain, "Lista de sujetos que concurrieron al servicio del Rey 11 De Mayo a 12 De Mayo," enero 1796, Caracas, 95, Archivo General de Indias.

³ Ibid.

⁴ "Expediente sobre la insurrección."

up on the plain, [as I] mentioned elsewhere, three hundred fifty men or more.”⁵ Valderrain went on to testify that, upon questioning captives, he confirmed that there were 425 rebels that came down the sierra that day. This number did not include those that were still occupying the sierra, under the command of Chirino.⁶

The rebels’ numbers must have been alarming, especially in light of the fact that Coro was not densely populated. The rebels marched towards Coro, stopped and waved a flag to signal a desire to express their demands. They demanded the abolition of slavery and the abolition of taxes paid for by free men and stated that they were unwilling to give anything in return, but would hand over the city if their demands were met. Their demands were not met, and instead, “the response was to shoot a cannon at them.”⁷

The cannon shot was supported with the simultaneous firing of rifles and the firing of arrows from Indian allies. Outgunned, the rebels retreated. Valderrain later boasted about the blood he and his troops shed, “Right there I killed two of them – one by gunshot and the other with a saber blow from my own hand – and charged at them with a section of the Guaynacoa Indians company that was arriving when the first shots were fired, and immediately came the lancers; it was an enormous butchery going after them for over two miles in distance.”⁸ This points to Valderrain’s dependence on the Guaynacoa Indians who swooped in as the battle was under way.

⁵ Ibid., “En esta disposición me mantuve hasta las seis de la mañana y pareciendo que ya no vendrían, traté de retirarme hacia al centro de la ciudad donde esta el cuartel de armas, pero apenas llegaba a las primeras casas cuando se presentaron al llano, dije en otra parte trescientos cincuenta hombres algo mas.”

⁶ Ibid. It is unclear the exact total of rebels, but there appears to have been at least 425 in total. It is possible that they total number was closer to 500 people.

⁷ Ibid., “La contestación fue dispararles un cañonazo.”

⁸ Ibid., “allí propio maté dos, uno a tiro de pistola, y otro a golpe de sable por mi propia mano, y cargando sobre ellos un trozo de la compañía de indios de Guaynacoa que venia llegando cuando se hizo la primera descarga, y en seguida los lanceros, se hizo una carnicería formidable yendo en alcance de ellos, hasta mas de dos leguas de distancia.”

The Guaynacoa probably would not have been involved if Coro had the defensive capabilities of other major cities in the Atlantic. After Tackey's revolt in Jamaica in 1760, the Lieutenant Governor immediately sent troops from varying parishes to confront the rebels. Jamaican authorities also relied on its large and militarily agile maroon communities, who had worked alongside authorities to crush revolts for decades.⁹ Similar to Coro, authorities in Caribbean Colombia also relied on allied indigenous groups to crush disturbances, but unlike Coro, even rural towns in Caribbean Colombia could rely on local militias, most of whom were comprised of free people of African descent.¹⁰ Free black militiamen were also relied upon in late-eighteenth century Cuba, and may have been the deciding factor during the 1812 island wide Aponte rebellion.¹¹

Dead bodies littered the *llanos* of Coro, and after this decisive battle was won, twenty-four rebels were captured. With no prisons to hold them, the captured rebels were questioned, tortured and decapitated that same day, without trial. Under questioning, the rebels stated that González had convinced the slaves and free men of the sierra to rise and rebel. According to Valderráin, González had told the rebels that he had obtained a Real Cédula that had granted the slaves freedom, orders which their masters had withheld. Valderráin stated that the slaves and free black people that rebelled would be in charge of a new republic, once their enemies had been defeated.¹²

Valderráin sent some members of his makeshift army to his home where González was being held with twenty-one of his followers. The fighters were ordered to move

⁹ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 130.

¹⁰ Aline Helg, *Liberty & Equality in Caribbean Colombia, 1770-1835* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

¹¹ Matt D Childs, *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle Against Atlantic Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

¹² "Expediente sobre la insurrección."

González and his followers to another location for questioning, and possibly execution. The only jail cell Coro had was in Valderrain's home. As the Justice Administrator, Valderrain also had the city's weapons stored there. In the midst of this chaos, and because Coro did not have the capability of housing a large number of prisoners, private homes were doubling as jails and small squads of armed men were left to guard the homes and the prisoners. When the cell in Valderrain's home was opened, González and two others ran out. The cell was quickly shut, but González and his two followers were abruptly shot and killed. Significantly, one of Coro's leading figures and the leader of free blacks in the region was killed at the outset of the revolt.

Valderrain spent the night at Coro's port of La Vela. The next morning, he and his followers made their rounds around the city, arresting anyone they considered suspicious. Additional reinforcements from neighboring Indian villages also arrived the morning of the thirteenth of May, and at around 1:00 p.m. frantic residents approached Valderrain and his forces, warning that the "blacks were coming."¹³

It is noteworthy that Coro's free and enslaved rebels were lumped together as "blacks" by those in the city, both white and *pardo*. This characterization points to two significant phenomena in Coro, which are important to understanding both the region and the revolt. First, notions of race were tied to labor, and both free and enslaved people performed the same labors in the sierra, although enslaved people could not be overseers. The second phenomenon was that it was difficult to distinguish free and enslaved people, especially for those who lived in the city of Coro or any other region outside of the sierra. Free and enslaved people who worked in the sierra were all of African descent, most of

¹³ Ibid.

mixed African and indigenous or mixed African and European descent. Darker skin coupled with African origins did not serve as a distinguishing marker between enslaved and free either. It is unlikely that many of Coro's slaves were born in Africa, but the hundreds of Africans that did live in Coro at the time were free people who had escaped their lives as slaves in Curaçao to live free in Coro.¹⁴

When news spread that the rebels were advancing on the city, people reacted quickly in an effort to defeat them. This was a time of extraordinary fear and communal support, where people were not only giving up their homes to aid in containing the revolt, but also risking their lives to serve as look-outs and soldiers. Valderraín testified that "at that moment, half naked and without shoes, I went to the field to review the troops where the enemy incursion was coming from, and I explored the entire campaign in over two miles, returning without having found any problems at four in the afternoon."¹⁵

The next day, four days after the revolt started, Valderraín and three hundred men made two expeditions to the sierra in an attempt to crush the rebellion by attacking its source. Valderraín offered a pardon to all rebels who surrendered, but had also secretly decided to apprehend all leaders of the revolt and execute them, especially Chirino. This was a major turning point in the unfolding of the revolt because the rebels, perhaps dismayed at the many defeats, particularly González's death in the city, gave up fighting.

On the fifteenth of May, nine suspected leaders had their throats slit, again without a trial. It is clear that the lives of Coro's rebels were not worth much to authorities. However, it is significant that Coro lacked the legal infrastructure or the capability to hold a large

¹⁴ Soriano, "Rumors of Change."

¹⁵ "Expediente sobre la insurrección;" "en aquel instante, cuasi desnudo, y sin zapatos me tiré al campo a registrar a la tropa por donde venían la incursión de los enemigos, y exploré toda la campaña en mas de dos leguas, retornándome sin haber encontrado novedad a las cuatro de la tarde."

amount of prisoners, something authorities used as an excuse to brutally execute the rebels without trial. Speaking on behalf of Valderrain, who executed the rebels, Carbonell wrote that Valderrain had “arrested 24 of them, whom he beheaded immediately, except that he first administered the Sacrament of the Penance without following the formality of a trial, since they were apprehended for a very serious crime, and because, surrounded by enemies, defenseless, and without the security of jails, nor other means to turn to, they would be an imminent risk, and perhaps make the destruction of that jurisdiction and the spreading of that infection inevitable if he allowed them to live.”¹⁶ Forty-four more suspected leaders were found throughout the following days and twenty-one of them were decapitated on May 23.

A reward was then offered for the apprehension of Chirino, who had disappeared. He was apprehended two months later in Baragua, deep in the interior of Venezuela, where he had been hiding. Chirino was then taken to the royal prison in Caracas where he was eventually sentenced to death.¹⁷

Chirino’s Execution

On December 17, 1796, after a year and a half in captivity, José Leonardo Chirino was tied to the tail of an ox, and a military guard escorted him to Caracas’ Plaza Mayor,

¹⁶ “Expediente sobre la insurrección.”; “aprehendió 24, los cuales decapitó inmediatamente precedido la administración del Sacramento de la Penitencia sin seguir formalidad exterior de juicio, por ser cogidos en un delito notorio de la mayor gravedad, y por que cercado de enemigos, indefenso, y sin seguridad de cárceles, ni otro arbitrio a que acudir, era un riesgo inminente, y quizá inevitable la destrucción de aquella jurisdicción, y extensión del contagio si los dejaba con vida.”

¹⁷ Ibid. Chirino’s testimony has been missing since it was last cited in Arcaya, *Insurrección de los negros de la serranía de Coro*. It was presumably stolen from the Archivo General de la Nación in Caracas at some point after 1910.

where he would be hanged. Chirino had been caught about two months after the revolt and transported to a prison in Caracas where he was probably tortured for over a year.¹⁸ A noose was placed around Chirino's neck and he hanged until he suffocated to death. His body was later mutilated; his hands were cut off, as was his head. His body parts were to be hung up at various locations in Coro, as a warning to all those who dared to rise up against the King.¹⁹

Grisly public executions and the display of bodies and body parts were typical of the eighteenth-century Atlantic. One historian has noted that these very public displays of power were characteristic of a "personalistic stage of state formation."²⁰ Michel Foucault has argued that public executions were political acts designed to seek justice for the King, "It is a ceremonial by which a momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted. It restores that sovereignty by manifesting it at its most spectacular."²¹ As was the case in Chirino's execution, Foucault shows that a military presence was required to achieve the spectacle's full effect in eighteenth-century Europe, in order to enforce the spectacle of power, and to enforce the message that "the criminal was an enemy of the prince."²²

Scholars have shown that these political operations were performances akin to theater and ones that were intended to disclose "truth." For late eighteenth-century England, historian V.A.C. Gatrell has shown that these executions "constructed a drama

¹⁸ It is not entirely clear why Chirino was executed when he was, after so much time in captivity.

¹⁹ "Expediente sobre la insurrección."

²⁰ Petrus Cornelis Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering: Executions and the Evolution of Repression : From a Preindustrial Metropolis to the European Experience* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 109.

²¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 48.

²² *Ibid.*, 50.

which defined what law, justice, and sovereignty ‘really’ were.”²³ Foucault has written that through the ritual of torture and execution

the body has produced and reproduced the truth of the crime—or rather it constitutes the element which, through a whole set of rituals and trials, confesses that the crime took place, admits that the accused did indeed commit it, shows that he bore it inscribed in himself and on himself, supports the operation of punishment and manifests its effects in the most striking way. The body, several times tortured, provides the synthesis of the reality of the deeds and the truth of the investigation.²⁴

Chirino’s execution was a spectacle of power in which Chirino and his body were punished for their apostasy. The ostentatious military execution was designed to show the Crown’s divine power and Chirino’s criminal weakness. The Royal forces that surrounded Chirino at the scene of his execution represented the King’s army, and thus God’s army on earth. The executioner represented the King’s long reach, “he was turned over to Agustín Blanco, the black executioner who, having placed a noose around his neck and received the appropriate signal, lunged him from the gallows, and waited until he died and became a cadaver, after which the same executioner took him down.”²⁵ The scribe who documented the proceedings writes that Chirino “naturally” died as he was hung, a notion that points to the divine nature of the proceedings and the display of truth. Chirino died naturally, thus it was God’s will, and if it was God’s will, then Chirino was surely guilty of the crimes he was accused of committing. Chirino’s execution was thus a display of truth: Chirino had offended the King, his crimes had upset God, and his execution was a display of the penalty one receives when one insults the Divine.

²³ Vic Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People, 1770-1868* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 83.

²⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 47.

²⁵ “Expediente sobre la insurrección.”; “se entrego al negro Agustín Blanco ejecutor de sentencias, quien habiéndole puesto un dogal al cuello hechole la correspondiente seña le arrojó de la horca, en la cual se mantuvo pendiente hasta que naturalmente murió, y quedó hecho cadáver, después de lo cual, fue descolgado por el mismo ejecutor.”

As seen in Chirino's public execution and others across the Atlantic, the body must be "degraded" in order to ensure guilt and cement power.²⁶ People convicted of treason in eighteenth-century England bore the brunt that Chirino did as well. Gatrell argues that a medieval pagan worldview that favored sacrifice to Gods carried over into the early modern period. He adds that many public executions in England followed the same rituals of their medieval counterparts, "Since it was in the traitor's body that felonious or treasonable thought was conceived, each bodily part bore its own responsibility for aspects of the crime and was punished accordingly. The body which had committed a crime against sovereignty—and thus against nature—must be infinitely degraded."²⁷

Similarly, Chirino's body had to be "infinitely degraded," which occurred after his execution. After the executioner brought down Chirino's body, he "he cut off both of his hands, and placed them in a box, which had been readied with salt for that purpose."²⁸ The executioner then "cut the head off of the stated corpse, and placed it inside the iron cage that had also been readied for that purpose; and as a result, after sprinkling some salt on it to preserve it from decay, I headed out with those who were to come with me to the road that runs from this capital to the City of Coro."²⁹ Chirino's hands, which had committed the treacherous crime of murder, were cut off. His head, infused with evil thoughts, and which instructed the hands to offend the King, was also cut off. Just as criminals in England, Chirino's body parts needed to pay the price for their crimes against the Sovereign.

²⁶ Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree*, 315.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ "Expediente sobre la insurrección;" "le cortó ambas manos, y se pusieron en un cajón, que al efecto estaba preparado con sal."

²⁹ *Ibid.*; "cortó la cabeza al enunciado cadáver, y la pusiese dentro de la jaula de fierro que a este fin también estaba preparada: En cuya consecuencia habiéndole echado una poca de sal para preservarla así mismo de la corrupción me dirigí con todo el acompañamiento al camino que sale de esta Capital para la Ciudad de Coro."

Foucault has shown that the severity of the torture and execution of the condemned could vary according to the severity of the crime. The state's punishment must also be harsher than that of the crime, in order to display the asymmetry of power. Foucault writes, "the punishment is carried out in such a way as to give a spectacle not of measure, but of imbalance and excess; in this liturgy of punishment, there must be an emphatic affirmation of power and its intrinsic superiority. And this superiority is not simply that of right, but that of the physical strength of the sovereign beating down upon the body of this adversary and mastering it."³⁰ The same can be seen in eighteenth-century England. Gatrell shows that public executions declined in the second half of eighteenth-century Britain, largely because there were no major threats to power.³¹

Punishment often took place at the scene of the crime or as a reenactment of the crime committed. In eighteenth-century France, a student who had killed several people at an inn was later executed by the state at the same spot of his crime.³² Foucault tells of another episode during the same period where a servant girl who killed her mistress:

Was condemned to be taken to the place of her execution in a cart 'used to collect rubbish at the crossroads'; there a gibbet was to be set up 'at the foot of which will be placed the same chair in which the said Laleu, her mistress, was sitting at the time of the murder; and having seated the criminal there, the executioner of the High Court of Justice will cut off her right hand, throw it in her presence into the fire, and, immediately afterwards, will strike her four blows with the cleaver with which she murdered the said Laleu.³³

Chirino's hands and head were also punished at the scene of the crime committed. After the executioner placed Chirino's head in a small cage, his head was hung high and in

³⁰ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 49.

³¹ Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree*, 15.

³² Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 44.

³³ *Ibid.*, 45.

front of the battalion that marched from Caracas to Coro.³⁴ More spectacles were executed for Chirino's hands once they arrived in Coro. The scribe wrote:

I went to the Caujarao customs office accompanied by military corporal Josef Rafael Arteaga and a force of seven armed men and two sheriffs who were with him, where I had the sentence contained in the Royal Provision voiced by Juan de la Paz de Mora, an enslaved colored person who plays the role of town crier because we do not have one, and had previously had a military drum played to attract some of the place's neighbors, and later I had a twenty foot long pole fastened to the ground and, just as was ordered in said sentence, which I attest to with due diligence, I nailed one of the hands of the criminal Leonardo Chirinos to it, which was sent from the capital of Caracas for that purpose.³⁵

Afterwards, a similar ritual was performed in another location in the sierra:

I went by the mountain range elevation where Don Josef de Telleria was killed, and in the manner stated previously, I had the sentence published, and I fastened the other hand of said prisoner to another pole of the same height, and had the pole fastened to the ground, and attached a piece of wood to it, with a sign that states that it is one of the hands of the mentioned prisoner, and that another one had equally been fastened to a pole at the Caujarao customs office.³⁶

Of course, the point of public executions, mutilations, and displays was to terrorize the population. Therefore, the audience was the most important player in the spectacle; "the sentence had to be legible for all."³⁷ Foucault has shown that people needed to know, but they also "must see with their own eyes. Because they must be made to be afraid; but also because they must be the witnesses, the guarantors, of the punishment, and because

³⁴ "Expediente sobre la insurrección."

³⁵ Ibid.; "pase a la Aduana de Caujarao acompañado del cavo de escuadra de milicias Josef Rafael Arteaga, y una guardia de siete hombres armados de su compañía, y dos alguaciles en donde hice publicar la sentencia contenida en la Real Provicion por vos de Juan de la Paz de Mora, moreno esclavo que hace de pregonero por no haberlo público, habiendo antes hecho tocar un tambor de guerra, a cuyo acto concurrieron algunos vecinos de aquel lugar, y después hice poner fijado en tierra un palo de veinte pies de largo, y clavar en él una de las manos del reo Leonardo Chirinos, remitidas de la capital de Caracas para el efecto, todo como se manda en dicha sentencia lo que pongo por diligencia de que doy fe."

³⁶ Ibid.; "pasé a la altura de la serranía donde fue muerto Don Josef de Tellería, y en la forma ante dicha hice publicar dicha sentencia, y clavar en otro palo de la misma altura la otra mano del dicho reo, quedando el palo fijado en tierra, y puesta en él una tablilla con un rotulo que expresa ser aquella una de las manos del citado ro, habiéndose puesto otra igual en el palo que se fijó en la Aduana de Caujarao."

³⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 43.

they must to a certain extent take part in it.”³⁸ Historian Louis Masur has shown the importance of religion in public executions during the early U.S. Republic. According Masur: “at the gallows the crowd received a lesson on the consequences of crime and sin; on hanging day civil and clerical figures offered proof that society worked properly and that God saved souls.”³⁹ Historian Petrus Cornelis Spierenburg also points out the significance of post-mortem mutilation as a social control mechanism: “A corpse can no longer feel the pain. Hence its punishment is meant for others.”⁴⁰ The overall goal, of course, was to preserve order.⁴¹

Preserving order was the goal of the authorities involved in Chirino’s execution, the mutilation of his body, and the display of his body parts. Although not much is known about public executions in colonial Venezuela, the ceremony of Chirino’s execution in Caracas was one that surely attracted many. The ceremonies in the sierra were designed to control what was considered an unruly population, whose autonomous lifestyles were blamed for the unrest. The town crier who beat on a war drum to attract attention to the site announced both ceremonies, which took place at the tax post, and at the site of Telleria’s murder. This was a ceremony in which people were undoubtedly encouraged to attend, and it was intended to scare them into submission.

Subsequent Reforms

³⁸ Ibid., 58.

³⁹ Louis P. Masur. *Rites of Execution: Capital Punishment and the Transformation of American Culture, 1776-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 26.

⁴⁰ Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering*, 56.

⁴¹ Masur, *Rites of Execution*, 27.

In the aftermath of the Coro revolt, authorities of the Captaincy-General began a wave of reforms in order to instill control in Coro, particularly over enslaved and free black people. From then on, Coro would be more closely tied to Caracas, and more closely scrutinized by the capital city, whose authorities increased their role in overseeing Coro's operations.

In May of 1796, Francisco Jacot, Caracas's Military Commander, sent a letter to Valderraín asking that he begin a search for a free black man known as Francisquito.⁴² Francisquito had been identified as a confidant of González by an investigation carried out in Caracas over an escaped female slave. On his way back to Caracas from Coro in September of 1795, Jacot had arrested a slave woman who was living free in Curamebo, a small town in the region. Upon questioning, the woman stated that González had granted her freedom months before the revolt, and that Francisquito had escorted her to San Felipe, a neighboring city where she could live free. Jacot took this woman to the Royal Prison in Caracas where she stayed until she died in prison, probably due to torture. For the next seven months, Jacot had been in regular communication with Valderraín, Coro's new military commander, over the investigation into Francisquito, his whereabouts, and his connection to González, and the Coro revolt.

Increased oversight from Caracas was coupled with new mechanisms of surveillance over Coro's people, particularly free and enslaved people in the sierra. The principal concern of reformist officials was the "corruption" or intermingling of the free and enslaved classes. Officials saw marriage as the root of the problem: "It would be convenient to separate the blacks, *sambos*, and free *mulatos* from the slavery of the haciendas, where

⁴² "Caso contra un negro llamado Francisquito, 12 De Mayo-16 De Diciembre, 1796," n.d., Casos Criminales: Caja 7, 41., Archivo Histórico del Estado de Falcón.

communication continues, and the frequent weddings of the ones from those castes to the [female] slaves, have been the main causes of the corruption, including the insurrection."⁴³ Authorities thought that the interclass marriages were indicative of the improper freedoms with which enslaved people lived. They also believed that if enslaved people fraternized with free people, the enslaved person would desire freedom, which led to instability.

Authorities proposed to build a church in the sierra so that church officials could instill proper behavior, and prevent free people from marrying enslaved people. The sierra's priests would "teach the Christian Doctrine and administer the Sacraments to all of the inhabitants of this Valley."⁴⁴ Authorities believed that the sierra's inhabitants lacked an understanding of natural hierarchy, where the free were higher than the enslaved, and thought that instilling these values, through Church dogma, would help reign in the population's deviousness.

Authorities also proposed to install surveillance squads in the sierra, comprised of twenty-five men each. Surveillance squads such as these had proven successful in the immediate aftermath of the revolt: "forming patrols with neighbors, excluding Indians, who remained close to their old headquarters. The patrols consisted of twenty-five men, including a corporal, with a third of whites, browns, and blacks."⁴⁵ Just as the church officials did, these patrols would enforce the segregation of the free and enslaved classes. The patrols would also arrest anyone they found to be suspicious, and there is evidence that these objectives were completed.

⁴³ "Expediente sobre la insurrección;" "convendrá separar de la esclavitud de las haciendas los negros, zambos y mulatos libres, cuya comunicación continua, y los frecuentes casamientos de los de aquellas castas con las esclavas, han sido las causas principales de la corrupción, y esta de la insurrección."⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ibid.; "enseñar la Doctrina Cristiana y administrar los Sacramentos a todos los habitantes de dicho Valle."

⁴⁵ Ibid.; "formando patrullas de vecinos exclusivos indios, que sin innovar quedaron en el antiguo pie de sus capitanías. Las patrullas se formaron de veinte y cinco hombres, incluso su cabo, terciadas de blancos, pardos y morenos."

Shortly after the Coro revolt, a free black man named Francisco Antonio Sanchez, was arrested for being a “suspicious foreigner.”⁴⁶ Sanchez was born in Caracas but had moved to Coro years before the revolt, where he cut sugar cane on an *hacienda* there. He earned a monthly wage that provided him with just enough to survive. A white man named Juan Chaves, who had been put in charge of surveillance of the area in which Sanchez worked, arrested Sanchez because he was a “a foreigner who is suspected of being a slave and also of not having a fixed destination, and after being released, of having told the Lieutenant that he was a native of Carora and told me [that he was a native] of Caracas.”⁴⁷ Chaves stated that his orders were to arrest anyone considered mobile or suspicious, and that they should be sent to Caracas.

Sanchez was arrested and taken to the Royal Prison in Caracas, where he lived in “misery” for months.⁴⁸ Marcos Joseph Sanchez de Espinoza, perhaps a relative of Sanchez, wrote the Real Hacienda, begging for clemency on the behalf of Sanchez, who was flabbergasted as to why he was imprisoned, and could only believe that he had fallen prey to the “confusion” surrounding such an overcapacity prison.⁴⁹ Finally, after much back and forth, Sanchez was returned to Coro on November 18, 1795, after paying an undisclosed fine. Sanchez’s predicament shows how both local officials and those of the Captaincy-General installed new mechanisms of surveillance in Coro in the aftermath of the revolt. It is unclear if these new mechanisms were effective or if they simply increased arbitrary

⁴⁶ “Sobre la detencion de Francisco Antonio Sanchez por forastero y sospechoso. 3-18 De Noviembre De 1795.” n.d., Casos Criminales: Caja 7, 39., Archivo Histórico del Estado de Falcón.

⁴⁷ Ibid., ff. 3. “forastero y ser sospecha de ser esclavo y además no tener destino fijo y después de su remisión haberle dicho al Sr. Teniente ser hijo de Carora y a mi de Caracas.”

⁴⁸ Ibid., ff. 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

detentions of people of African descent. What is clear, however, is that these mechanisms emerged after the Coro revolt and that they deeply affected people's lives.

Authorities also opened up several new posts in order to control Coro's people. By August of 1797, the Capitanía de Conducta for Coro and its jurisdiction were operational. One of the office's principal orders was to police the behavior of black people in Coro's sierra. On August 17 of that year, the new Capitán de Conducta wrote a letter to some *hacendados* in Macuquita, a plantation in Coro's sierra, to apprehend a fugitive slave named Bacilio. The Capitán wrote that he had learned that Bacilio had been working as a free man on Macuquita in 1794, but was unable to do anything about it at the time, given that there was no system in place to apprehend such fugitives. The Capitán ordered the *hacendados* of Macuquita to apprehend Bacilio and bring him to jail. From there he would serve his time and then be sold.⁵⁰

The sierra's enslaved and peasant populations were not the only ones subject to new controls, however. Authorities also sought to reign in corrupt local officials. Governor Carbonell was hesitant to remove corrupt officials from their post because, "the narrow bonds of the society, which sustain justice among men with indescribable skill and harmony, would be destroyed."⁵¹ Carbonell thought that if corrupt officials would be reprimanded in the aftermath of the rebellion, that this would justify some of the rebels' actions. Carbonell did, however, argue that the newly empowered Comandante should "be attentive to their conduct and suddenly suspend them," should they continue conducting

⁵⁰ "Sobre la aprehension de un esclavo nombrado Bacilio en las montañas de Macuquita. 17 De Agosto De 1797.," n.d., Casos Criminales: Caja 7, 48., Archivo Histórico del Estado de Falcón.

⁵¹ "Expediente sobre la insurrección;"; "se echarían por tierra los estrechos vínculos de la sociedad, que con tan increíble acierto, y armonía sostiene la justicia entre los hombres."

business inappropriately.⁵² Therefore, after some time had passed, Coro's newly installed military commander would have the authority to reprimand and suspend officials suspected of corruption.

A new Comandancia Militar would be appointed to Coro and its region. Carbonell wrote: "it is indispensable by now to install a military commander in Coro so that, by having the needed jurisdiction, handles the defense and maintenance of that territory."⁵³ This new military commander would be responsible for overseeing a newly militarized zone that included a coast guard, armed troops, and a freshly installed militia system. Valderrain, a man personally responsible for the death of dozens of rebels and suspected rebels was promoted to Captain of Infantry. Fifty troops would be stationed in Coro and would be buttressed by two militias, one white and one *pardo*. Governor Carbonell sent Caracas's militias to Coro until these ambitious measures were put in place.

In order to achieve these lofty goals, authorities implemented a plan to increase the funds allocated to Coro and to improve the local economy. The Real Hacienda would fund the new posts that were to be constructed. For example, a new Teniente would be needed to register incoming vessels, and he would receive 800 pesos annually. The *comandancia militar* would receive 2,000 pesos annually, and the military commander himself would be paid 800 pesos a year. Coro's economic troubles could not be solved with allotments from the Real Hacienda, however. Carbonell wrote that Coro needed a "growth of its commerce and agriculture, as a gift to its residents."⁵⁴

⁵²Ibid.; "estar a la mira de su conducta, y suspenderlos de pronto."

⁵³Ibid.; "antes de ahora es indispensable se ponga comandante militar en Coro para que reuniendo la jurisdicción ordinaria atienda a la defensa, y conservación de aquel territorio."

⁵⁴ Ibid.; "auge a su comercio, y agricultura, en obsequio de sus habitantes."

Conclusion

After several years investigating the causes of the Coro revolt, Coro's local authorities, in conjunction with authorities of the Captaincy-General, reported to the Crown that the biggest cause of the revolt was the ability of people of different social strata to interact without any impedance from authorities. If another revolt was to be avoided, it was imperative for authorities to take a bigger interest in controlling its population in the sierra.

This lack of surveillance was indicative of a larger infrastructural problem in Coro at the time, which can be seen in the ways the revolt transpired. Without troops or a militia, Valderraín's first move was to send for help, which he received from neighboring Indian villages that provided weapons and their expertise in using them. A lack of troops and militias also required intense communal action on the part of residents who served as look outs, used their homes to as prisons, and volunteered for battle. Although Valderraín was ruthlessly eager to exterminate his opposition, Coro's lack of jails and an efficient judicial system served as an excuse to execute rebels as they were captured, something that had the momentous and intended effect of instilling fear in Coro's rebels.

After the revolt, authorities of the Captaincy-General along with local authorities in Coro, instilled mechanisms to control Coro's population of color. They established new offices and posts in Coro, such as the Captaincy of Conduct, and installed two permanent militias, along with troops, and a coast guard. The execution of Chirino, and the mutilation and display of his body, were additional mechanisms of social control installed by

authorities, which hoped that these grisly spectacles would serve as a hindrance to further acts of collective resistance.

Conclusion

The Coro revolt occurred at a time of revolutionary upheaval in the Caribbean. Coro's enslaved and free people of African descent were engaged in the revolutionary politics of the time, while espousing a political ideology all their own. The rebels intended to take power from local authorities so that poor people of African and indigenous descent would rule, without slavery, without tribute, and without taxes paid to the Crown. Coro's emancipatory movement served as inspiration for anti-colonial and anti-slavery struggles thereafter in the region, and the memory of this movement is used in anti-racist and anti-imperialist politics in Venezuela today.

Historians of slave and peasant rebellion have outlined several characteristics of rebellion in general, which have provided explanations for the preconditions present in Coro at the time of the 1795 revolt. The region of Coro was suffering an economic decline that could have affected the subsistence ethic of enslaved and free people of African descent, who comprised the majority of the region's inhabitants. The Coro rebels attempted to address their grievances through the proper channels, by expressing their concerns with local authorities. Their concerns were not adequately addressed, however, which probably influenced their decision to rebel.

This study of the Coro revolt has shown that weak mechanisms of surveillance and weak defenses could be important preconditions for slave and peasant revolt as well. Coro's sierra, where the revolt was planned well in advance, and where the violence erupted, was populated by free and enslaved people of African descent who lived and

worked with little interference from slave masters and other local white authorities. Coro's authorities also lacked weapons, a militia, or any other military forces that many of its neighboring slave societies and other Spanish American societies used to ensure control.

The Coro revolt rocked the Captaincy General of Venezuela and after the revolt, authorities of the Spanish Crown, such as the governor of the province, started to address these weak mechanisms of surveillance and defense in order to prevent other rebellions. Venezuela's authorities, in conjunction with those in Coro, found these weak institutions alarming and began an ambitious reform effort in order to police and control Coro's inhabitants, particularly free and enslaved people of African descent. Authorities implemented patrols in the sierra in order to arrest anyone suspicious and attempted to systematically prevent the marriage of free and enslaved persons. Authorities also opened new administrative units to oversee the policing of Coro's coast. The brutal execution and dismembering of Chirino's body was a calculated attempt to instill fear in Coro's free and enslaved people of the sierra.

The findings of this study have implications for future studies of slave and peasant unrest. The 1780 Comunero rebellion took place in an isolated environment in Nueva Granada similar to those found in Coro.¹ The indigenous revolutionary movements that erupted in the Andes during the 1780s were born in largely self-governing indigenous communities, albeit under the strains of a changing colonial order.² Enslaved people on plantations in northern Saint-Domingue appear to have had enough autonomy to plan and

¹ John Leddy Phelan, *The People and the King: The Comunero Revolution in Colombia, 1781* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).

² Sergio Serulnikov, *Subverting Colonial Authority: Challenges to Spanish Rule in Eighteenth-Century Southern Andes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

execute the only successful slave revolt in human history.³ Historians should continue to investigate the mechanisms of control utilized in plantation societies and other rural societies in the Americas. These pursuits should help us better understand the nature of social control, rebellion, and revolution.

These findings also point to the unusual nature of slavery in Venezuela, and shows that our understandings of slavery are incomplete without knowing more about Venezuela and other societies with slaves. At the close of the eighteenth century, approximately 60% of Venezuelans were of African descent, yet less than a third of them were enslaved. Enslaved people in Coro's sierra worked side by side with free people of African descent, and their daily lives in relation to their work and their families were quite similar. It is possible that largely autonomous plantation communities in Venezuela operated in ways similar to that of Coro. More research is needed on slavery in Venezuela to find out why and how so many people were manumitted, and to uncover more about the daily lives of enslaved and free people of color who worked these plantations.

³ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*; Carolyn E Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution From Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990).

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Archivo General de Indias. [Seville, Spain] Caracas, 93. Guillemi, Juan. "Acusa Recivo Una Real Orden De Josef Caridad Gonzalez." May 12, 1792.

Archivo General de Indias. [Seville, Spain] Caracas, 95. Valderrain, Mariano. "Lista De Sujetos Que Concurrieron Al Servicio Del Rey 11 De Mayo a 12 De Mayo." 1796.

Archivo General de Indias. [Seville, Spain] Caracas, 426 "Expediente Sobre La Insurrección De Los Negros, Zambos y Mulatos Proyectada En El Año 1795 a Las Inmediaciones De La Ciudad De Coro, Provincia De Caracas." 1798.

Archivo Histórico del Estado de Falcón. Casos Criminales: Caja 7, 39 "Sobre La Detencion De Francisco Antonio Sanchez Por Forastero y Sospechoso. 3-18 De Noviembre De 1795." n.d..

Archivo Histórico del Estado de Falcón. Casos Criminales: Caja 7 41 "Caso Contra Un Negro Llamado Francisquito, 12 De Mayo-16 De Diciembre, 1796," n.d..

Archivo Histórico del Estado de Falcón. Casos Criminales: Caja 7, 48 "Sobre La Aprehension De Un Esclavo Nombrado Bacilio En Las Montañas De Macuquita. 17 De Agosto De 1797." n.d.

Archivo Histórico del Estado de Falcón . Tellería, Josef. "Testamentaria De Joseph De Tellería, Diligencias Sobre La Venta La Mujer e Hijos De Jose Leonardo Chirino." 1798.

Biblioteca Oscar Bullón. Tellería, Josef. "N. 15 Ynforma, Al Real Consulado De Comercio De Venezuela, El Diputado De Coro, Lo Que Es Esta Provincia: Las Causas De La Total Desolacion En Que Se Halla, y Medios Que Le Paracen Adequados Para Su Prosperidad y Opulencia." 1794.

Secondary Sources

Aizpurua, Ramón. "Revolution and politics in Venezuela and Curaçao, 1795-1800." In *Curaçao in the Age of Revolutions, 1795-1800*, ed. Wim Klooster and Gert Oostindie, 97-122. Leiden: KITLV Press, 2011.

Aptheker, Herbert. *American Negro Slave Revolts*. New York: International Publishers, 1969.

- Arcaya, Pedro Manuel. *Insurrección de los negros de la serranía de Coro*. Caracas, 1949.
- Arendt, Hannah. *On Revolution*. New York: Viking Press, 1963.
- Ballagh, James Curtis. *A History of Slavery in Virginia*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1902.
- Bell, J. Bowyer. *On Revolt: Strategies of National Liberation*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976.
- Bennett, Herman L. *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003.
- Berlin, Ira. *Many Thousands Gone: the First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Burnard, Trevor G. *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- Childs, Matt D. and Manuel Barcia, "Cuba" in *The Oxford Handbook of Slavery in the Americas* by Robert L. Paquette and Mark M. Smith, 97–103. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Childs, Matt D. *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle Against Atlantic Slavery*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- Coffin, Joshua and American Anti-Slavery Society. *An Account of Some of the Principal Slave Insurrections and Others Which Have Occurred or Been Attempted in the United States and Elsewhere During the Last Two Centuries with Various Remarks*. New York: Published by the American Anti-Slavery Society, 1860.
- Craton, Michael. *Testing the Chains : Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982.
- Davis, David Brion. *Inhuman Bondage: the Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- de Altolaguirre, Angel y Duvale. *Relaciones geográficas de la gobernación de Venezuela (1767-68) Con prólogo y notas*. Caracas: Ediciones de la Presidencia de la República de Venezuela, 1954.
- de la Fuente, Alejandro. "Slave Law and Claims-Making in Cuba: The Tannenbaum Debate Revisited." *Law and History Review* 22, no. 2 (2004): 339–369.
- Dubois, Laurent. *Avengers of the New World : the Story of the Haitian Revolution*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004.

- Ferrer, Ada. "Speaking of Haiti: Slavery, Revolution, and Freedom in Cuban Slave Testimony," *The World of the Haitian Revolution*, from Geggus and Fiering, 223–247. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009.
- Ferrer, Ada. "Haiti, Free Soil, and Antislavery in the Revolutionary Atlantic." *American Historical Review* 117, no. 1 (2012): 40–66.
- Fischer, Sibylle. *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.
- Garraway, Doris Lorraine. *Tree of Liberty: Cultural Legacies of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008.
- Gaspar, David Barry. *Bondmen & Rebels: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua, with Implications for Colonial British America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985.
- Gatrell, Vic. *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People, 1770-1868*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Geggus, David Patrick and Norman Fiering. *The World of the Haitian Revolution*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009.
- Genovese, Eugene D. *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979.
- Gil Rivas, Pedro A., Luis Dovale Prado, and Lidia Lusmila Bello. *La insurrección de los negros de la sierra coriana, 10 de mayo de 1795: Notas para la discusión*. Caracas: Dirección de Cultura, Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1996.
- Guha, Ranajit and James Scott. *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.
- Hackel, Steven W. and Omohundro Institute of Early American History & Culture. *Children of Coyote, Missionaries of Saint Francis: Indian-Spanish Relations in Colonial California, 1769-1850*. Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 2005.
- Helg, Aline. *Liberty & Equality in Caribbean Colombia, 1770-1835*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- Hobsbawm, E.J. and George F. E. Rudé. *Captain Swing*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1968.

- Hobsbawm, E.J. *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848*. Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1962.
- Jenson, Deborah. *Beyond the Slave Narrative : Politics, Sex, and Manuscripts in the Haitian Revolution*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011.
- Johnson, Sara E. *The Fear of French Negroes: Transcolonial Collaboration in the Revolutionary Americas*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012.
- Kuethe, Allan J. "Bourbon Reforms," *Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture*, by Jay Kinsbruner and Erick Detlef Langer. Detroit : Charles Scribner's Sons, 2008.
- Landers, Jane. *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010.
- Lugo, Juan Ramón. *A propósito de doscientos años de olvido : Trozos de la serranía, negra luz que aún hoy arde*. Caracas: Asociación Cultural José Leonardo Chirino, Red Venezolana, Capítulo Falcón, 2006.
- Lugo, Juan Ramón and Fulvia M Polanco B. *Reflexiones sobre el zambo José Leonardo y tradiciones de la sierra*. Venezuela: Asociación Cultural "José Leonardo Chirino" : CONAC, 1998.
- Lynch, John. *Simón Bolívar: a Life*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Lynch, John. *The Spanish American Revolutions, 1808-1826*. New York: Norton, 1973.
- Martí, Mariano, Lino Gómez Canedo, and Juan Joseph Guzmán. *Obispo Mariano Martí: Documentos relativos a su visita pastoral de la Diócesis de Caracas, 1771-1784*. Caracas: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 1969.
- Midlo Hall, Gwendolyn. *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies; a Comparison of St. Domingue and Cuba*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971.
- Nesbitt, Nick. *Universal Emancipation : the Haitian Revolution and the Radical Enlightenment*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008.
- Paquette, Robert L. *Sugar is Made with Blood : the Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict Between Empires Over Slavery in Cuba*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1988.
- Paton, Diana. *No Bond But the Law: Punishment, Race, and Gender in Jamaican State Formation, 1780-1870*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Reis, João José. *Slave Rebellion in Brazil : the Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

- Rupert, Linda. "Marronage, Manumission and Maritime Trade in the Early Modern Caribbean." *Slavery & Abolition* 30, no. 3 (2009): 361–382.
- Santiago Gerardo Suarez, Marina. *Milicias y ejército en la colonia*. Caracas: Autor, 1971.
- Scott, James C. *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976.
- Soriano, María Cristina. "Rumors of Change: Repercussions of Caribbean Turmoil and Social Conflicts in Venezuela (1790-1810)." PhD diss.: New York University, 2011.
- Spiereburg, Petrus Cornelis. *The Spectacle of Suffering: Executions and the Evolution of Repression : From a Preindustrial Metropolis to the European Experience*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Thompson, E.P. "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century." *Past & Present* 50 (1971): 76–136.
- Thornton, John K. *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1680*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Thornton, John K. "African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion." *The American Historical Review* 96 (1991): 1101-13.
- Thornton, John K. "African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution." *Origins of the Black Atlantic*, edited by Laurent Dubois and Julius S. Scott, 195-213. New York: Routledge, 2010.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past : Power and the Production of History*. Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1995.
- Tutino, John. *From Insurrection to Revolution in Mexico: Social Bases of Agrarian Violence, 1750-1940*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986.
- Viotti da Costa, Emília. *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: the Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.