

Irish Indentured Servants, Papists and Colonists in Spanish Colonial Puerto Rico, ca. 1650-1800

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Abstract

The historical treatment of Irish Catholics by the English and British governments has been the subject of much examination, but systematic research on the social, economic, and political impact of Irish refugees who sought asylum in Spain and Latin America at various times since the sixteenth century has only recently drawn the attention of scholars. The Irish experience in Spanish colonial Puerto Rico is no exception. Puerto Rican historiography acknowledges the presence of a handful of Irish planters in the late eighteenth century, but provides few clues about those who came before or after that time (Picó 1986: 142). Nor are the 'push' factors that might help explain why they came to the island discussed at any length. This essay seeks to bridge this gap by linking the Irish diaspora to a long history of Anglo-Spanish rivalry both in Europe and the West Indies. In doing so, it also aims to show how changes in Spain's colonial priorities impacted on Irish immigration in Puerto Rico. Three numerically small but significant Irish 'waves' are identified and briefly examined in the context of Spain's foreign immigration policy: indentured servants around the middle of the seventeenth century; illegal traders in the early 1700s; and Irish farmers, artisans and soldiers during the late Bourbon period, c. 1750-1815.

Anglo-Spanish Rivalry in the Caribbean

Inter-imperial competition between Spain and England over New World resources characterised the first four hundred years of the post-Columbian era. Initially, Spain (or more properly, Castille) claimed the entire American region as its exclusive Catholic domain, but by the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas (a Hispano-Portuguese treaty that divided the 'New World' in half between the two powers), Portugal had managed to 'legalise' its colonial occupation of Brazil. From the perspective of both Portugal and Spain, non-Iberian Europeans who dared set foot in the region were considered intruders. However, the logistical difficulties of settling such a vast realm eventually compelled Spain to concentrate on the mineral enclaves of Mesoamerica and the Andean world. Less economically promising areas were abandoned, left to their native inhabitants, or used as refuelling stations for the *carrera de Indias*, that is, the transatlantic voyage to the Americas.

Spain's European challengers targeted these weak links for exploration, plunder and ultimately colonisation, starting in the Lesser Antilles and expanding into the Bahamas, Jamaica, western Hispaniola, the Mosquito bay, and the Atlantic shores of North America in

the course of the seventeenth century. As they established themselves there, they turned to smuggling European goods into Spanish dominions in exchange for their mineral wealth, pearls and exotic tropical products. As soon as commercial sugar production began in earnest in the non-Hispanic Caribbean, they also bartered for beasts of burden, provisions and timber. Spain's inability to satisfy the growing demand in the Indies for alcoholic beverages, textiles, industrial equipment, weapons and even slaves stimulated this clandestine activity. The encroachment often escalated into state-commissioned piracy and various other armed conflicts, including the pillaging of settlements, naval warfare and the capture of American territories that each European polity claimed to 'own'. By the eighteenth century, these struggles had reduced Iberian hegemony in the Caribbean to Cuba, Hispaniola (present-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic), Puerto Rico and Trinidad. England, France, Denmark and Holland continued to battle amongst each other for the spoils (Morales Carrión 1974).

Of the large areas of American soil that fell into English hands, none became more important than the sugar-growing regions. Commercial sugar production was introduced into the Spanish Antilles and spread out to the

mainland, especially on the Atlantic seashores of Mexico and Brazil. It began replacing tobacco as the principal economic pursuit in the eastern Caribbean in the 1640s in places like Barbados, where the phrase 'Barbadian planter' became synonymous with wealth and power. In 1655 England seized Spanish Jamaica and opened it up to colonisation by its subjects from Europe and the Americas.

The centre of English piratical raids against the Spanish Main, Cuba and Hispaniola, Jamaica underwent a gradual transformation into a flourishing sugar island, starting around 1700. The sugar planters of the expanded British Caribbean commanded a great deal of power at home. Organised into a dominant political force known as the West Indian lobby, they did their best to keep England from acquiring new American territories where sugar could be grown profitably. They also supported policies designed to curtail smuggled sugar and its by-products — rum and molasses — from entering England from British North America (Alonso and Flores 1998: 38-43). New Englanders had been bartering for these and other tropical products in the West Indies since the middle of the seventeenth century (Williams 1970: 164-66).

England's loss of its North American colonies following the American Revolutionary War altered this state of affairs by triggering renewed British territorial expansion in the Americas. One of its targets would be Puerto Rico. Relatively large when compared to its eastern neighbours and ideally suited for large-scale sugar cultivation, the Spanish colony was a thorn in the side of the British West Indian lobby. Puerto Rican buccaneers frequently attacked British vessels and raided the seaside settlements and plantations across the Lesser Antilles. Puerto Rico is a short distance away from the former British Caribbean colonies of Tortola, Antigua, Virgin Gorda, Saint Kitts, Nevis, and Montserrat. Before 1800 much of its coastline had been largely unguarded and its interior thickly forested. These conditions attracted countless fugitive slaves fleeing their British captors, depriving them of valuable labour (Morales Carrión 1974; China 1997).

British Caribbean planters desperately sought to cut their losses by pressuring England to confront the Spaniards on this issue. Those from colonies experiencing the destructive effects of deforestation and soil erosion also envisioned making Puerto Rico their next sugar frontier. English merchants foresaw gaining a major foothold in the central Caribbean from which to expand their illegal trade with the Spanish Antilles and northern South America.

The Irish in the Caribbean

Following Oliver Cromwell's conquest of Ireland, Irish military prisoners, religious dissidents and abductees were shipped out to the British Caribbean plantations as indentured workers (Dunn 1972: 69). Historian Hilary Mc. D. Beckles described the attitude of the British planters toward their victims:

English masters considered their Irish servants as belonging to a backward culture, unfit to contribute anything beyond their labor to colonial development. Furthermore, their adherence to the Catholic religion reinforced the planters' perception of them as opposed to the English Protestant colonizing mission that in fact had begun in Ireland. Irish servants, then, were seen by the English planter class as an enemy within and were treated accordingly (Beckles 1990: 510-11).

They were often mistreated by a biased judicial system, 'imprisoned, publicly flogged, [and banished] for arbitrary or minor offences (Beckles 1990: 513). Labour unrest and other forms of resistance by the Irish, 'whom some [English planters] thought a greater threat than their African slaves', were swiftly and brutally suppressed (Beckles 1990: 513). Many suffered slave-like working and living conditions, which often fuelled anti-British plots and rebellions.

Rumours of collaborative plots by Irish servants and enslaved Africans circulated in the Bahamas in the 1650s and 1660s (Bernhard 1999: 89-91). The Irish rose up violently in Saint Kitts in 1666 and in Montserrat in 1667, and later defected to the invading French forces. Over one-hundred rebelled again in Saint Kitts two years later. In Antigua and

Montserrat, the British conducted mass arrests and deportations of pro-French Irish servants (Beckles 1990: 509; 519-20). In 1694, Jamaica's Governor William Beeston suspected that Irish Papists were actively encouraging the French to invade the island (Great Britain, Board of Trade: 98).

In 1729, the Jamaica Assembly passed an Act 'to prevent dangers that may arise from disguised, as well as declared Papists' (Great Britain, Board of Trade: 159). The measure responded to public statements by Irish servants to the effect that they would not fight the Spaniards in the event that they attacked Jamaica, and to their alleged secret correspondence with the Spaniards in Cuba (Headlam 1964, Governor Hunter to the Council of Trade and Plantations, 6 September 1729).

Following a pattern established by Amerindians, sea flight as a means to escape servitude became commonplace for both indentured servants and African captives (Fergus 1994: 25; Beckles 1985: 79-95; Handler 1997: 183-225). Ordinances in Saint Christopher (or Saint Kitts) penalised anyone who sailed off with servants without authorisation (*An Abridgment of the Acts of Assembly... of St. Christopher* 1740: 189-194). Puerto Rico, Hispaniola and Cuba became popular destinations for the fugitives. The Spaniards often labelled the servants *ingleses* (English), but there can be little doubt that most such cases referred to the Irish. In 1657, two Dutch and two British Catholics, who claimed to have been held as slaves by the British in Saint Thomas, fled to Puerto Rico. So did the 21-year old Irish servant Joseph Marques in 1688, who absconded from the British Virgin Islands. Three more sought shelter in the western seaside town of Aguada in 1700. The anonymous *inglés* married to a Black female slave who led thirty-six African maroons and four Amerindian captives to Puerto Rico to request asylum in 1715 was probably Irish. In 1763 the Irish servant Diego Sky fled to Puerto Rico along with a British companion from Spanishtown, Jamaica (Chinae 1997).

At the beginning of the century, in 1701, alarmed by the frequency and magnitude of the maritime exodus, the Jamaica Assembly passed an Act 'to prevent freemen, white servants, negroes and other slaves running away from this Island in shallops, boats, and other vessels.' (Headlam 1964: vol. 19, #1172). A decade later, Governor Hamilton reported that his counterpart in Santo Domingo sought to 'inveigle several Irish Papists settled in H.M. colonies...alleading it was for their interest to desert the tyranny these heretick Dogs exercis'd over them' (Headlam 1964: vol. 26, #268). As late as 1768 the authorities in Cuba reported the arrival of Irish escapees from Jamaica (AGI-SD, Papeles de Cuba, leg. 1049).

Despite the antagonistic climate between England and Spain and the latter's policy of harbouring and 'freeing' the Irish servants, Spain exercised strict control over foreign immigrants in a persistent, but unrealistic attempt to keep the riches of the Indies from falling in the hands of non-Hispanics. Although the Spanish Crown incorporated or collaborated with subjects from various parts of Europe — for example, Austrians, Italians, and French — the laws of the Indies strictly forbade foreigners from settling or trading in Spanish America (Chinae 2002). However, many non-Iberians slipped past these prohibitions. Some had become hispanicised prior to or after their arrival in the Americas. Keeping track of their whereabouts in such a vast empire, particularly as they moved about within and outside their first points of destination, was next to impossible. Some blended easily into their host societies, stayed out of the way, or built familial and economic ties with subjects of Spain in the Indies, further obstructing their detection, apprehension, and deportation (Chinae 2002).

Since 'foreigners' hailed from diverse social classes and occupational backgrounds, these factors often helped determine how they fared in the Spanish American colonies. Researchers who write about them in monolithic terms fail to account for these important differences. To be sure, there were several distinct 'waves' of Irish migrants in the Caribbean. Irish servants

who sought asylum in Puerto Rico often came with little more than their shirts on their backs and gratefully repaid their Spanish hosts in a variety of ways. Like African maroons, some willingly provided valuable information about the military conditions of Spain's European rivals. Others joined the local Spanish militia or navy. They also arrived at a time, roughly from the 1650s to the 1760s, when Puerto Rico was sparsely populated and in dire need of extra hands for its defence. During the course of previous research on maritime maroons during this period, I found no evidence that any servant was ever returned to their Danish, Dutch, French or British 'masters' (China 1997).

By contrast, Irish immigrants whose presence in Puerto Rico, or in other Spanish American territories for that matter, the colonial authorities viewed as a real or likely mercantilist breach, were generally unwelcome. Several times between 1686 and 1701, the Spanish Crown denied Flemish and Irish families authorisation to settle in Hispaniola. In this instance, their potential infringement on the Spanish American trade in a colony already heavily involved in contraband was a major reason for turning them down (Gutiérrez Escudero 1983: 58-61). The same principle applied to Puerto Rico, as typified by Governor Miguel de Muesas's 1770 deportation of the Irish illegal immigrant, Thomas Fitzgerald. An investigation tied him to illegal trade in the southern district of Humacao. Daniel O'Flaherty was also arrested and charged with smuggling goods, but managed to escape before he could be legally tried (Feliciano Ramos 1984: 90-94).

Late eighteenth-century developments in Trinidad, located just off South America, reveal another variation of the Spanish Crown's ambiguous position with respect to foreign immigration in its American colonies. As in much of the Hispanic Caribbean, Trinidad was thinly settled and deeply implicated in illegal trading. Spanish imperial planners had few options to choose from in addressing conditions in the marginal colony. Since Trinidad lacked mineral wealth and its economy

was stagnant, Spanish immigrants preferred to settle elsewhere. Relinquishing it to European foes was not practical, since Trinidad was part of a chain of Caribbean defensive posts extending from Florida to northern South America (Morales Carrión 1976: 26-7).

Under these circumstances, settlement by selected foreigners from friendly, Catholic countries became a viable alternative for revitalising Trinidad's languishing economy. Colonists from the French Caribbean and later Irish residing in Danish-held Saint Croix, especially those with slaves and desirable plantation-applicable trades, were enticed to relocate to Trinidad. Land and other incentives were granted to them to make the offer attractive (Joseph 1970: 158-167; Borde 1982: 153-207).

This marked shift from excluding to luring foreign immigrants responded to Charles III's military, fiscal and administrative overhaul of the Spanish American empire. In essence the Bourbon reforms, as some of these changes became known collectively, aimed to boost royal revenues and bring peripheral regions of the Indies into closer alignment with Spanish imperial goals. In the late 1760s, the monarch had recruited immigrants from Germany, France, Switzerland and Greece to colonise deserted regions in Spain, including the southern region of Sierra Morena (Hull 1980: 167-8; Lynch 1989: 213-4).

Although results were mixed, these migrants persuaded the Crown to lessen restrictions on foreign colonisation in Spanish America. The selection of Trinidad in 1776 sought to test out the idea in a colony considered among the least profitable and most militarily vulnerable of the Spanish Antilles. The 'experiment' succeeded economically as Trinidad experienced a remarkable agrarian boom over the following two decades. But it was not accompanied by any significant improvements in the island's defensive capability, an oversight that cost Spain the colony when the British easily took over it in 1797 (Newson 1979: 139; 147).

Irish Settlers during the Transition to Commercial Agriculture in Puerto Rico

With a population in 1776 estimated at around 70,000 inhabitants and growing, Puerto Rico did not desperately need as large an infusion of foreign immigrants as Trinidad. When contemporary observers recommended that immigrants settle it, they invariably hoped to attract colonists with capital, skills or slaves capable of converting Puerto Rico's agricultural wealth into cash crops. The Bourbons agreed in principle, but made no effort to go beyond what they had done for Trinidad. Instead, they focused mainly on increasing mercantile ties between the peninsula and the Hispanic Caribbean through the 1778 *comercio libre* (free trade) policy. They also promoted the importation of African captives via slave trade contracts and special permits.

Neither initiative had the desired impact on Puerto Rico, which continued to linger on the fringes of the Hispanic American economy for much of the eighteenth century. Also launched in 1778, one reformist measure that seemed promising was the re-appropriation and reallocation of all state-owned land among farmers. A special dispensation was simultaneously granted to landowners: they were allowed to contract a fixed number of agricultural specialists from the nearby non-Hispanic Caribbean to assist them in establishing and running their plantations.

The experts had to be both white and Catholic, requirements that appealed to Irish planters, overseers and skilled craftsmen residing in the nearby British and Danish colonies. No one knows for certain how many of them took advantage of the opportunity, but their noticeable presence in Puerto Rico in the last third of the eighteenth century appears to suggest that a considerable number surely did. Felipe Doran, a native of Carlow, was one of them (AGI-Ultramar, leg. 405, Cámara de Indias to King, 16 January 1804).

Alejandro O'Reilly, of County Meath, who migrated to Spain in his early teens and later joined the Hibernia Infantry Regiment, was the highest ranked Irishman serving in the Spanish

armed forces to come to Puerto Rico around this time. A career officer holding the rank of Field Marshall in 1765, he was dispatched to Puerto Rico a few years earlier in response to the British occupation of Havana. His *memoria*, or report, of Puerto Rico enabled the Spanish Crown to get a better sense of the island's military weaknesses and economic potential. Credited with re-organising the local militias, O'Reilly also set out to revamp the fortifications around San Juan (Torres 1969; Beerman 1982).

The latter task fell to Colonel Tomás O'Daly, a native of County Galway who began his military career as a second lieutenant under Juan (John) Sherlock's Ultonia Regiment in 1744. Trained as a military engineer in the Academia de Barcelona, he served in Madrid, El Ferrol, and Girón (AGS-Guerra, legs. 2668 and 3091). Granted land in the vicinity of San Juan, O'Daly began developing it into a thriving sugar hacienda (AGI-SD, leg. 2300, 15 July 1761). With that step, he joined an embryonic Irish immigrant community that would come to be associated with the growth of commercial agriculture. Upon his untimely death in 1781, his brother Jaime took over the property and helped raise Tomás's three children, Isabel, Manuel, and Demetrio (AGI-SD, leg. 2393, 6 July 1797).

A colourful character, Jaime left Ireland possibly in his late twenties and took up residence in Cádiz, Spain, around 1763. Two years later, he sailed off to the Dutch Caribbean colony of Saint Eustatius. When a Spanish fleet ran aground near the British colony of Anguilla, Jaime and a business partner came to its aid. In compensation, the Spanish Crown gave him a temporary licence to export products from Puerto Rico to recoup the funds both had spent on refitting the stranded convoy. He applied for a licence to embark from Cádiz to Puerto Rico on 6 November 1775, but did not leave until 23 February 1776 (AGI, Casa de Contratación, leg. 5522, no. 1, r. 21).

Sheltered by Tomás, he remained on the island beyond the stipulated time. Over the next decade, Jaime built up a reputation as a successful sugar and tobacco planter and

merchant, with connections across the non-Hispanic Caribbean and Europe (Torres 1962; Pérez Toledo 1983). In 1793, detractors cited his foreign status to block his nomination to a post on the prestigious San Juan city council (AGI-SD, leg. 2372, 16 December 1793). When the Spanish Crown appointed him director of the Royal Tobacco Factory in 1787, one of his *fiadores* (guarantors) was Bernardo Ward, the Irish economist and adviser to the Spanish monarch King Ferdinand VI (China 2001).

Jaime claimed blood ties to Lieutenant Timoteo O'Daly and Captain Pedro O'Daly, officers of the Hibernia Regiment that took part in the 1781 Spanish capture of Pensacola, Florida. Lieutenant Colonel Arturo O'Neill, also of Hibernia, co-led the final assault that dislodged the British forces. For his feat, Spain named him Governor of West Florida and subsequently appointed him to the Supreme Council of War (Murphy 1960: 220-22; Beerman 1981: 29-41; Walsh 1957: 38). In 1792, he had been placed on the short list of candidates to replace Governor Miguel de Uztáriz, who passed away while en route to Spain (AGS-Guerra, leg. 7146). His two nephews, Julio (or Tulio) and Arturo O'Neill y O'Kelly, born in Saint Croix, moved to Puerto Rico in 1783 with their slaves and plantation equipment (AGI-SD, leg. 2364, 15 October 1783). Another Irish planter residing in Saint Croix, Tomás Armstrong followed them in 1791 (AGI-SD, leg. 2393, 16 February 1791).

Others were not so lucky, no doubt because their intentions would have violated regulations that banned foreigners on Spanish soil from partaking in the navigational and commercial trades. Such was the case of Juan Tuite, a resident of Saint Croix with business ties to England. In 1766, he proposed setting up an Irish colony of one hundred well-to-do families in Puerto Rico. He asked for authorisation to bring in provisions, tools and slaves not just for his settlers, but also to supply Puerto Rico and other Spanish American colonies. Clearly, Tuite's mercantile ambitions contravened the Laws of the Indies, which could explain why his project was not favourably received (AGS-Estado, leg. 6961, exp. 14, 1766).

In order to gain approval to import slaves into Puerto Rico, Tuite needed a licence. This may have been possible, especially during acute labour shortages. But the Spanish Crown had already granted an exclusive slave importation right, or *asiento*, to a private party or company between 1765 and 1789. Thereafter, the Crown opened the trade in African captives to all its subjects and foreigners upon payment of the applicable slave importation and sales duties. Joaquín Power y Morgan came to Puerto Rico in connection with the Compañía de Asiento de Negros and married a local Creole, María Josefa Giralt (AGI-SD, leg. 2389; AGMS, 1ra. Sección, leg. P-2619). His paternal grandfather Pedro Power was a native of Waterford who emigrated from Ireland to Bordeaux. Father José Bautista Power, born in the French port city, relocated to Biscay, northern Spain (Bilbao Acedos 2004: 102-3). Born in 1775 in San Juan, one of Joaquín's sons, Ramón Power y Giralt, became Puerto Rico's representative to the Spanish *Cortes* in 1808 and later president of the same legislative assembly (Caro 1969).

Several servicemen of the Irish regiments that saw action in Central and South America around this time also remained behind in the Hispanic Caribbean. Patricio O'Haurahan and Cristóbal Conway, both of the Irlanda Regiment, were two of them (AGMS, leg. 7147, exp. 33, 24 July 1790 and exp. 40, 25 May 1790). A handful of lesser known Irish settlers also came to Puerto Rico around this period. Besides the O'Dalys and O'Neills, at least two other separate pairs of brothers, David and Jaime Quinlan and Miguel and Patricio Kirwan, established sugar haciendas. Like the O'Dalys, the Kirwans also came from County Galway (AGPR, Loíza, carpeta 1, 1791-1803). Their fellow countrymen, Miguel Conway, Patricio Fitzpatrick, Felipe Doran, Jaime Kiernan, and Antonio Skerret, were also commercial farmers around northern Puerto Rico, from Toa Baja in the northeast to Luquillo in the east (Bermejo-García 1970: 125-26). Since some of the latter began as overseers, there is a strong possibility that they originated from the nearby non-Hispanic colonies where former Irish servants with limited prospects for social mobility had

little choice but to seek greener pastures elsewhere (Walters 1982).

The 1797 English Invasion of Puerto Rico

In the early morning of 17 April 1797, a large convoy approached the waters off San Juan, the capital of Puerto Rico. Even though it hoisted no flags at first, a state of war between Spain and England dictated caution. So started the report filed by Brigadier Ramón de Castro, Captain General of Puerto Rico, about the largest and last British attempt to wrest territories in the Americas from Spanish control. Between sixty and sixty-four vessels ferrying an estimated ten thousand combatants, including German and black auxiliaries, took part in the attack. The outbreak of hostilities began the following day and ended disastrously for the aggressors on 1 May (Tapia y Rivera 1970: 669-718).

For British warmongers, the attack was a costly miscalculation. They had grossly underestimated both the citadel's ability to fend off enemy strikes and the tenacity of its defenders. During the two-week conflict they were held back by an impregnable fortified system circling the city, working in tandem with organised resistance forces deploying both frontal charges and guerrilla tactics. Prevented from gaining any significant ground, the invaders abandoned a large quantity of their armaments and re-boarded their ships in the cover of night. It was a resounding victory for the island's armed forces, the overwhelming majority of whom were local people (Tapia y Rivera 1970: 669-718).

This event marked a turning point in the history of Spanish colonial Puerto Rico. In its aftermath the lettered elite seized the opportunity to leverage a series of concessions, including tax relief, privileges and honorific titles for various government functionaries, and special recognition of the capital as 'most noble and loyal' (Tapia y Rivera 1970: 715-18). Poor residents of the adjacent Loíza and Cangrejos settlements, most of them black and/or former maroons, boasted of their own active role in thwarting the British invasion, a feat commemorated by their descendants to this day (Giusti 2000: 33-41). Local lore immortalised

the heroism displayed by the likes of José 'Pepe' Díaz, an officer from the peripheral town of Toa Alta killed while charging a British battery in the Martín Peña bridge (Morales Carrión 1974: 117).

Fascinatingly, the traditionally despised 'barbaric' countryside (symbolically represented by the rural folk from throughout the island who answered Castro's call to arms) had saved the ostentatious, 'civilised' walled city of San Juan (Giusti 1993: 20). According to historian Fernando Picó, the triumph over the numerically superior English expedition may have even led to 'the crystallisation of a national sentiment' (Picó 1986: 123).

Having invested considerable funds and manpower in upgrading defences in Puerto Rico in the last third of the eighteenth century, the Spanish Crown could not have been more pleased with the defeat of its British opponent. Seen from an imperial perspective, however, the show of force displayed by the Puerto Ricans was as impressive as it was alarming. They had demonstrated their loyalty, but also their ability to come together and fight for their homeland. In an age when slave revolts and pro-independence agitation were on the increase, Spain viewed this development with trepidation.

Several important economic reforms sought to blunt this budding movement of self-affirmation. The opening of five additional island ports in 1805 was expected to increase the exportation of tropical staples by eliminating the need to ship them out only through the 'official' port of San Juan. A decade later, Spain granted Puerto Rico a '*Cédula de Gracias*' to attract capital and skilled workers, and to otherwise further the island's agricultural growth. The Crown expected these types of concessions to keep the islanders from severing the colonial bond (Scarano 1984: 18).

There was one unanticipated consequence of the British attack that has received only scant attention in the historical literature: the expulsion of English-speaking European foreigners alleged to have supported the anti-Spanish military campaign. Three days into the

battle, Governor Castro reported that a party of Loíza blacks had captured two German soldiers. They were escorted to the capital, where a routine check of their backpacks uncovered a piece of paper with the name of a San Juan resident. To guard against the possibility that the enemy might gain intelligence from anyone in the city or the island, Castro ordered some of the local residents and foreigners, especially those of English and Irish descent, to be placed under surveillance. The directive coincided with a report that British soldiers had looted the sugar plantations owned by José Giralta and Jaime O'Daly. Eventually, he had them arrested and imprisoned (Tapia y Rivera 1970: 680).

Castro extended his expulsion order to all foreigners, yet apparently those affected by it were overwhelmingly Irish. Jaime Quinlan, Jaime O'Daly, Miguel Conway, Juan Nagle, Miguel and Patricio Kirwan, Tomás Armstrong, Jaime Kiernan, Felipe Doran, Patricio Fitzpatrick and Antonio Skerret were given eight days to leave the island (AGS-Guerra, leg. 7146, exp. 2, 14 March 1797; AGI-Ultramar, leg. 451, 3 July 1797). Miguel Kirwan ended up in Saint Thomas, where he passed away alone in September 1798. His wife Juana Rita Salgado and daughter Isabel, fourteen years old at the time, stayed behind in Puerto Rico. His worldly possessions in Loíza included nine slaves, countless heads of cattle, pastures and four houses. The land itself was appraised at 28,617 pesos (AGPR, Loíza, carpeta 1, 1791-1803). His brother Patricio, Miguel Conway and some four or five unidentified Irish colonists were taken out of jail and cast off the island. Fifty-year-old Juan Nagle, who had successfully made the transition from overseer to planter, died soon after being released (AGS-Guerra, leg. 7146, exp. 2, 14 March 1797). O'Daly was incarcerated for forty-six days (AGI-SD, leg. 2393, 15 September 1797). The fate of the others could not be ascertained.

Even though the situation looked grim for the Irish, their defenders in Puerto Rico lost little time in making their views known to the Spanish Crown. At least two prominent local figures spoke out for them in vigorous terms.

Treasury official Felipe Antonio Mejía condemned Castro's pronouncement as legally unjustified and economically counter-productive. He pointed out that there was no credible evidence to support the claim that the Irish had aided the enemy, nor any real effort to get at the truth. All were arbitrarily rounded up, locked up, and told to leave the island without ever facing a court of law.

O'Daly, a royal appointee, was put behind bars and denied an opportunity to secure the accounts of the Royal Tobacco Factory as mandated by the Laws of the Indies. Moreover, Mejía wrote to the King, their unwarranted removal went against everything the Crown had done to jump-start the economies of the Spanish Antilles, such as reapportioning state-owned land among farmers, waiving certain import and export duties, and granting special dispensations to foreigners knowledgeable in commercial agriculture. After all, he added, the Irish *hacendados* (landowners) whom Castro had expelled without just cause were spearheading the conversion of swampy, uncultivated lands into flourishing plantations (AGI-Ultramar, leg. 451, 3 July 1797).

The Spanish Secretary of State Juan Manuel Alvarez forwarded a confidential letter to Bishop Juan Bautista to try to learn what really happened. According to the informant, an anonymous flyer circulating after the British invaded contended that the enemy planned to capture Governor Castro's wife who had taken refuge in the town of Bayamón. It also claimed that Nagle, Conway, O'Daly, the Kirwans and others were keeping contact with the British. The governor hastily charged them with aiding the enemy and placed them under guard in solitary confinement. In the end, however, none of the allegations were proven.

To cover up the wrong, the bishop continued, Governor Castro cloaked his actions by recourse to the laws that forbade aliens from settling in Spanish America. Still, his order of expulsion against the Irish excluded all other foreigners, 'of which there are plenty' (AGS-Guerra, leg. 7146, exp. 2, 14 March 1797). The bishop described Conway as 'one of the most proper and honorable men' he had known. His

only fault, Batista went on, was to have an Irish nephew in the ranks of the British forces that assaulted the island although no communication between the two was ever established. The ecclesiastical official added that Nagle had done nothing to merit his ill-treatment. He merely went to the British general leading the attack with a signed passport from a local Spanish commander to retrieve several slaves stolen by his soldiers, all of which Nagle had dutifully informed Governor Castro. Echoing Mejía's comments, he added:

In effect, Your Excellency, these honorable Irishmen, most of them married, all landowners, dwelling and grounded in this island for so many years, are the ones who have opened the eyes of these our islanders; they have taught [them] to make and refine our rums; to plant sugar cane, manufacturing it and whitening it with the perfection that it is done today; they are the ones who have taught [them] all of the labors and operations of coffee [production], introducing all the useful machinery to save on labor and to make [our coffee] among the most preferred, save those of Asia and Mocha; they are the only ones who have imported into this island many lines or articles of commerce, utility, and industry; finally, before their arrival and settlement, a sad and worthless cane syrup was produced here which foreigners purchased, converted to rum, and sold back to us for a sweet profit (AGS-Guerra, leg. 7146, exp. 2, 14 March 1797).

Just what transpired as a result of Alvarez's inquest is not clear from the sources consulted for this article. Yet in 1798, the expulsion order against O'Daly was suspended. Governor Castro was directed to forward all documents regarding his case to the Council of the Indies for review. O'Daly remained in Puerto Rico, where he died of natural causes in 1806 and was buried in the San Juan Cathedral (AHC, Fondo N.S. de los Remedios, Sección Sacramental, caja 84, Libro 17 de Defunciones,

fols. 295-295v.). Doran, Kiernan, Quinlan and Skerret also survived the witch hunt. The first received a residence permit in 1804; the other three obtained naturalisation in 1816. Kiernan even managed to acquire another four hundred acres of land in Hato Rey (AGI-Ultramar, leg. 405, 16 January, 1804; Cifre de Loubriel 1962: 93; AGI-SD, leg. 432, 30 October 1816).

While it is entirely possible that these Irish settlers successfully countered the false charges of treachery, the urgency of retaining and expanding an economically viable white population in Puerto Rico may have also worked in their favour. The British attack coincided with the Haitian Revolution in the adjacent French colony of Saint Domingue, which resulted in the abrupt flight of thousands of whites fearing for their lives. The Spanish colonial authorities not only forbade Dominguan slaves and free blacks from entering Puerto Rico, but also kept native people of colour under constant watch to prevent what they believed to be an impending race war.

Accordingly, the aforementioned 1815 *Cédula de Gracias* had a distinctively pro-white slant in that it offered incoming 'coloured' farmers a fraction of the land that it allotted to their white counterparts. In this racially tense atmosphere, attracting previously excluded white foreigners willing to embrace the Catholic faith and pledge allegiance to Spain regardless of country of origin became a priority. As a result, the foreign white population, which included the Irish, increased noticeably in Puerto Rico during the first half of the nineteenth century (China 2005).

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Abbreviations

AGI = Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Spain.

SD = Sección de Santo Domingo

Ultramar = Sección de Ultramar

AGS = Archivo General de Simancas, Simancas, Spain

China, Jorge L. 'Irish Indentured Servants, Papists and Colonists in Spanish Colonial Puerto Rico'

Guerra = Sección de Guerra

Estado = Sección de Estado

AGMS = Archivo General Militar de Segovia, Segovia, Spain

AGPR = Archivo General de Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico

AHC = Archivo Histórico Catedral, San Juan, Puerto Rico

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