

Christian Slavery in North America: How the British Enslaved Franciscan Friars, Mission Indians and Spanish Soldiers and the Development of Slavery as a Tactic of Conquest of the Southeast Against the Spanish from 1657-1708

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Introduction

North America was a battleground where several competing European powers fought over control of the continent. When the British arrived in North America, besides bringing with them their colonists, they had to confront a Spanish presence in the Deep South where a frontier city named St. Augustine was established in 1565. Following the establishment of St. Augustine, a widespread system of Catholic missions (first Jesuit (1565-1570) and later Franciscan) was also established amongst the several native peoples of what is today the Southeastern United States. Several of those missions were established just south of Virginia in what is today Georgia amongst the Guale and Mocama (Timucuan) peoples. In order to expand southwards from Jamestown, the British needed to find a way to establish additional British settlements in North America closer and closer to St. Augustine.

While the British were not the first Europeans to bring slaves with them to North America, they too brought with them a participation in the larger Transatlantic Slave Trade. The British, however also saw an opportunity to weaken the Spanish using slavery as a tactic. And this was completely different from the slave trade of Africans that is very frequently discussed in American historiography on slavery. This was a slave trade where its victims were not only Catholic Native Americans, but also Spanish soldiers and Franciscan friars. Indeed, as will be revealed in this paper, because of this British-sponsored transactional and politically convenient enslavement of Spanish soldiers, Franciscan friars and Mission Indians by British-allied Native American slave raiders, the Spanish Missions north of St. Augustine were abandoned leaving the land south of Jamestown free for further British southward expansion thus pushing Spanish Florida to the limits of the Florida Peninsula and parts of the Gulf Coast.

Historical Background

As mentioned before, a complex system of missions was established by the Spanish beginning with the Jesuits and later with the Franciscans. These missions were tasked with not only introducing Christianity to the native peoples of La Florida, but also the subjugation of the same peoples in order to bring them under the authority of both the Spanish Crown and the Catholic Church. Following the controversial Protestant Reformation, Great Britain became a largely Protestant nation under its national denomination, the Church of England, whereas Spain remained staunchly Catholic. When the Spanish succeeded in establishing the resilient city of St. Augustine in Florida, the British too became interested in establishing a settlement in the New World. Indeed, as historian James Horn wrote, every Englishman “knew that all of the European settlements in the New World were under the authority of the Spanish Crown.”¹ During the Elizabethan Era, three expeditions were launched to Roanoke Island between 1584-1587 with the objective of establishing a British settlement there which would also serve both as a New World base for British privateers for raiding the Spanish New World settlements and a source of income through the exploitation of natural resources.

A short-lived colony was ultimately established at Roanoke, but due to hostilities with the local peoples and supply issues with its colonists, the settlement ultimately came to an end by 1590 resulting in its abandonment and the mysterious disappearance of its colonists.² Despite the failure of the Roanoke settlement, this would not be the last time the British would attempt to establish a settlement in North America. Several years later in 1607, the Virginia Company launched an expedition to what is today the Chesapeake Bay (which the Spanish previously

¹ James Horn, “The Founding of English America: Jamestown.” *OAH Magazine of History* 25, no. 1 (2011): 25-26.

² Ibid.

called the *Bahía de Santa María*, or St. Mary's Bay) and while in said expedition, they were ordered to explore the bay's rivers and find a spot along a major river that led to the sea where they could build a settlement. On May 13, 1607, they explored up the James River and eventually found a spot along said river which they named Jamestown. The British had hoped initially to find silver and gold but they did not succeed.³ The British faced many hardships following the founding of Jamestown as relations between them and the local Powhatan were far from peaceful resulting in many British colonists being killed as well as a bloody war breaking out between them (known as the First Anglo-Powhatan War) between 1609-1614.⁴

Further frontier conflicts took place between 1622-1632 and 1644-1646.⁵ The Powhatan, however were not the only Virginian natives that they encountered. Another group was the Westo whose origins are quite mysterious. According to scholar John Worth, the Westo appear to have possibly been a have been a band of displaced Erie who settled at the falls of the James River around 1656 during the Iroquois Wars that the British called the "Rechahecrians".⁶ Despite the early tensions with the British, these Westo appeared to have established peaceful relations with the British and not long after, a trade in British firearms and munitions developed between them in the late 1650s.⁷ It would be precisely during this period when we would begin to see the Westo make their way southward into the domain of the Spanish missions in Georgia where the slaving

³ Ibid, 27.

⁴ J. Frederick Fausz, "An 'Abundance of Blood Shed on Both Sides': England's First Indian War, 1609-1614." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 98, no. 1 (1990): 1.

⁵ Ibid, 2.

⁶ John E. Worth, *The Struggle for the Georgia Coast: An Eighteenth-Century Spanish Retrospective on Guale and Mocama* (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1995), 17.

⁷ Ibid.

raids against the Spanish missions would begin. By the beginning of the 1660s, the Westo began their raids on the Spanish Florida missions.

The Westo Invade Spanish Florida

In the Spring of 1661, Spanish authorities in St. Augustine received news that the Westo invaded Spanish Guale sacking the mission churches and killing many Catholic Guale in the process.⁸ A letter dated November 15, 1661 by Spanish Florida Governor Alonso de Aranguiz y Cortés detailed how in June 1661, the Westo entered Spanish Guale descending the Altamaha River and raided the mission of Talaxe resulting in its abandonment.⁹ Mission San Joseph de Sapala on what is today Sapelo Island was also the target of a raid by the Westo but they were unsuccessful with this one following a Spanish defense.¹⁰ During these raids, several Guale Mission Indians were taken back to be sold into slavery resulting in the destruction of Talaxe which would ultimately be re-established on the northern end of St. Simon's Island as "Santo Domingo de Asajo."¹¹ The Westo continued shortly after that to continue causing damage.

In an order to Captain Matheo Pacheco y Salgado dated October 24, 1662, Governor Aranguiz y Cortés wrote of how he received the news that the Westo (who he called the *Chichimecos*) were at a village called Huyache 5 leagues from Spanish Guale as well as that they destroyed it and killed many people there.¹² As a result of this attack, the Spanish Guale mission

⁸ Ibid, 15.

⁹ Alonso de Aranguiz y Cortés, Letter from the Governor to the Crown, November 15, 1661, AGI Contaduría 965. In Worth, *Struggle*, 15-16.

¹⁰ Worth, *Struggle*, 16.

¹¹ Ibid, 17-18.

¹² Alonso de Aranguiz y Cortés, Order to Captain Matheo Pacheco y Salgado, October 24, 1662. Snippet in Worth, *Struggle*, 18-19.

village of San Diego de Satuache was abandoned by its abandonments who decided to seek safety further south by 1666 at the more important mission of Santa Catalina de Guale on St. Catherine's Island.¹³ Fortunately, by 1663, the raids appeared to have stopped for the time being. Fray Juan de Uceda wrote on April 7, 1663 how there was no news of the *Chichimecos* and that all was "quiet and calm."¹⁴

While for the rest of the 1660s, there would appear to be relative stability, the British continued to make strides with their ambitions for southward expansion. Relations continued to be strained with the Powhatan, but their alliance with the Westo remained and this brief pause in the Westo raids on Spanish Florida would not last long. In the year 1670, the British had finally managed to establish another successful settlement south of Jamestown and that was the British settlement of Charles Town bringing a British presence much closer to Spanish St. Augustine. This was a major defeat for the Spanish as their enemy (political and religious) was now much closer than before. They were also dealt with yet another significant defeat that same year with the Treaty of Madrid. In the said treaty, there was one clause that asserted that Great Britain was entitled to all of the lands it held in North America to "hold and possess forever."¹⁵ The British did not stop in their southward ambitions and the Westo raids would once again reappear in the historical record. By the mid-1670s, the Westo began to continue their harassment and raids on Spanish Catholic Mission Indians.

¹³ Worth, *Struggle*, 19.

¹⁴ Fray Juan de Uceda, Certification regarding the state of Guale, April 7, 1663, In Manuel de Montiano, Documentary package concerning Guale and Mocama, August 18, 1739, AGI Santo Domingo 2584. In Worth, *Struggle*, 92-93.

¹⁵ J. Leitch Wright, "Spanish Reaction to Carolina". *The North Carolina Historical Review* 41, no. 4 (1964): 469.

In a letter dated May 23, 1675, Spanish Florida Governor Pablo de Hita Salazar presented the testimony of a Chisca woman who escaped from slavery in Charles Town who told him of how the Westo were allied with the British in order to “make war on and disturb the natives already converted to the Catholic religion.”¹⁶ Little did the Spanish know that the British and their Westo allies had an even larger scale raiding operation in the works and it would result in far more devastating damage than what was previously seen in the 1660s. In April 1680, a band of around 300 men comprising of Westo, Uchise and Chiluque raiders and British soldiers invaded Mission Santa Catalina de Guale and despite a miraculous Spanish defense despite being outnumbered, the mission was abandoned and its inhabitants relocating further south to Mission San Joseph de Sapala (on what is today Sapelo Island). The Westo were not the only natives who participated in British-sponsored slave raids.

In February 1685, around 50 Yamasee led by Chief Altamaha attacked the Timucuan mission of Santa Catalina de Afuyca resulting in the village being burned, 18 of its inhabitants being killed and capturing around 21 natives as slaves. These slaves were then taken by the Yamasee to the short-lived colony of Stuart’s Town (in what is today South Carolina) where they were then divided amongst a British man from Charles Town and an Irish settler ship. The Yamasee did all of this in exchange for 30 shotguns and cutlasses.¹⁷ Several years later, yet another British-allied Native American group would also seize several Mission Indians during British-sponsored attacks. Between 1692-1694, Creeks armed by British firearms attacked the Chacato mission of San Carlos de los Chacatos killing several of its inhabitants and taking back

¹⁶ Pablo de Hita Salazar, “Auto concerning English depredations, May 23, 1675”, AGI Santo Domingo 839. Snippet in Worth, *Struggle*, 27.

¹⁷ Worth, *Struggle*, 45-46; Alonso Solana, “Declaration of Juan Liloston (John Livingston), native of Edinburgh, September 23, 1686”, AGI Santo Domingo 2584. In Worth, *Struggle*, 152-153.

others into slavery as well.¹⁸ A few additional years later, following the British invasion of Spanish Florida (on what is today Amelia Island) in November 1702, the British and their Creek allies invaded the missions of Santa Catalina de Guale and Santa Clara de Tupiqui on the island.¹⁹

The British and their Creek allies would also end up capturing fellow Europeans during these raids as well and not just Mission Indians. During these attacks, the Spanish Captain Francisco de Fuentes was captured by the British and he was then transported to Charles Town where he would be kept until he passed away there in September 1705.²⁰ Two years later, the British and their Creek allies invaded Spanish Apalachee and during their raids, Fray Domingo Criado, a Franciscan priest, took his flock into the woods for safety. They managed to survive in the Florida wilderness for over a year; however, they were unfortunately discovered resulting in the death of many of Padre Criado's flock. Criado suffered an equally awful fate with him being "stripped of his holy habit" and then taken back by the enemy raiders "where in prolonged martyrdom he served the enemy Indians as their slave" until he passed away not long after.²¹ The raids continued past that point as well as it was even documented in early 1708 that around 28 women from Mayaca-Jororo Province that were out looking for roots to eat were captured by such raiders. 4 of those women managed to escape captivity and it is thanks to those women that

¹⁸ Dale Cox, *The History of Jackson County, Florida Vol. 1: The Early Years, Incidents from Before The Civil War* (Dale Cox: Self-published, 2008), 32-33 & 36.

¹⁹ Charles W. Arnade, *The Siege of St. Augustine in 1702* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1959), 14-15.

²⁰ Worth, *Struggle*, 50 & 55.

²¹ Florencia, Claudio de, Urisas, Manuel de, Vasquez, Domingo, Salas, Simon de, Angeles, Antonio de los and Leon, Francisco de, "Letter of the Franciscan Fathers to the King, St. Augustine, May 7, 1707". In Mark F. Boyd, Hale G. Smith and John W. Griffin, *Here They Once Stood: The Tragic End of the Apalachee Missions* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1951), 88.

such notice was even made.²² This British alliance with the Creeks would continue for well-past the early 1700s.²³

Conclusion

As a result of these raids, the Spanish Mission Field was effectively pushed further south closer to the Presidio of St. Augustine which left the land north of St. Augustine free for further British southward expansion. This most definitely paved the way for the later establishment of the city of Savannah and the birth of the Georgia colony in 1733 bringing the British now much closer to St. Augustine and Spanish Florida. By forming a utile commercial relationship with the hostile Native Americans such as the Westo, Yamasee and Creeks, the British found a way to push the Spanish southward and also seized many Mission Indians in the process for sale in their Charles Town slave trade. Even Spanish Europeans were not immune from being seized by the slave raiders as we saw with Fray Domingo Criado and Francisco de Fuentes. Therefore, because of the British-sponsored transactional and politically convenient enslavement of Spanish soldiers, Franciscan friars and Mission Indians by allied Native American slave raiders, the Spanish Missions north of St. Augustine were abandoned as well as Spanish dominion pushed further south closer to St. Augustine leaving the land south of Jamestown free for further British southward expansion.

These historical events carry with them major historical implications. Given that American academic circles have largely focused on the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the stories

²² “Governor Francisco de Córcoles y Martínez to the King, San Agustín, January 14, 1708”, AGI Santo Domingo 841. In Boyd, Smith and Griffin, *Here They Once Stood*, 90-91.

²³ Joshua Piker, “Colonists and Creeks: Rethinking the Pre-Revolutionary Southern Backcountry.” *The Journal of Southern History* 70, no. 3 (2004): 503. <https://doi.org/10.2307/27648476>.

of African slaves, these historical events show that North American Slavery history also includes not only the enslavement of Native Americans by Europeans, but also both the enslavement of Native Americans by other Native Americans (albeit sponsored and encouraged by a European power) and Europeans (in this case, the Spanish) by fellow Europeans (the British). They also show that Christians (in this case, Franciscan friars and Mission Indians) also suffered as slaves in North America.

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