



# Decoding the Colonial Documents: The Hidden History of Women in Slavery in Puerto Rico

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# Agenda

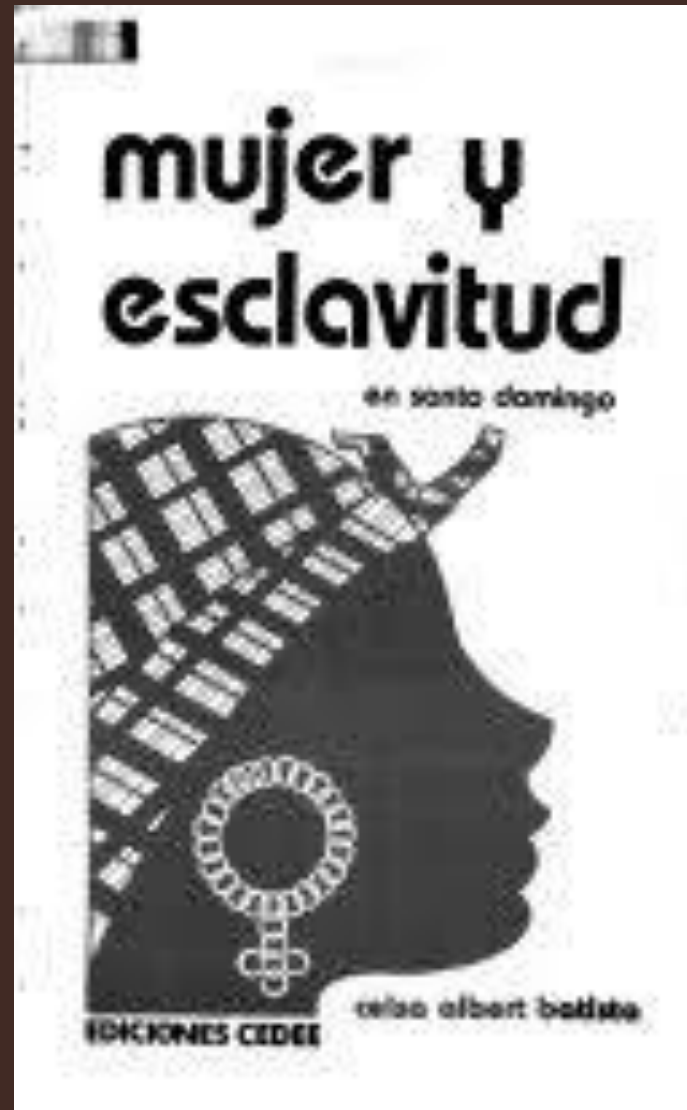
- Investigation Problem & Stages of Research
- Preliminary insights
- Main challenges and difficulties
- Archives in Spain: AHN & AGI
- Archives in Puerto Rico: AGPR & UPPRP
- Case studies
- Slave Register
- Questions



# Investigation Problem

- Interests:
  - Understand the role of gendering, social reproduction and the sexualization of enslaved women bodies for the development of an anti-Black racial system in the Spanish Caribbean, with an emphasis in Puerto Rico.
  - Centering enslaved women as part of the history of resistance of the Caribbean and the Black Radical Tradition.
- Dissertation: Long durée of anti-Blackness from early modern Iberia to the plantation system Puerto Rico.
- Problem: Gaps in the literature about gender and slavery in the Spanish Caribbean, particularly Puerto Rico.
- Available literature about slavery and gender in the Caribbean focuses primarily on the English-speaking Caribbean.
- Examples: Hilary Beckles' *Centering Women: Gender Discourse in Caribbean Slave Society* (1999) and Lucille Mair's "Women Field Workers in Jamaica during Slavery" (2001)
- Available literature about slavery in the Spanish speaking Caribbean lack a robust gender analysis.

# Exceptions to the gap in the literature



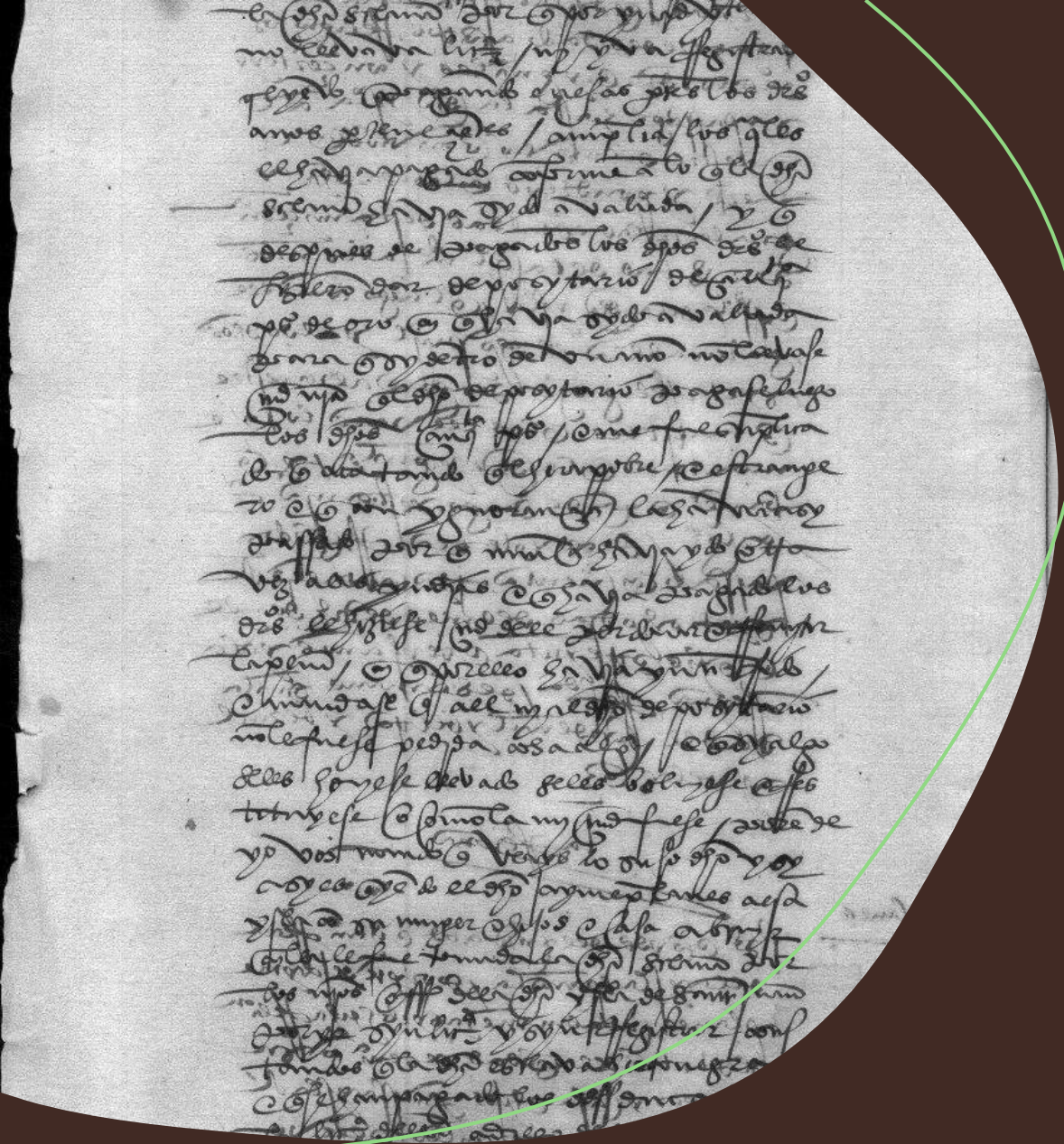
# Stages of Archival Research

- Literature Review about gender, slavery and race in Puerto Rico.
- Identification of main archives and collections.
- Familiarization with metasearch systems (e.g., PARES in Spain).
- Appointments in archives and planning of visits with a preliminary list of documents.
- Search for a phone app to scan documents.
- Order of visits:
  - Archivo Nacional Histórico in Madrid
  - Archivo General de Indias in Sevilla
  - Naval Museum in Sevilla
  - Maritime Museum in Barcelona
  - Archivo General de Puerto Rico
  - Biblioteca y Herмотeca Puertorriqueña, Lázaro Library, UPPR.
- Tabulation of documents seen and scanned, analysis and research on digital documents.



# Key terms

- **Captive:** highlights the process of kidnapping, capture and enslavement.
- **Cimarronaje** (marronage): flight and running away from plantation and colonial authorities.
  - Small acts of resistance that disrupted and interrupted the operation of the plantation.
- **Cimarrón** (maroon): Runaway enslaved person.
- **Gender/labor differentiation:** when sex or gender is used for the division of labor.
- **Social reproduction:** activities requires for the reproduction of life and human relations.
  - Care activities like cooking, raising a children, providing emotional support, cleaning, fostering social relations, etc.



# Practical difficulties

- Learning the different collections, metasearch system, and how to identify the documents to request in the archives.
- Legibility of 16th-18th century documents.
- Time: before, during and after
- Length of some documents: over 1,000 pages.
- Decision between scanning documents or carefully reading in the archives.
- Exhaustion after few hours.



# Conceptual challenges

- Coloniality of the archive: the archives are constructed from the colonialist and racist episteme.
- Limitations in the representation of enslaved people beyond their reduction to a merchandise.
  - Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts”
- Ethical problem: reproducing the violence of the archives.
  - Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*
- Alternatives:
- Hartman’s “**Critical Fabulation**”
  - Struggle to represent a full picture of those who were enslaved.
  - Attention to the possibilities of a story not told by the archives.
  - Rearranging elements of the story to imagine “what might have happened”
- Jean Casimir’s “**Reading Against the Grain**” (*The Haitian: A Decolonial History*):
  - Interrogating the actions and gestures of the colonists, enslavers and archives’ writers.
  - Thinking the colonist restrictions as a response to the enslaved resistance.
  - Recentring the people, their acts of resistance, the construction of alternative forms of life and social relations.

# Preliminary insights

- Limitations in the abstract, numerical and dehumanizing representation of enslaved populations on colonial documents.
- Colonial obsession to document all instances of runaway slaves, conspiracies and rebellions.
- Contradiction of the archives: while the writing denies agency the history of what is written speaks to enslaved resistance.
- Enslaved women should be also thought as *cimarronas* (maroon women), as central for enslaved resistance and the social reproduction of enslaved people.
- Tension: lack of gender/labor differentiation and sexual/reproductive vulnerabilities.
- Contradiction of enslaved female reproductive capacities and maternity:
  - capture and monetization of their reproductive value
  - kinship relationships beyond physical separation.
- Questions about the role of enslaved women to the sustenance of alternatives mode of social relations among the captives.

# Archives in Spain: Archivo Nacional Histórico, Madrid

- Main collection: **Ultramar**
  - Ministry created for the government and administration of Puerto Rico, Cuba and Philippines.
- P.R.: Documents related to slavery from 1824 to 1899.
- Real Cédulas (Royal Decrees): authorization for importation of enslaved people to P.R.
  - **Problem:** abstract and numeric representation of enslaved in archives.
- Good source for demographic information in 19th century P.R.
- 1841 Census: Blancos: 180,091, Mulatos: 132,694, Negros libres: 25,744, Esclavos: 44,619.
  - Non-white population: 203,057 vs. White population: 180,091
  - Useful to track the racial demographic changes and the changes in the enslaved population.
  - Problem: how the information was gathered.
- **Statistical information about criminality** in Puerto Rico (1866)

# Estado o censo de Almas de la isla de In.

	Blancos.				Mulatos libres.				Negros libres.				Esclavos.					
	Padres de familia	Muertos de familia	Hijos	Total	Padres de familia	Muertos de familia	Hijos	Total	Padres de familia	Muertos de familia	Hijos	Total	Padres de familia	Muertos de familia	Hijos			
Capital	589	767	955	1110	2415	751	458	591	722	1976	155	278	333	359	1155	82	166	20
Ayuntam.	140	148	409	419	1140	104	108	288	254	754	3	3	6	9	21	4	8	2
Aguacaa	1150	1180	2352	2272	6952	84	98	110	190	484	23	23	56	60	21	4	8	2
Aguadella	1497	1400	3007	1979	6565	216	462	333	561	1523	86	174	90	81	421	406	512	4
Atafo	1016	1077	2310	2660	7263	245	266	572	561	1661	25	40	75	247	176	175	4	2
Cajiao	604	622	1379	1477	2978	349	427	475	627	1880	175	225	506	575	1501	195	202	4
Ataruta	153	128	270	266	808	195	202	424	472	1210	22	45	46	50	162	28	34	2
Agua-buenas	93	85	255	657	1089	174	111	622	661	1574	13	8	24	8	53	1	2	1
Barranquitas	254	268	570	580	1675	144	175	418	443	1180	6	9	3	1	19	49	68	1
Barrua	166	163	384	405	1118	67	78	215	260	569	17	18	33	27	107	8	12	2
Bayamon	205	187	512	512	1416	462	522	1222	1224	3548	34	40	44	42	161	126	242	2
Cabo-rojo	843	896	1584	1796	5059	862	1062	1654	1705	5285	65	69	101	122	267	600	225	1
Caguas	476	477	861	862	2697	457	566	1072	1406	3812	79	87	154	117	439	206	176	2
Caguay	460	450	740	776	2261	308	250	600	450	1320	67	70	90	99	326	147	192	8
Camuy	602	642	492	506	2242	28	34	67	73	214	4	7	6	11	28	18	42	1
Carrizosa	15	12	22	17	66	16	13	27	26	92	114	108	209	208	629	10	10	1
Catao	237	252	608	542	1792	57	42	114	106	311	6	7	40	14	67	6	5	1
Catua	236	242	550	516	1544	276	420	850	832	2508	66	72	80	100	218	56	80	1
Coamo	114	127	147	126	518	238	285	657	605	1757	12	16	24	24	76	24	35	1
Corzal	195	222	414	440	1445	403	500	674	702	2277	55	66	118	158	427	34	28	1
Cayabo	490	505	1210	1081	3286	120	108	300	340	868	20	27	41	52	158	24	160	1
Guayama	273	277	847	508	1725	265	456	1222	1127	3180	54	121	122	164	488	1208	272	14
Guainabo	127	145	442	406	1120	228	241	578	575	1622	47	46	125	120	338	7	27	1
Guarabo	106	118	207	202	623	241	277	771	718	2020	40	47	111	121	221	12	24	1
Guayanilla	576	620	222	244	1722	520	516	580	412	2028	70	130	61	110	271	250	240	2
Hato-grande	480	500	1880	1200	4060	415	600	680	570	2285	122	212	221	250	806	50	54	2
Humacao	250	272	755	726	2304	505	561	557	708	2222	56	74	107	12	247	155	234	2
Hatillo	276	740	1516	1222	4284	248	366	474	474	1460	60	66	122	168	426	7	12	2
Laguaira	598	578	558	696	2750	220	220	765	998	2402	67	67	90	96	320	22	22	1
Llano	700	554	2007	2020	6271	71	60	180	222	592	6	8	12	20	50	260	182	1
Llanos	275	282	716	717	1971	1076	1205	2522	2207	6272	21	18	46	27	122	19	24	2
Llanos-Dian	504	577	1002	994	2073	326	207	574	577	1828	169	140	163	174	666	280	245	2
Limon	65	75	220	220	690	107	108	400	216	722	50	60	240	320	820	40	42	2
Lopez	120	118	272	248	706	147	171	412	338	1128	198	220	422	440	1285	272	124	1
Lopez	267	106	295	271	2229	154	155	314	270	872	4	6	18	13	41	14	12	1
Luguello	141	184	227	442	1106	122	122	174	200	622	57	60	70	88	277	60	70	1
Mariaguez	782	1072	2558	2910	7806	665	775	2021	2120	5651	83	104	205	274	786	760	624	15
Moravia	560	477	1207	1260	2527	72	72	157	142	445	22	17	28	16	82	6	6	1
Moravia	228	271	1701	1514	4224	228	262	551	680	1858	157	162	262	278	1072	221	190	3
Moravia	117	117	222	197	668	122	122	220	204	750	22	25	58	42	149	22	72	2
Moravia	1057	1142	1878	1984	6062	76	77	201	215	582	28	42	82	82	245	107	142	2
Moravia	214	222	512	452	1407	124	140	255	218	747	21	17	19	25	84	8	18	2
Moravia	218	402	921	817	2468	258	206	752	772	2072	42	22	156	142	426	9	61	2
Moravia	382	241	406	419	1558	221	278	2144	2181	6224	12	9	20	14	56	81	60	2
Moravia	420	205	490	290	1705	407	422	586	622	2057	126	122	166	155	570	146	140	2
Moravia	866	1158	2404	2207	7617	122	174	287	567	1722	82	70	255	220	747	7	10	1
Moravia	171	170	222	422	1128	220	226	561	622	1722	22	22	24	45	121	1227	1144	7
Moravia	1266	1282	2122	2022	6760	875	1106	1971	1927	5821	20	22	24	45	121	1227	1144	7
Moravia	57	48	104	85	274	77	105	127	166	522	62	64	97	76	219	1	1	1
Moravia	274	272	1202	1174	2408	12	16	21	25	112	2	2	6	5	15	4	27	1
Moravia	512	508	1240	1165	3422	77	70	40	20	217	8	7	12	16	42	40	60	2
Moravia	122	141	267	247	722	162	146	240	202	707	240	301	330	300	1171	26	22	2
Moravia	126	145	320	201	722	170	170	262	251	1070	104	92	199	126	502	66	32	2
Moravia	150	195	414	295	1184	475	482	1122	1245	2226	7	5	19	25	56	12	20	1
Moravia	112	104	222	247	746	191	172	448	422	1240	11	9	22	22	72	12	16	1
Moravia	2516	4502	6415	4901	12225	1219	2017	5150	6221	15807	422	622	214	157	2578	222	601	92
Moravia	158	170	407	408	1122	67	67	168	126	422	7	7	17	19	52	91	40	2
Moravia	28	25	40	28	124	20	22	60	46	172	24	24	11	12	42	20	60	2
Moravia	220	271	744	582	1887	227	222	675	615	1850	24	21	39	24	128	12	21	16
Moravia	58	52	224	265	722	226	276	621	658	1841	21	25	22	10	78	151	178	47
Moravia	111	124	241	226	712	211	217	220	260	1118	101	92	101	126	421	10	20	10
Moravia	175	117	222	222	1002	152	152	227	224	926	122	122	261	224	768	21	9	22
Moravia	140	170	224	221	1162	146	162	222	224	1296	26	40	102	101	277	10	16	2
Moravia	268	276	777	844	2425	104	112	220	212	627	26	34	52	42	150	3	2	1
Moravia	820	825	1917	1722	5221	222	222	661	672	1842	2	10	12	11	42	10	20	1
Total genl.	22715	22270	64247	51046	180217	12562	22161	42662	42374	122629	2270	4200	7225	7720	25744	2421	2522	152

Nota: Aparecen menos num<sup>os</sup> de habitantes en el censo de la Capital que en la clasifi.

# ESTADO DEMOSTRATIVO

## DEL ESTADO CIVIL DE LOS REOS CONOCIDOS.

JUZGADOS.	Libres.	Esclavos.	TOTAL.	Solteros.	Viudos	Casados.	TOTAL.
Real Audiencia.....	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
Juzgado de Guerra.....	4	"	4	4	"	"	4
. . . Hacienda.....	3	"	3	"	"	3	3
. . . Aguadilla.....	88	4	92	51	6	35	92
. . . Arecibo.....	92	11	103	77	8	18	103
. . . Caguas.....	148	7	155	89	11	55	155
. . . Catedral.....	124	7	131	95	5	31	131
. . . Humacao.....	105	10	115	84	5	26	115
. . . Mayaguez.....	73	5	78	60	3	15	78
. . . Ponce.....	186	28	214	144	9	61	214
. . . San Francisco.....	101	10	111	86	3	22	111
. . . San German.....	121	25	146	92	15	39	146
	1045	107	1152	782	65	305	1152

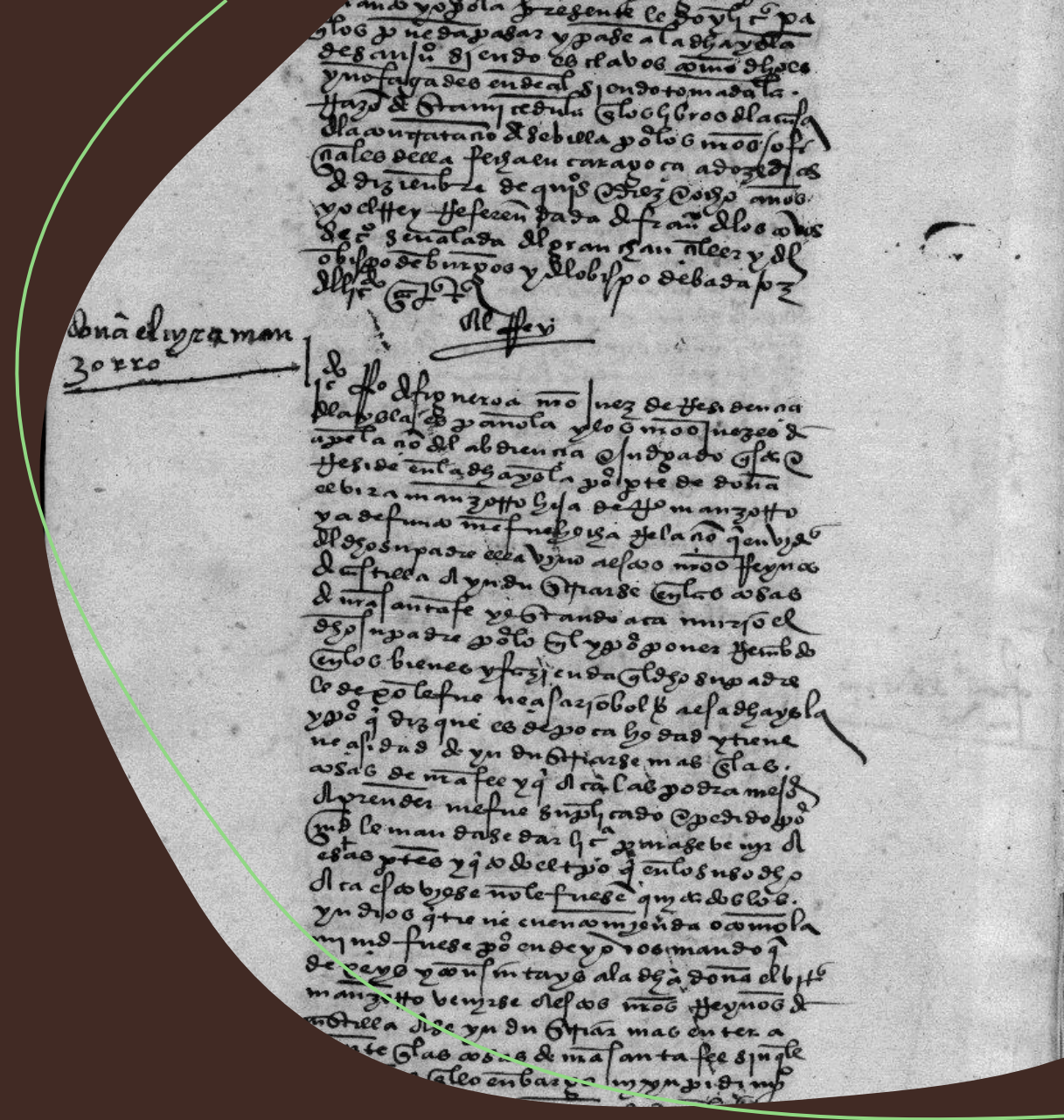
# ESTADO DEMOSTRATIVO

## DEL COLOR DE LOS REOS CONOCIDOS.

Juzgados.	BLANCOS.	MULATOS.	NEGROS.	TOTAL.
Real Audiencia.....	"	"	"	"
Juzgado de Guerra.....	4	"	"	4
. . . Hacienda.....	3	"	"	3
. . . Aguadilla.....	59	28	5	92
. . . Arecibo.....	48	45	10	103
. . . Caguas.....	61	86	8	155
. . . Catedral.....	48	67	16	131
. . . Humacao.....	38	57	20	115
. . . Mayagüez.....	30	41	7	78
. . . Ponce.....	84	100	30	214
. . . San Francisco.....	12	62	37	111
. . . San German.....	59	66	21	146
	446	552	154	1152

# Archives in Spain: Archivo de Indias, Sevilla

- Main collection: **Casa de Contratación** (House of Contracts)
- Casa de contratación (1503-1717) regulated the commerce between Spain and the Indies.
- Documents regarding the issuing of license to transport enslaved people.
- Legal cases regarding the **unlicensed importation** of enslaved people.
  - Insight: importation of enslaved people was larger than official numbers.
  - Private and individual character of enslaved importation.
- Limitations: license depict enslaved people as merchandise.
- Cases of importation of “esclavo blanco” (white slave).
  - Possible interpretation: importation of Moorish slaves.



# Archives in Puerto Rico: Archivo General de Puerto Rico, San Juan



- Records of the Spanish Governor of Puerto Rico
- Documents produced by the colonial government of Puerto Rico, primarily from the 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.
  - **Esclavos (libertos) 1799-1825** / Freed slaves
    - “Esclavos prófugos” 1801-1806 / Fugitive slaves
  - **Esclavos (registro de)** / Slave Registre
    - Volume I, II, III
- **Esclavos (libertos):** major letters to the governor Miguel de la Torre describing cases of enslaved people running away or apprehension of fugitive slaves.
- Discovery: announcement of fugitive or apprehended slaves in newspaper *La Gaceta*.
- Documents relating to sea-marronage and intra-Caribbean traffic of enslaved people.



# CARIBBEAN MAP



Sea  
marronage

# Enslaved female resistance: *cimarronas* (maroon women)

- Rethinking marronage as enacted by female captives.
  - Cimarrón = male maroon = masculine conception of marronage
  - Archives support centering: Cimmarronas or Maroon Women.
- Two cases:
  - **Family marronage:** document records enslaved men running away with their female partners and children. (Esclavos prófugos 1801-1806)
  - Captive women named Negra Martha ran away by herself, going from the main island of Puerto Rico to its smaller island Vieques, and back.

# Family marronage (1806)

- 3 out of 9 ran with their partners and one of them with their children.
- Problem: archives still represent the maroon women as passive actors.
- Alternative framing: maroon women as active participants and organizers.

6

*Relacion de los Negros profugos de las Haciendas de Santiago Prieto, y los Mercederos de David Quintan.*

*De la de Prieto.*

<i>Vicente, su mujer, y Francisco</i> .....	<i>3.</i>
<i>Roman y su mujer</i> .....	<i>2</i>
<i>Mam. Congo, su mujer y dos hijos</i> .....	<i>4</i>
<i>Teferino</i> .....	<i>1.</i>
<i>Miquel Franca</i> .....	<i>1</i>
<i>Ignacio</i> .....	<i>1.</i>
<i>Atanacio</i> .....	<i>1</i>
<i>Juan de la Cruz</i> .....	<i>1.</i>
<i>Juan Pedro</i> .....	<i>1.</i>
	<hr/> <i>15</i> <hr/>

*De la de Quintan.*

<i>Francisco</i> .....	<i>1.</i>
<i>Juaquin</i> .....	<i>1.</i>
<i>Francisco</i> .....	<i>1.</i>
	<hr/> <i>3</i> <hr/>

*Yoavaca 30 de Junio de 1806.*

*Fernando de Utrera*

# Cimarrona Martha (1824)

- Cimarrona's mobility.
- Use of "Negra" as synonymous for slave.
- Limitations in the representation of Martha.
- Captive female escaped by themselves.

Casa de Gobierno de S.<sup>a</sup> Tomas, 20 Febrero 1824.

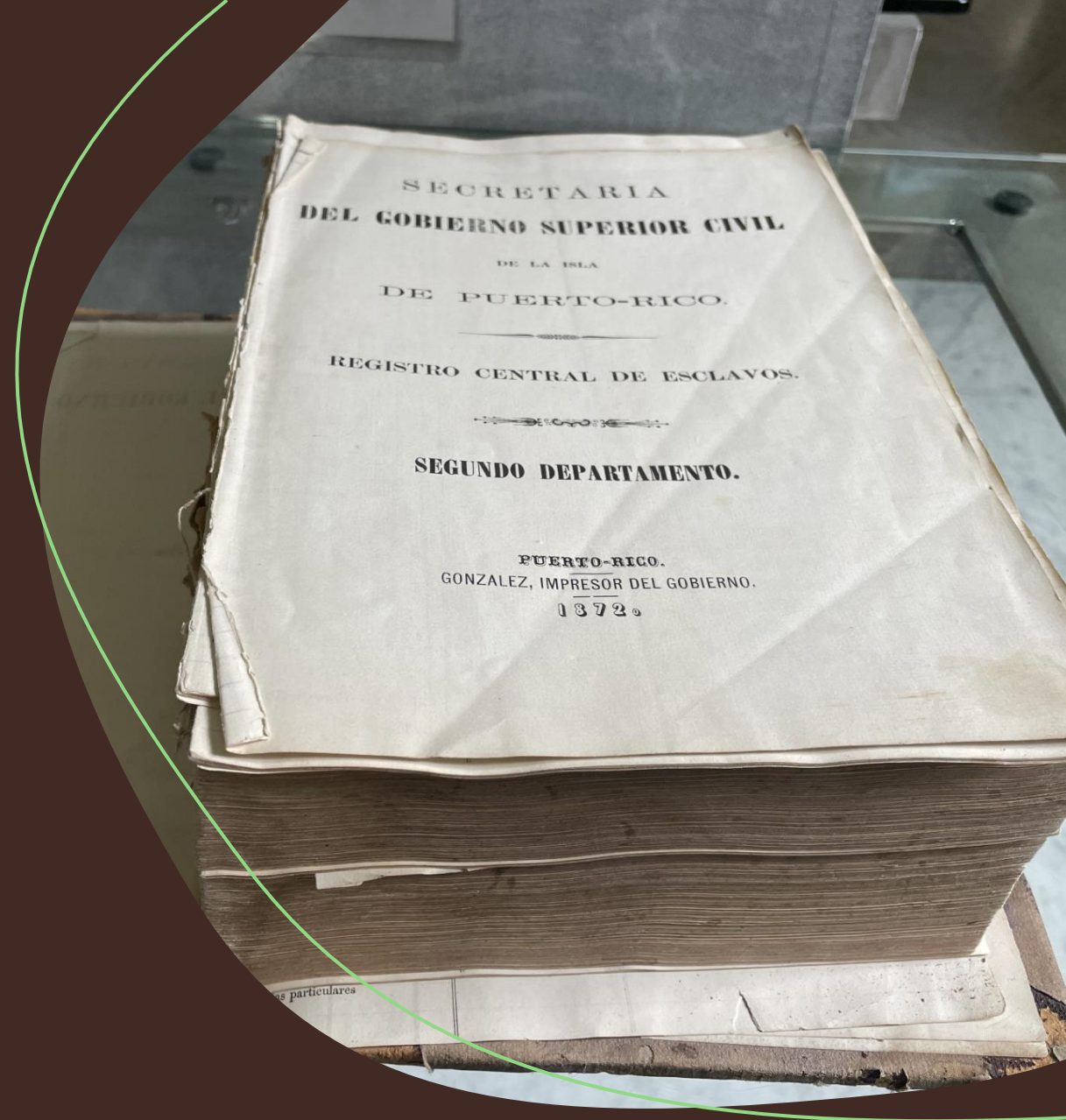
Como Señor!

Una Negra llamada Martha, perteneciente a Daniel Petersen, hombre libre de este Vecindario, se huyó de aquí en Sept.<sup>bre</sup> 1822. Su amo el dicho Petersen, ha descubierto últimamente por informes de un tal Andres Delgado, hombre libre vecino de Candilero en el distrito de Humacao; que la Negra Martha, con el nombre de Rosa, se hallaba en aquel mismo lugar con un José Maria Corsino, hombre blanco; por lo que ha determinado pasar allí en solicitud de su Esclava; y yo suplico a V.C. se sirva dispensarle su protección.

Martha ha vivido algun tiempo en Piqués con un Mulato, William Miller,

# Registro de Esclavos (1872)

- Slave Registers based on the enslaved population per municipality.
- Registers allow to compare different patterns of enslaved labor, rates of enslaved male and female, and use of racial categories.
- Type of enslaved labor depended by regional economic conditions or dominant economy.
- Four main categories of labor: labrador (agricultural or field work), jornalero (rent their labor), doméstico, and artesano (specialized enslaved labor).
- **Lack of gender differentiation:** enslaved female and male labor depended more on the region and municipality.
  - Towns with a predominance of agricultural production had enslaved women mostly doing field work.
  - Towns with a predominance of urban slavery had women and men doing specialized labor, including domestic.



Núm.º	Pueblos.	Nombre del esclavo.	Nombre del dueño.	Estado.	Oficio.
	Sanjose alto	<p><b>Josefa</b> Natural de Pto Rico Está coartado en 200 pesol. Empadronado en el bº del pueblo Es hijo de Mercedes y de ~ Tiene 2 hijos que se llaman Juvenal y Luis Maria</p>	D. Jose Joaquin Diaz y Valencia	Soltera	Labrador
	Sanjose alto	<p><b>Proencio</b> Natural de Pto Rico Está coartado en ~ Empadronado en el bº de Pueblo Es hijo de Josefa ~ y de ~ Tiene ~ hijos que se llaman ~</p>	D. Jose Joaquin Diaz y Valencia	id	id
	Sanjose alto	<p><b>Luis Maria</b> Natural de Pto Rico Está coartado en ~ Empadronado en el bº del pueblo Es hijo de Josefa y de ~ Tiene ~ hijos que se llaman ~</p>	D. Jose Joaquin Diaz y Valencia	id	id

Filiacion.	OBSERVACIONES.
<p>Edad 26 años Estatura regular Color Negro Pelo liso Barba ~ Ojos grandes Nariz chico Boca regular Señas particulares 3</p>	
<p>Edad 10 años Estatura creciente Color gris Pelo liso Barba ~ Ojos regular Nariz chata Boca regular Señas particulares 2</p>	
<p>Edad 8 años Estatura creciente Color gris Pelo liso Barba ~ Ojos regulares Nariz chata Boca regular Señas particulares 2</p>	


# Urban Slavery in San Juan: Specialized enslaved female labor

- Predominance of **urban slavery** in San Juan: specialized enslaved labor:
  - Domestic specialized labor: washer, cookers, candy maker, ironing clothes, dressmaker, caretaker, etc.
  - Urban skilled labor: tailor, mason, cooker, chocolate maker, baker, carpenter, tobacco maker, washer, etc.
- High number of enslaved women, particularly mulatto women.
- Challenge our understandings of domestic labor, and the boundaries between the private and public sphere.
- Mariano Negrón Portillo and Raúl Mayo Santa analyze the Registro to challenge simplistic understandings on enslaved family structures. Information about captive children:
  - 36% of enslaved children lived with their mother
  - 34% lived with an owner
  - 30% lived with other enslaved people
- Evidence of family reunion after emancipation in the Book of Contracts.

Capital

Maria Luisa Rusó  
Natural de Cuba

Está coartada <sup>ignorándose la</sup>  
<sup>cantidad</sup>  
Empadronado en el bº del nº 2.


Es hija de Rosa Rusó  
y de  Tiene 5

hijos que se llaman Martin,  
Juan Blas y José

Capital

Cristina Marini

Natural de Pto Rico

Está coartado en 

Empadronado en el bº del nº 4.

Es hijo de José Antonio  
y de M<sup>a</sup> Rivera Tiene 2

hijos que se llaman Teresa e  
Isabel



Letra Lavandera



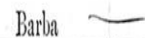
Letra Cocinera

Edad 48 años

Estatura regular

Color mulato

Pelo canoso


Barba 

Ojos negros

Nariz regular

Boca red

Señas particulares

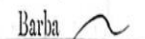


Edad 24 años

Estatura alta

Color mulata

Pelo para

Barba 

Ojos negros

Nariz ancha

Boca regular



## Questions for further research :

How long were enslaved women able to stay with their children?

Where enslaved women able to foster and continue maternal bonds with their children after physical separation?

What was the role of enslaved maternity and care work for the creation of alternative kinship structures?

How can we read enslaved maternity beyond the colonality of the archives?