

2018 RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Title: Voyage of The *Guipuzcoa*: How Trans-Imperial Networks Built the Spanish Slave Trade

Program of Study: Master of Arts – History

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ABSTRACT

The scholarship of the transatlantic slave trade continues to benefit from additional digitization of primary source documents, incorporated into *Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*. While there exists a well-developed Latin American historiography, nothing comparable exists for the Latin American slave trade, in part due to a dearth of official documents. Using recently discovered archival data, the *Voyages* database reassessed key routes by which African slaves enter Spanish America and introduced a sophisticated analysis of contraband. As reflected in the 2013 *Voyages* dataset, the slave trade to the Spanish Americas has been underestimated; up to four times more captives delivered than previous estimates. Lacking prior experience under the *asiento*, a recent scholarship trend assumes Caribbean-based entrepreneurs required a learning curve before facilitating a “triangular trade” in human cargo. This learning curve delays their entry into the slave trade until the nineteenth century, with the first disembarkation in 1810. This paper counters that assessment. Havana-based merchants of Basque origin, utilizing confraternity resources and ties throughout Europe, Latin America and Africa, began operating as early as 1792. By following the voyage of the *Guipuzcoa*, the sinews

of these connections can be traced to reveal a diversified, efficient, and expanding organization. Charting the expedition from the merchant perspective, our focus will shift from large-scale redundancies to small-scale slave traders, networking at intersecting entrepôts for optimum efficiencies, using pre-existing practices and trends. The need for a learning curve is eliminated, as the new entries are not creating a business model from scratch, they are adding a new route. The capital formation, financing, risk spreading, and market information sharing travel along this pre-existing route, which shifts according to market fluctuations. With flexibility and organization, the interplay between metropolitan and colonial authorities balances the fine line between legal and illegal slave trading. This research will shed new light on the timing of Spanish entry into the slave trade, information sharing, and models of efficiency within the slave trading industry.