

**UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL BULLETIN  
ANNOUNCEMENT**

**Florida International University**  
*University Graduate School*

Doctoral Dissertation Defense

**Abstract**

The Unusual Suspects: The Bourbon Reforms and The Inter- and Intracolonial Mobility of Africans and Their Descendants in The Spanish Caribbean

by

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This social history examines the trans-imperial mobility of people of African descent in the eighteenth-century Spanish Caribbean within the contexts of Atlantic enslavement, fugitivity, and Spanish imperial policy. Spanish officials knew how often Africans and their descendants traveled throughout the circum-Caribbean. They implemented policies to use this movement for their own gain, either by harnessing that movement for imperial rivalry or commandeering it for security. A close analysis of Catholic parish records, Spanish governors' correspondence, drafts of Black codes, and smuggling investigations reveals a tension between free and enslaved people's multi-faceted mobility and Spanish officials' attempts to use and limit this mobility. This study proposes a new periodization of that tension.

During the first half of the century, officials readily commandeered fugitive religious asylum as a means to check British encroachment along its maritime and terrestrial borders. They offered Catholicism as a pathway for free and enslaved people to signal loyalty to the Spanish empire. Officials' flexible use of inter- and intracolonial mobility shifted after the occupation of Cuba in the 1760s as they increasingly believed that movement represented a threat to the empire and that people of African descent should be tied to plantation slavery.

When the administrative, economic, and military imperial policies of the Spanish monarchy, known collectively as the Bourbon Reforms, reached their zenith at the beginning of the Age of Revolutions, officials implemented new laws that used religious instruction as a disciplinary measure to root people of African descent to the plantation rather than to employ multifaceted integration strategies. The adaptability and fluidity of policies in the first half of the century gave way to more rigid policies of rootedness and enslavement. This study contributes to scholarship that analyzes the connections between marronage, militia service, the Atlantic slave trade, and the Bourbon Reforms by emphasizing the central role itinerant free and enslaved people of African descent played in shaping policies in the Spanish Caribbean.

**Date:** June 21, 2022  
**Time:** 11.00 a.m.  
**Place:** MMC, DM 370

**Department:** History  
**Major Professor:** Dr. Bianca Premo