

MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTRY
Archive "Negros y Esclavos"

REF N° 2004-21

PART A: ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

1. Summary

The archive collection entitled "Negros y Esclavos" that forms part of the documentary assets of the 'Archivo General de la Nación' contains extensive and very important testimonial information about the development of the African slave trade in the 'Neogranadino' territory. The collection is composed of 55 files, equivalent to approximately 55,000 sheets of paper, that refer not only to the history of Colombia, but also that of Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela.

New slaves were sent to the different Spanish colonies in South America from the port of Cartagena, which therefore documented information about slaves and their treatment. Regrettably, most documents produced in Cartagena during that period - 16th to 18th centuries, have disappeared. The 'Archivo General de la Nación' together with the archives of the 'General de Indias de Sevilla', preserves the remaining documents on this topic.

2. Details of the Nominator

2.1 Name: ARCHIVO GENERAL DE LA NACION DE COLOMBIA

2.2 Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated:

The important collection of archives: "Negros y Esclavos", is one of 62 colonial documentary collections that are preserved by the National Archives.

2.3 Contact person:

Sara Ofelia González Hernández.

Directora (E) Archivo General de la Nación

2.4 Contact details:

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3. Identity and Description of the Documentary Heritage

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated:

Fondo: NEGROS Y ESCLAVOS

Legajos: 1-55

Fechas Ext.: 1550– 1818

3.2 Description:

Slavery, although a shameful practice, existed in many cities throughout the centuries. In the territory of New Granada – (the ancient name of Colombia) - some indigenous cultures practiced slavery, especially prisoners of captured during times of war, capturing as prisoners. Since the 16th century, inhabitants of the southern Province of Popayán, located near the northern limits of the Inca Empire, enslaved those captured in war or in conquests. These slaves were called "Yanaconas".

In his description of Atahualpa, the chronicler Antonio de Herrera, said: "... The Yanaconas were serving the great Christians, men who were forced to perpetual servitude and captivity, separated from the free men by their garment, treatment and service ..." (Blacksmith, Antonio of: " General History of the West Indies ", Decade V, Freed III. Pág. 47). Sebastián de Belalcázar and his men introduced a good number of indigenous Yanaconas from Peru and Ecuador into the Neogranadino territory. For this reason, names of Quechua origin appear in our geography, which presumably we owe to these aboriginals, who on occasion managed to escape from their oppressors, and then settled in the region.

In general, when one speaks about "Yanaconas", "Anaconas" or "Mitimaes", one refers to these native people of Incaico origin who possess a traditional character of servitude. Nevertheless, we must bear in mind that in some cases the Spanish settlers called any aboriginal they enslaved 'Yanacona' irrespective of which tribe they originated. In Mexico, the aboriginals of service were called: "Nabories".

The documents that compose the archive: "Negros y Esclavos" are varied and refer to the process of slavery experienced in the New Kingdom of Granada between the XVIth at the beginning of XIXth centuries. These documents provide evidence of the maltreatment of slaves; their protests; their sale and marketing; their role in daily domestic work; their work in the mines and on the large estates, and finally of their rebellion.

The trade in native peoples began from the start of European occupation of American territory. This gave rise to the formulation of many protective dispositions from the Spanish Crown for indigenous people, but nevertheless at the beginning, these were not sufficiently respected.

Black slaves brought from Africa, were introduced in the Neogranadino territory during the first years of European colonization. The trade and sale of slaves were carried out through the "asiento" contract, formalized between the Spanish Crown and the contractor. The forced capture of slaves from different African tribes contributed the terminology by which they were distinguished: "mandinga", "carabalí" and "mondongo". Such appellations were imposed as surnames on slaves, but also referred to other aspects of behaviour and condition. For example, the word "muzzle" was used for those slaves that were captured from the land of birth but had not learned to speak Spanish, whereas those had been that had been enslaved for more than one year or who already spoke Spanish, were called "ladino".

Likewise, distinction was made between the newly enslaved and those in bondage for some time. The latter were called: "muleques". Seven to ten-year-old slaves were called: "boom" and were generally considered awkward and slightly skillful. The "cimarrón" was a rebellious slave who fled to the field becoming accustomed to a rough life. On the other hand: "pieza" ó "pieza de las Indias" were applied to those between the ages of 18 and 35 years.

The price that was paid for a slave depended on his age and physical fitness for work. Between 150 and 25 pesos were paid for a slave between 16 and 18 years at the beginning of the 18th century. During this same period, a house made of wood and straw cost 900 pesos in Santafé.

The "palmeo" was the procedure used to determine the value of the slave. It consisted of measuring him with a strip of wood and the price would drop if the slave was ill, had lost teeth or had spots. Afterwards, their skin was branded with a hot iron - the marquilla-, on the chest (with the "R" of the Real Crown) and on the back with the initials of the respective owner. It is also known that some slaves were branded on their face.

The role of the slaves in the New Kingdom of Granada, as in other countries, was not limited to work in the mines or in the plantations. Slaves also performed diverse domestic chores such as the manufacture of handmade goods and activities relating to transportation. They contributed to the development of an American society based on a combination of "bloods": white, Indian, etc. whose numerous varieties, generated a scale of 'afro Latinos' that have helped to build a nation over the centuries.

Although the number of black slaves introduced into New Granada during more than three hundred years has never been established with accuracy, it was not less than 250,000 individuals, and Father Claver affirmed that more than 300,000 black slaves were baptized during his clerical period of service.

Although on several occasions since the 16th century, groups of slaves tried to rebel against their owners, in Colombia, it was not until the beginning of the 19th century that the abolition of slavery was seriously debated. In 1814, the 'Vientres' law was applied in the Colombian province of Antioquia. It gave freedom to the children of slaves, but this glory did not last long; in 1816, Antioquia was again occupied by the Spanish army.

In 1819, the Liberator Simon Bolivar expressed his desire for the absolute freedom of slaves when he created the Congress of 'Angostura'. Since then, several legislative efforts took place that tried to abolish slavery. These include the Decree of 22 January 1820, the Law of 21 July 1821 on the freedom of childbearing, manumission and abolition of slaves trafficking; the Decree of 27 June 1828 that dictates rules for the Meetings of Manumission; the Decree of 27 July 1839 on the implementation of the 1st and 4th articles of the Law of 1821; the Decree of 12 April 1842 that arranged for the formation of a slave census; the Law of 29 May 1842 in addition to that of manumission; the 30 July Decree of 1842 on the implementation of the Law of May 29 of the same year.

Finally, this process ended with the enactment of the Law of 21 May 1851, by President José Hilariá Lopez, which declared free all slaves that lived in the territory of the Republic. It established that the Meetings of Manumission created in the different provinces should send certificates of presentation, valuation and freedom of every slave, in order for the ancient owners to exchange them for a certain value of manumission, which would be recognized gradually in the State. The application of the Law, began from 1st January 1852, stated the following: " ... slaves will enjoy the same rights, will have the same obligations as other natives of Granada and will be protected by the Constitution ".

4. Justification for inclusion/Assessment against criteria

The documents "Negros y Esclavos" of the ancient Spanish colonies in America are today, one of the most valuable archives in the world. The preservation of testimonial relating to the route of the African slave to the American continent is a recent trend in the world of historiography. It has become very important to preserve the history of slavery and to understand the role it played in the creation of nations throughout 4 centuries.

4.1 Authenticity:

These documents were originally produced by the colonial Administration in the New Granada (today the Republic of Colombia), that serve as proof as the original and only existing testimony. They form part of the cultural heritage of Colombian history as they provide rich and useful information about the process of slavery in the ancient New Kingdom of Granada.

4.2 World Significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability:

Though it is true that other documents of this sort exist in other institutions of the world, such as: "Archivo de Indias", "Archivo Nacional do Brasil", etc, it is extremely important that this type of material remain intact and preserved for present and future generations to study the impact of this cultural shock.

Many studies of this topic, including those relative to the New Kingdom of Granada and to the different possessions of Spain in the Indies, refer to the documents contained in this archive, due to the fact that Cartagena was a major slave port and it was from there that slaves were transported to different regions of the Continent. The documents therefore exceed local interests.

As there is a global interest today to accurately establish the development of the African slave trade throughout the 16th to 19th centuries, in this respect, the primary sources contained in the archive exceed the geographical borders of any country.

4.3 Criteria:

Each time a researcher consults the heritage archives "Negros y Esclavos", it gains in greater importance as an aid to the construction of new visions of the history of the African-American in the social environment of Spanish-American countries.

The state of conservation of the original documents and the long-term criteria for their preservation merit greater dissemination of this rich material using the most sophisticated technology available.

4.4 Rarity, integrity, threat and management:

This archive possesses a particular importance due to the richness of its contents regarding the condition of the black slave in the territories of the former New Kingdom of Granada. Although certain complementary information exist in other files, as is the case of the 'Archivo General de Indias de Sevilla', the archive is unique and provides us today with vast information about many aspects relating to the problems of slavery in Colombia.

5. Legal Information

5.1 Owner of the documentary heritage:

The documentary heritage: “Negros y Esclavos” is owned by El Archivo General de la Nación de Colombia. The documents may be consulted in the Research Room.

5.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage: Archivo General de la Nación de Colombia.

5.3 Legal status:

a) Category:

b) Accessibility:

Access to the Archive is free. All the information has been transferred to microfilm and has been digitized which allows the original documents to be kept safe and inaccessible by the public.

c) Copyright status:

The Archive permits open consultation of its fonds; nevertheless, it requires that each time information from these documents is used, the source and exact reference of the files consulted be mentioned.

d) Responsible administration:

Mr. Mauricio Tovar González, Chief of the Division of Services to the Public and of the Research Room of the Archivo General de la Nación de Colombia.

e) Other factors:

Recently, the Archive has made distance consultation of the archive possible through the Internet. However, it is in the process of establishing political limits in order to define the economic rights that could stem from a possible commercial development of the archive.

6. Management Plan

6.1 Summary of the Management Plan:

The Management Plan of the archive “Negros y Esclavos” is not very different from that used to manage other documentary archives that form part of the undivided assets of the Archives. Archival principles have been developed and the necessary instruments of consultation have been elaborated for its use.

7. Consultation

7.1 Details of consultation of nomination:

El Archivo General de la Nación, member of the National “Memory of the World” Committee of Colombia.

PART B – SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION

8. Assessment of Risk

The fonds along with other documents of Archivo General is safeguarded and preserved in air-conditioned repositories where only heritage documents are kept. Fire alarms are installed in these repositories, the doors are fitted with safety mechanisms and access is controlled.

9. Assessment of Preservation

9.1 The fonds has been restored and finished with a new leather binding. The sheets of paper were sewn in book fashion, reinforcing them with muslin or Japanese paper. Additionally conservation boxes were designed to facilitate the preservation and identification of the documents. On the other hand, appropriate conditions of conservation concerning temperature and humidity are controlled permanently, together with other fonds of the undivided assets.

It is necessary to note that once the files are microfilmed and digitized, an institutional law foresees the retirement of the original documents.

PART C - LODGEMENT

This nomination is lodged by: El Archivo General de la Nación de Colombia

Signature _____

Sara González Hernández
Director, Archivo General de la Nación

31 March 2004