

ABSTRACT

AFRO-WEST INDIANS IN SEARCH OF THE SPANISH MAIN: THE TRINIDAD-VENEZUELA REFERENT IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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KEYWORDS: Nineteenth century; Afro-West Indians; nineteenth century; This thesis focuses on the migration of Afro-West Indians from Trinidad to Venezuela in the nineteenth century, in a phase coinciding roughly with that between the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars and the settlement of the Guyana-Esequiba border dispute by international arbitration. Within that period, thousands of West Indians, often using Trinidad as a springboard, trickled to the Spanish Main. Except for the territories adjacent to and north of the Orinoco and adjacent to and south of the Demerara, the Mainland constituted then something of a no-man's land. It is the contention of this thesis that, although overlooked, these movements constitute an important part of the Afro-West Indian emigration dynamic. They formed the basis of the evolution of the Afro-West Indian Diaspora on the Spanish Main.

Our study confronts the traditional approach to emigration from West Indian islands as a development shaped entirely by market forces. It considers emigration between Trinidad and Venezuela as shaped by unique geographical and historical circumstances between these two territories and as the continuity of a tradition begun by the Amerindians and their European overlords. Some of the nineteenth century emigrations of Afro-West Indians were illegal and reflected their search for freedom and opportunities on the

Spanish Main. An examination of these emigrations allows for consideration of the forced and voluntary movements of Afro-descended groups during the period of British slavery, the years immediately following Emancipation and in the later decades of the nineteenth century. Far from being purely a response to market forces, these movements reflected also the complex interplay of racism and imperial policy.

KEYWORDS: Migration; Afro-West Indians; nineteenth century; Spanish Main; Trinidad, Venezuela; Slavery; Emancipation; Racism, Imperial Policy.