

**ABSTRACT****Labour Shortage in Trinidad 1498-1797:****The Scarcity of African Slaves****Ope M. Kojo**

Trinidad was claimed by the Spanish on Columbus' third voyage, in 1498, and for a long time after that remained a neglected colony. Even after the first permanent settlement began, in the 1590s, the colonists started to experience a growing labour shortage. The Amerindian population began to die out quite rapidly. Estimated to be about 30,000 at the time of discovery, their numbers dwindled to just 2,000 by the end of the eighteenth century.

The colonists soon turned to African Slaves as their only hope for labour. In spite of numerous attempts to get such slaves, for a number of reasons, the supplies were never enough. Mainly to ease the labour shortage and develop the colony, the Spanish government implemented the famous Cedula of Population of 1783, offering very generous incentives for Catholic immigrants to come to the colony with their slaves. The more slaves they brought, for example, the more land they could get. In spite of the generous provisions of the Cedula, however, the island remained undersupplied with slaves. Among other things, this Research Paper examines why there was such a chronic shortage of African slaves both before and after the Cedula.