

Date: 1528, March 30.

Theme: Letter by oidores Espinosa and Zuazo of the *Audiencia* of Santo Domingo about the population situation in Santo Domingo

Source: PARES, Portal de Archivos Españoles--Archivo General de Indias, PATRONATO,172,R.35.

[fo. 392r.]

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Sacred, Cesarean, Catholic Majesty /

r The report of what we deem is convenient to the service /  
of your majesty, which could be in place to populate this Española island /  
so that it would have perpetuity /

r Looking for means and ways so that this island may /  
be populated and is populated by asiento, seeing how almost /  
all the towns that until now were populated /  
have been consumed and others dismantled and depopulated /  
at all, except for the city of Santo Domingo, which is populated /  
and build in the manner that the religious fathers will /  
relate, besides that they are carrying the /  
drawing of it, because since ten years ago have been depopulated /  
in this island [the following]:

r The village of Santa Cruz de Icagua and of Yaquimo /  
and of Lares de Gauhaba and of Buenaventura and /  
of Bonao /

These towns have been totally depopulated, with no memory /  
remaining of them /

r Also the following towns /  
have been almost totally lost and depopulated /

[fo. ]

r The city of La Concepción, whci was the main /  
thing of this island, and for this it was designated head /  
of the bishopric, and is in the center of the island, and there is in it /  
a fortress and a church of stone, and a monastery of Saint /  
Francis of stone, and houses of the city council and other /  
twenty five or thirty very good buildings of stone /  
there used to be in this city two hundred *vecinos* /  
out of which one hundred were *hidalgos* with horses and /  
principal persons. There are now not [even] twenty denizens and most /  
of them about to abandon it, old and not /  
married and without having children from whom /  
perpetuity could be expected. /

– The village of Santiago, there used to be in it one hundred /  
denizens, also principal persons that /  
eighty with horses, now there are not [even] eight /  
denizens of the quality of those of La Vega, and these, in their /  
farms and not in form of a town / .

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[...]

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[fo. 393r.] r [...]

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[fo. 393v.]

[...]

Juan Ponce de León and Miguel Díaz, denizens of the Española island /  
left this island to populate the island of San Juan and lead its peopling. /  
Indians almost vanished and very little population is left in the island, /  
so that there are only two towns: one that is called Puerto Rico /  
[crossed out: San Germán] which used to have a hundred and fifty /  
denizens. There are not [even] sixty now, and these sustain themselves with /  
the blacks that have been brought to the said island /

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[...]

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[fo. 394v. ]

r [...]

therefore from the entire report that is submitted /  
to your majesty conained above it may be inferred /  
r clearly that in everything that your majesty has /  
in this new world and the land of the Indies /  
that are discovered and initially populated /  
there is nothing populated by *asiento* nor that has /  
any perpetuity nor is expected in the future /

except for this city of Santo Domingo, because of the /  
r constructions of sugar mills and the population of blacks /  
that have been placed in it, because all the people that /  
have gone on to populate other lands and /  
provinces and reside in them, [they] do go more to depopulate /  
and enjoy the land and the natives /  
over there, rather than to populate it or remain in it, /  
except when there are *entradas* and gold in the hands of /  
r the Indians to take them and [bring? ] before the said /  
Indians, so that we believe it will be as brief as it was /  
in these islands, because in comparison so much populated /  
were these islands as [it is] what is now/  
r beginning to be populated, and th Spaniards that /  
came to it were more established [there] /  
than are the ones that now go to these new /  
settlements and governorships /.

[fo. 395r.]

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x

[fo. 395v.]

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- for it: a town of fifty married denizens /  
with their wives at least, as long as half /  
of them are Spaniards and the other half blacks, and so that all of them /  
are brought from Spain, and they may not be taken away nor /  
the denizens of this island that may want /  
to settle in the said town, and that said town will also build /  
a church of stone, and it will have a clergyman that will take charge of the  
sacraments, /  
and that he should also build a strong house similar to a /  
x fortress for the defense of what may be there, because here it seems /  
to be convenient for each settlement to have one. Also that he will /  
comply with and build all of it at his expense, also that they will pay their fares  
and cargos / to the farmer denizens that they may bring. Also /  
here they will give them the necessary sustenance until they have it /  
and they will build their houses in which they may stay, and they will help each  
denizen, /  
especially among those they are recently brought for the said peopling, ten cows /  
and two oxens and fifty sheeps and one mare, and ten /  
female pigs with which they may have better arrangement to breed and farm /  
the land, and that this town they will begin to build this town soon and /  
they will have it finished within five years, and that these /  
settlements will be done mainly for the peopling /  
of the land and its security, and in place where they are closed to /  
minds to collect gold in them or to sugar mills or to other businesses and  
improvements of the land of which the denizens /  
may take benefit from or live and sustain the said lands. /
- r all of which is said they will do and comply with, and for this they will oblige /  
themselves firmly, and the Dominican fathers are taking with them particular  
powers /  
of some principal persons of the land to whom your majesty/  
ordered to provide the following: /
- firstly, that it be mandated to issue a license to each of the settlers /  
who were to build the set town so they may /  
carry to this island one hundred blacks with their wives, so that neither there /  
nor here they may be asked for any duties nor *almojarifazgo* /.

[...]

[fo. 397v.]

[...]

[fo. 398r.]

up to this point is what we think your majesty should mandate /  
to be done for the new peopling of this island. And the remedy /  
that we think is currently appropriate for the towns mentioned /  
above which are about to be depopulated is the following: /

the two main things with which [they] can be sustained and favored /  
at present are: having the mines and the business of sugar /  
active for the towns that are located close to the rich mines /  
that are in this island. Your majesty must order for them to be favored /  
and given the grace that it be ordered how they should proceed in the mines /  
and have it as the main business, and they be authorized /  
and given opportunity for it. And this should be decided so that your majesty /  
grants them the grace of ordering that they be helped with one thousand black  
bozales, /  
mandating that they are given to them on credit at a price that your majesty  
pleases /  
and this must be granted and given on credit in the manner said here /  
to the denizens of the city of La Vega and Puerto Real and Santiago /

[fo. 398v.]

and in San Juan de la Maguana. Also the pay will be very certain and safe /  
because the gold itself that they may collect may be excised at the foundry /  
and the same blacks will be mortgaged to the pay, so that /  
nothing of it may be lost and they are paid in a short time and your majesty /  
will be benefitted in the price of the said blacks and, in it, the tithes iof /  
the gold that they may dig, besides the growth and benefit of the towns /  
of this island. Also that these blacks, so that they are always on foot and walk  
together /  
from denizen to denizen, that the said denizen to whom they were given on  
credit/  
and in the manner that had been said, may not sell them away nor bartered nor  
change nor /  
detached from him nor from his property, except [ ? ] /  
and if by a chance the denizens who has them /  
diminishes by death or loss of assets or absence, /  
then they must be given at the same price and on credit in the same manner to the  
denizens /  
that were to succeed, because in this manner the number of denizens /  
will always sustain itself or they will not diminish because the blacks /  
are here such a safe wealth and so continuous, especially /  
been married, and the land very favorable for them, because /

they face no risk. We beg your majesty that this item be seen and /  
to decide, because it seems to us it is one of the most important that /  
may be decided upon for the peopling and perpetuity of this island. /  
Also to the denizens to whom they are given under this condition great /  
favor is done to them and to their heirs and successors, because it will be /  
property that they will never risk losing, and this is another way that the ancient  
ones /  
had for peopling new lands, as it shows in all the laws /  
that mention this matter. /

[...]

And in case that your majesty is not pleased that these blacks be brought by /  
the officials of your majesty and of your royal treasury to /  
see this benefit that may be obtained from them, your majesty should grant favor  
to /  
the denizens of this city of Santo Domingo with the others in the island that /

[*On the left margin.*] Once this [issue] of the Germans is over, his majesty will  
make favor to the towns of his majesty in the said island of one thousand blacks  
[], so that they pay only the *almojarifazgo* and comply with the conditions that  
will be imposed upon the population of the said towns. /

[fo. 399r.]

may join them so they find a way to bring /  
the said blacks and introduce them into this island and give them on credit at fair /  
prices to the said towns, according to in the way that is deemed convenient /  
for their sustenance and that of this island. Also as to the distributing of the /  
said blacks it must be assigned to this *audiencia real* so it is done /  
in the most convenient manner to the service of your majesty and of the /  
sustenance of the said towns. /

As to the sugar mills, there is also great need of being /  
always as assisted with blacks, because those built and which are /  
equipped are twelve, and the ones begun and which are already very advanced /  
about to be finished if they are assisted with people, are another twelve or  
thirteen, /  
all of which need to be fed with blacks and people of service, because otherwise /  
in lacking the people, they [ ? ] and stop milling even when having /  
everything necessary for it, as your majesty will be more /  
particularly informed by the priests, so that the main remedy /  
and sustenance of everything here consists of the building and /  
multiplying of these sugar mills, and of giving them all the equipment necessary /

for it, and this they can not have in any way. And as /  
it is said here no black people and even Indians of service are introduced /  
and, due to this lack that has occurred and at present occurs, /  
the ones that are initiated are still to be finished, and the finished ones stop  
milling /  
and producing wealth half of the year. /

[...]

Also your majesty should grant favor and mandate to decide that as to the blacks /  
and buildings and everything else necessary for the equipment and milling  
machinery of the /  
sugar mills, no confiscation may be done nor is done except upon the sugar /  
and the fruits that were found in it and were to be made subsequently, because in  
doing the / contrary, and in lacking anything necessary for the /  
said equipment, it stops and gets wasted, all the creditors stop /  
being paid, and the sugar mill been maintained and the /  
fruits been maintained, no matter how much it is owed, there is [monies] to pay  
everybody, and otherwise /

[fo. 399v.]

since the sugar mills are the first sustenance of the towns, /  
if they are unequipped, the town where the said mill is quickly lost /  
as we have seen and we see in conversation and /  
by experience, and in this matter four or five sugar mills have been lost /

[...]

Done in Santo Domingo on the thirtieth day of the month of March of fifteen  
hundred twenty eight years /

[...]

*Licenciado* Espinosa Zuazo

[fo. 400vo]

1528

The reports brought by the Dominican priests /  
about the towns of La Española island