

Statistics of the Slave Trade to Cuba, 1790-1867

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I

The most recent as well as the most comprehensive book on the statistics of the Atlantic slave trade has been written by Professor Philip D. Curtin.¹ *The Atlantic Slave Trade, A Census* is a work which applies modern techniques and sophisticated analysis to the very difficult historical problem of the magnitude of the Atlantic slave trade. As Curtin himself states: 'The dimensions of the nineteenth century slave trade have always been a matter of controversy - political controversy at the time and historical controversy since'.² Professor Curtin's book will not put an end to the controversy, but it does suggest further areas for research. More work needs to be done on the historical sources from which the statistics of the slave trade are derived.³ This article examines the main sources available for assessing the importation of slaves into Cuba from 1790 to 1867 and analyses the statistics which these sources yield in the light of Curtin's conclusions.⁴

Historians of the Cuban slave trade from José Antonio Saco onwards have realized that the two main bodies of archival material relevant to a statistical study of the last years of the slave trade to Cuba are the customs house records of Havana, covering the years 1790-1821, and the reports of the British Commissioners stationed at Havana from 1819. The period 1790 to 1867 is a convenient one to examine, since 1790 was the first year of the so-called 'open' Spanish slave trade operating under the conditions laid down by the *cédula* of 1789, and 1867 was the last year in which a documented slave landing took place in Cuba. In contrast to the 'closed' or *asiento* system which governed the African slave trade to Cuba before 1789, the *cédula* of that year relaxed the restrictions on foreigners bringing African slaves into the Spanish colonies. At the same time through a system of sub-

¹ Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade, A Census* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

² *Ibid.*, p. 231.

³ One very good example of recent work along this line is Leslie Bethell, *The Abolition of the Brazilian Slave Trade; Britain, Brazil and the Slave Trade Question 1807-1869* (Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 388-95.

⁴ The material for this article is taken from a nearly completed monograph entitled 'Britain, Spain and the Abolition of the Slave Trade to Cuba'. The research was made possible by a grant from the Canada Council.

sidies it attempted to encourage more Spaniards to enter the slave trade from Africa instead of relying on foreigners.⁵ The *cédula* of 1789 was modified slightly by another two years later,⁶ and a further *cédula* of 1804 extended the permission granted to Spaniards and foreigners alike to participate in the slave trade to the Spanish colonies.⁷ It was not until a treaty was signed between Britain and Spain in 1817 that Spain prohibited the trade in slaves between Africa and her transatlantic colonies, but this prohibition did not become total until 30 May 1820.⁸

From 1790 to 1820 the African slave trade to Cuba was legal according to Spanish law. The number of slaves officially imported into Cuba through Havana was recorded by the customs officials at Havana. The figures were gathered together in monthly returns by the Intendant of Havana and forwarded to Spain.⁹ A succession of historians have accepted (and published) these figures as accurate numbers for the slave trade to Cuba from 1790 to 1820. Baron von Humboldt used them in his account of Cuba published in 1826.¹⁰ An American historian of Cuban slavery later published the same figures in an appendix to his book on *The History of Slavery in Cuba, 1511-1868*.¹¹ Professor Curtin argues that these figures can be accepted as reasonable for the period they cover, and rejects a viewpoint put forward in 1842 by James Bandinel, an official at the British Foreign Office, that the Havana customs house figures ought to be doubled on account of illicit trade.¹² Curtin states in a footnote, 'Illicit trade may have existed but no evidence is available to show its level'.¹³

⁵ Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid (hereafter cited as AHN), estado, legajo 8.038, 'Real cédula de su magestad concediendo libertad para el comercio de negros con la isla de Cuba, Santo Domingo, Puerto Rico, y Provincia de Caracas, a españoles y extranjeros, baxo las reglas que se expresan', 28 Feb. 1789. See also James Ferguson King, 'Evolution of the Free Slave Trade Principle in Spanish Colonial Administration', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, xxii (1942), 34-56.

⁶ AHN, estado, legajo 8.038, 'Real cédula concediendo libertad para el comercio de negros con los virreynatos de Santa Fé, Buenos Ayres, Capitanía gral. de Caracas, e islas de Santo Domingo, Cuba y Puerto Rico a españoles y extranjeros baxo las reglas que se expresan', 24 Nov. 1791.

⁷ Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Indiferente general, legajo 2770, 'Real cédula sobre continuación del comercio de negros, y prórroga de su introducción, en la forma que se expresa', 22 April 1804.

⁸ The text of the treaty can be found in *British and Foreign State Papers*, iv (1816-17), 33-68.

⁹ Many, although not all, of these returns still exist and can be found in the Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Audiencia de Santo Domingo, legajo 2207.

¹⁰ Alexander von Humboldt, *Essai politique sur l'île de Cuba* (Paris, 1826).

¹¹ H. H. Aimes, *A History of Slavery in Cuba, 1511 to 1868* (New York, 1907, reprinted 1967), p. 269.

¹² Curtin, *op. cit.*, p. 36. For Bandinel's views, see James Bandinel, *Some Account of the Trade in Slaves from Africa as connected with Europe and America from the Introduction*

¹³ For footnote, see p. 133.

There is no question but that this illicit slave trade existed even in the 'open' period from 1791 to 1820. Havana was the only port listed in the 1789 *cédula* where foreigners could introduce imported African slaves into Cuba; Spaniards living in Santiago de Cuba were permitted to go to foreign colonies and purchase African slaves, but foreigners themselves were not allowed to sell African slaves at Santiago. The *cédula* of 1791 increased the number of Cuban ports through which Spaniards could import African slaves brought in Spanish-owned vessels, but Havana remained the only port on the island which foreign slave ships could legally enter. But the bulk of the slave trade from Africa to Cuba remained in foreign hands after 1789, so there were obvious reasons for merchants and planters in the outlying areas to connive at an illicit trade in slaves.

There are clear indications that the Spanish government was aware of this illicit commerce and of its extent. As early as 1791 the Intendant of Havana was told to make sure that certain coastguards were on the lookout for the clandestine entry of African slaves. The following year the Governor of Santiago was warned by the Madrid authorities of their suspicions that a large contraband slave trade was being carried on between Jamaica and Santiago.¹⁴ It would appear, then, that the permission granted to Spaniards in Santiago de Cuba in the *cédula* of 1789 to conduct the slave trade in Spanish ships merely gave an impetus to a long-standing clandestine trade between Santiago and Jamaica.

The figures of slave imports into Havana for the years 1790-1821, taken from the customs house records of Havana and given below in Table 1, represent the numbers of slaves brought in legally through Havana in this period, and cannot be taken as the total slave imports for the island of Cuba. These figures do not include the number of slaves legally introduced into Cuban ports such as Santiago and Trinidad, nor do they make any allowance for the contraband trade which continued throughout the 'open' slave trade. Both Aimes and Curtin fall into the trap of accepting the Havana customs house figures as representing the total number of slaves imported into Cuba, when at best they represent the minimum importation.

Cuban historians have been more aware of the inadequacy of these figures. In the hope of awakening his countrymen to the dangers of the slave trade, José Antonio Saco, in 1832, published an article analysing the statistics of the African slave trade to Cuba, using the Havana customs house records as the

of the Trade into modern Europe down to the present time, especially with reference to the efforts made by the British Government for its Extinction (London, 1842, reprinted 1968), pp. 284-6.

¹³ Curtin, *op. cit.*, p. 36, footnote 29.

¹⁴ AHN, legajo 8.038, summaries of letters to the Intendant of Havana, 24 Nov. 1791 and to the Governor of Santiago de Cuba, 4 Oct. 1792.

TABLE I

Official importations of African Slaves Through Havana, 1790-1821

<i>Years</i>	<i>Numbers</i>	<i>Years</i>	<i>Numbers</i>
1790	2,534	1806	4,395
1791	8,498	1807	2,565
1792	8,528	1808	1,607
1793	3,777	1809	1,162
1794	4,164	1810	6,672
1795	5,832	1811	6,349
1796	5,711	1812	6,081
1797	4,522	1813	4,770
1798	2,001	1814	4,321
1799	4,949	1815	9,111
1800	4,145	1816	17,733
1801	1,659	1817	25,841
1802	13,832	1818	19,902
1803	9,671	1819	15,147
1804	8,923	1820	17,194
1805	4,999	1821	4,122
		TOTAL	240,721

Source: José Antonio Saco, 'Análisis de una obra sobre el Brasil', *Revista bimestre Cubana* (1832); reprinted in *Colección de papeles científicos históricos, políticos y de otros ramos sobre la isla de Cuba* (3 vols., Havana, 1962), II, 74.

basic guide for the years 1790-1821.¹⁵ Saco added 60,000 or approximately one-quarter of the total to his total of 240,721 for the years 1790-1821 to cover legal entries through other Cuban ports, customs omissions and contraband trade.¹⁶ To accept Saco's calculations would mean a total of 300,721 slaves imported into Cuba during the years 1790-1821, in addition to his estimate of 98,684 as the number of slaves imported into Cuba before 1789.¹⁷ In round numbers then, the years of the 'open' slave trade saw 300,000 African slaves brought into Cuba, in contrast to the 100,000 imported before 1789. Confirmation of the reliability of the original customs house records of Havana can be found in a memorial sent by the *Consulado* of Havana to the Spanish Cortes in February 1811, warning against any precipitate action to abolish the slave trade. The *Consulado* stated that since 1789, 110,000 slaves

¹⁵ José Antonio Saco, 'Análisis de una obra sobre el Brasil', *Revista bimestre Cubana* (1832); reprinted in *Colección de papeles científicos, históricos, políticos y de otros ramos sobre la isla de Cuba* (hereafter cited as *Papeles sobre Cuba* (3 vols., Havana, 1962), II, 74.

¹⁶ Saco, *Papeles sobre Cuba*, II, 74-5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

had been imported into Havana at a cost of 33 million pesos.¹⁸ This figure roughly coincides with the totals from the Havana customs house records for the period 1789-1810. A later Cuban historian, Fernando Ortiz, also basing his calculations upon the Havana customs records, agreed with Saco that an addition of one-quarter should be made to cover clandestine trade, etc.¹⁹

Bandinel in his 1842 account was probably going too far in doubling the customs house figures, but was correct in not accepting the numbers of slaves imported through Havana as the total imported into the island.²⁰ Bandinel's main fault, which he shares with many other commentators on the Cuban slave trade, lies in calculating annual averages from small samples of questionable yearly statistics. Based on the Havana customs house records, the number of slaves brought to Cuba each year fluctuated widely. The number legally imported through Havana alone jumped from 1,659 in 1801 to 13,832 in the following year when there was a truce in the Napoleonic Wars. Similarly, at the end of the wars the number jumped from 9,111 in 1815 to 17,733 in 1816, and in 1821 it fell to 4,122 from 17,194 in 1820. As Saco informs us, the import figures for 1821 ostensibly represent those of expeditions which left Havana before the prohibition on the slave trade went into effect, and were therefore allowed by the Spanish authorities to return to Cuba with their slave cargoes.²¹ It is the fluctuations rather than the averages which ought to interest the historian because they document the almost rhythmic rise and fall of the African slave trade to Cuba.

Professor Curtin recognizes the imprecision of all statistics on the Atlantic slave trade and one of the valuable features of his book is his attempt to develop new techniques of assessing the reliability of figures of slave imports. For Cuba he has framed a mathematical equation based on the premise that 'Cuban slave imports of 1774-1816 must account both for the growth of the Cuban slave population from 1774 to 1817 and for any deficit caused by an excess of deaths over births'.²² By working out his equation he postulates a 3.5 per cent annual increase in the Cuban slave population and an implied rate of net natural decrease of 0.5 per cent per year between 1774 and 1817.²³ However interesting this approach may be, the figures he uses in his equation must be questioned. First, as has been shown, the limitations of the Havana customs house records have to be recognized. Second, how accurate are the population statistics which he uses?

¹⁸ Archivo General de Simancas, Simancas, estado, legajo 8277, 'Representación del Consulado de la Havana sobre las últimas ocurrencias habidas en el Comercio de Negros', no. 212, 24 Feb. 1811.

¹⁹ Fernando Ortiz, *Hampa afro-cubana: los negros esclavos, estudio sociológico y de derecho publico* (Havana, 1916), p. 87.

²⁰ Bandinel, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-5.

²¹ Saco, *Papeles sobre Cuba*, II, 74.

²² Curtin, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

The figures for Cuba given in Table 7 of Professor Curtin's book are headed 'Slave Population' and are taken from the six official censuses carried out in Cuba between 1774 and 1861.²⁴ The table is reproduced below as Table 2. Using these figures Professor Curtin calculates the rate of increase

TABLE 2

The Slave Population of Cuba, 1765-1867, taken from Curtin's Table 7, 'The Slave Populations of Cuba and Puerto Rico, 1765-1867'

<i>Place and date</i>	<i>Slave population</i>	<i>Rate of increase p.a. over period indicated (%)</i>
Cuba		
1774	44,300	3.5 (1774-1816)
1792	85,900	3.7 (1774-91)
1817	199,100	3.4 (1792-1816)
1827	286,900	3.7 (1817-26)
1841	436,500	3.0 (1827-40)
1861	367,400	-0.9 (1841-60)

Source: Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, p. 34.

per annum of the slave population over the whole period. Curtin's figures, which he has rounded off to the nearest hundred, agree with those used by José Antonio Saco in an article published in 1865, with the exceptions of the figures for 1791 and 1861.²⁵ There are minor differences for these years, although the statistics in both tables are derived from the same sources. Saco's table is reproduced below as Table 3.

TABLE 3

Cuban Population Figures, 1775-1861, According to the Official Censuses

<i>Years</i>	<i>Whites</i>	<i>Slaves</i>	<i>Free Coloured</i>	<i>Total Coloured</i>	<i>Total</i>
1775	96,440	44,333	30,847	75,180	171,620
1791	133,559	84,590	54,152	138,742	272,301
1817	239,830	199,145	114,058	313,203	553,033
1827	311,051	286,942	106,494	393,436	704,487
1841	418,291	436,495	152,838	589,333	1,007,624
1846	425,767	323,759	149,226	472,985	898,752
1861	757,612	370,553	232,493	603,046	1,360,658

Source: José Antonio Saco, 'De colonos africanos en Cuba y sus inconvenientes', *Revista Hispano-Americana*, II (12 May 1865), 9. The figures for 1846 are taken from Public Record Office, London, F.O. 84/789, Kennedy to Palmerston, no. 4, 1 Jan. 1850.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²⁵ José Antonio Saco, 'De colonos africanos en Cuba y sus inconvenientes', *Revista Hispano-Americana*, II (12 May 1865), 9-14.

A comparison of Table 2 with Table 3 reveals that Curtin takes no account of the free coloured population in his analysis. Yet the distinct implication of his premise is that the deficit in the slave population was only caused by an excess of deaths over births. Obviously, if the Cuban census figures can be trusted at all, there was a substantial growth in the free coloured population of Cuba from 1775 to 1861, due to manumissions and natural increase. Deficits in the slave population which had to be balanced by slave imports were caused both by an excess of deaths over births and by manumissions.

But an even more basic problem with Curtin's argument is the uncertainty of the accuracy of Cuban population statistics in the nineteenth century. How far can the statistics themselves be trusted? Curtin acknowledges in a footnote that 'reports of slave populations at various dates are not always in perfect agreement, and the Cuban census of 1846 has been set aside as suspect by Cuban scholars'.²⁶ The *Consulado* of Havana in 1811 was aware of the inadequacies of the early censuses. It stated in a report to Madrid, 'up to now we have not had a complete and exact census of the island'.²⁷ In his very first article on the Cuban slave trade, written in 1832, Saco drew attention to the notorious inaccuracy of Cuban census figures, especially where the slave and free coloured population were concerned.²⁸ He was more specific about the reasons for the inaccuracy of the censuses of 1827 and 1841 in a later pamphlet on the slave trade.²⁹ The *hacendados* in 1827 were loath to admit how many slaves they held because they feared the imposition of a new tax on planters to help Spain pay for the expenses of her military forces then in Cuba. The number of free coloured listed in the 1827 census was equally unrealistic. There was a continuing fear among both the peninsular and creole European population of a large increase in the free coloured population, undoubtedly connected to the growing numbers of *emancipados*, or African slaves ostensibly freed by the Havana Mixed Commission Court from captured slave ships. Comparing the 1817 figures with those of 1827, the number of free Africans, or coloured as the Cubans referred to them, appears to have diminished considerably in ten years.³⁰ In estimating the Cuban population in 1825, Humboldt arrived at a figure of 130,000 as the number of free coloured in contrast to the 1827 census figure of 106,494.³¹

²⁶ Curtin, *op. cit.*, p. 32, footnote 25.

²⁷ Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, MSS 14613²³, 'Nota sobre la población de la Ysla de Cuba', 20 July 1811.

²⁸ Saco, *Papeles sobre Cuba*, II, 76.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 136-7. The pamphlet entitled 'La supresión del tráfico de esclavos africanos en la isla de Cuba, examinada con relación a su agricultura y a su seguridad', was first published in Paris, 1844.

³⁰ See Table 3.

³¹ Humboldt, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

Saco informs us that in 1841 there were political motives for not revealing the exact number of slaves in the island. David Turnbull, the British Consul in Havana and an avowed abolitionist, had persuaded Palmerston to propose to Spain that the powers of the Mixed Commission Court in Havana be increased in order to enable it to ferret out slaves who had been illegally imported into Cuba since 1820. Since most of the slaves on the plantations in 1841 had entered the island illegally after 1820, the Cuban planters, faced with this threat, had good reason not to reveal how many slaves they actually owned.³²

Confirmation of the unreliability of Cuban census figures prior to 1861 is found in an analysis of the Cuban population made in 1843 by the then British Consul-General in Havana, Joseph Crawford. Referring to the Cuban census of 1841 he says,

All Slave holders, when they are required by Government agents to state the numbers they possess, are in the habit of returning much less than they actually own, frequently naming only one half, being fearful that such returns may be connected with some plan of Taxation, and in one District last year when the statistics were required by the *capitán de partido* only Four hundred and odd Slaves were returned, whereas there are in that District upwards of one thousand.³³

Crawford also reported that the Cuban government itself had political reasons for distorting the population figures. It feared a reaction from the creole population if it were known how rapidly Cuba's slave population was increasing and thereby continuing to worsen the disproportion between the races in the island. And the published figures, of course, were ammunition for Britain in her campaign to wipe out the illegal slave-trade to Cuba. When Captain General Leopoldo O'Donnell forwarded the census of 1847 to Madrid, he had to confess that, although all the statistics were checked very carefully, the results showed a decline in the Cuban population since 1841.³⁴ Since for him it was unquestionable that the Cuban population had increased during this period, the answer could only be errors in the 1841 census. After this unhappy experience with censuses, the Madrid authorities issued repeated royal orders prohibiting the formation and publication of censuses.³⁵ Not until 1861 was another full census compiled and published. Far from being a reliable check on the accuracy of the slave importa-

³² Saco, *Papeles sobre Cuba*, II, 136.

³³ Public Record Office, London (hereafter cited as P.R.O.), F.O. 84/463, Crawford to Palmerston, no. 35, 23 Oct. 1843.

³⁴ AHN, ultramar, legajo 4655, O'Donnell to Secretario de Estado y del Despacho de la Gobernación del Reino, 28 Nov. 1847.

³⁵ AHN, ultramar, legajo 4648, José de la Concha to Ministro de la Guerra y Ultramar, no. 1294, reservado, 9 June 1859.

tion statistics, Cuban censuses must be treated with great caution. Curtin's use of them not only as a check upon import figures, but also as a means of determining the annual growth rate of the Cuban slave population along with the net natural decrease rate shows far more confidence in the censuses than they warrant.³⁶

II

Because the African slave trade to Cuba was illegal after 1820, accurate figures of the number of slaves imported into the island are even more difficult to find than in the preceding period. Curtin, in his analysis, rightly rejects the figures compiled by H. H. S. Aimes for the years 1821-65.³⁷ Yet his own method of computing annual averages from published Foreign Office estimates in 1845, 1848 and 1865 is far from ideal.³⁸ Since the Foreign Office estimates came from figures supplied by the British Commissioners in Havana, the remainder of this article attempts to assess the reliability of these figures as a guide to the extent of the illegal slave trade to Cuba from 1821 to 1867.

Britain was fortunate in having continuous diplomatic or quasi-diplomatic representation in Cuba from 1819, first through the Commissioners appointed to the Havana Mixed Court as a result of the treaty signed by Britain and Spain in 1817, and supplemented by consular staff in Havana from 1833.³⁹ From 1819 to 1864 five men served as British Judges on the Havana Mixed Court, Henry Theo Kilbee (1819-28), William Sharp Macleay (1828-36), James Kennedy (1837-52), George Canning Backhouse (1852-5) and Joseph T. Crawford (1855-64). Britain was represented in Havana by three Consuls from 1833 to 1864, Charles David Tolmé (1833-40), David Turnbull (1840-2) and Joseph T. Crawford (1842-64).⁴⁰ In 1855 the positions of Judge on the Mixed Court and Consul-General were amalgamated and thereafter held by the same man. Each of the men mentioned above remained in Cuba long enough to become knowledgeable about the country, and in certain cases became experts on those aspects of Cuban life and society which were of interest to the British government.

Nothing concerned the British government more than wiping out the illegal slave trade to the island. Every British representative in Cuba was

³⁶ Curtin, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-40.

³⁹ David Tolmé was appointed the first British Consul in Havana in 1833. P.R.O., F.O. 72/415, Shee to Tolmé, draft, 16 Sept. 1833. Britain had appointed a consul to Santiago de Cuba in 1830.

⁴⁰ Biographical information on these men can be found in the following places: Kilbee, P.R.O., F.O. 72/215, Vaughan to Wm Hamilton, 16 March 1818; Macleay, *Dictionary of National Biography*; Kennedy, Frederic Boase, *Modern English Biography* (6 vols., Truro, Netherton and Worth, 1892-1921). For the others see the *Foreign Office Lists* from 1854.

required to do his utmost to achieve this and to report to the Foreign Office any supposed breach of the slave trade treaties in force between Britain and Spain.⁴¹ The reports of these representatives, beginning in 1819, provide the only continuous information on the illegal slave trade to Cuba available to historians today. All the statistics of the trade given to Parliament were taken from the correspondence of British officials in Cuba. Curtin, in relying on Foreign Office estimates prepared from time to time for Parliament, is using 'processed' as opposed to 'raw' data.⁴² Whether the statistics given to the Parliamentary Select Committee on the Slave Trade in 1848 were 'cooked', as he alleges, is really irrelevant since the original reports from which they were derived remain for the examination of any investigator.⁴³ But there is no evidence in the official records of a Foreign Office plot in 1848 to bolster the blockade policy with weighted statistics.⁴⁴

The decade 1820-30, the first decade of the illegal slave trade to Cuba, is the one for which statistics of the number of slaves landed are hardest to find. Yet it is possible to piece together a tentative estimate of the arrivals in the Havana area based on the reports of the British Commissioners. Robert Jameson reported on 1 September 1821 that since the end of October 1820 twenty-six slavers carrying 6,415 slaves had entered Havana.⁴⁵ Aimes included this figure as the total number of arrivals for 1821, which it is not, but it corroborates Saco's figure of 4,122 for 1821.⁴⁶ In his annual report dated 1 January 1825, H. T. Kilbee enclosed a list of slavers covering the years 1821-5. This list contains his estimate of the number of slave expeditions which landed at or near Havana from 1822-4, respectively ten, four and seventeen.⁴⁷ Kilbee thought an average of 250 slaves per ship was a 'low calculation', but on this basis the arrivals in the Havana area would be approximately 2,500 in 1822, 1,000 in 1823 and 4,250 in 1824.

Kilbee's report in 1826 was more specific. Thirty-seven slavers had returned to Cuba, bringing 11,190 African slaves.⁴⁸ He calculated that half this number was imported into the rest of Cuba, for a total importation of 17,885 for 1825. The annual report for 1826 stated that fourteen expeditions arrived at Havana in 1826, of which three were captured, carrying in all

⁴¹ A supplementary treaty between Britain and Spain was signed in 1835. The text of the treaty can be found in *British and Foreign State Papers*, xxiii (1834-5), 343-74.

⁴² Curtin, *op. cit.*, p. 39, Table 9A.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁴⁴ The correspondence in 1848 between Foreign Office officials and members of the Parliamentary Select Committee can be found in P.R.O., F.O. 84/739.

⁴⁵ P.R.O., F.O. 84/13, Jameson to Clanwilliam, 1 Sept. 1821. Robert Jameson was Commissioner of Arbitration from 1819 to 1823 and author of *Letters from the Havana, during 1820* (London, 1821).

⁴⁶ Aimes, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

⁴⁷ P.R.O., F.O. 84/39, Kilbee to Canning, no. 2, 1 Jan. 1825.

⁴⁸ P.R.O., F.O. 84/51, Havana Commissioners to Canning, no. 3, 1 Jan. 1826.

3,738 slaves.⁴⁹ Ten expeditions landed in the Havana area in 1827, bringing 3,500 African slaves,⁵⁰ but the next year Macleay, the British Judge, wrote that twenty-eight expeditions had come to Havana bringing not less than 7,000 and this figure did not include slaves on captured slave vessels.⁵¹ There were 1,002 captured slaves in 1828, so the total was 8,002. The number of slavers coming to Havana increased to thirty-three in 1829, and although Macleay did not estimate how many slaves were landed, 8,250 is a possible figure, using Kilbee's average of 250 per ship.⁵² The total of slaves landed in the Havana area during the period 1821-9 is given in Table 4.

TABLE 4
Number of African Slaves Landed in the Havana Area, 1821-9

Years	Number of Expeditions	Numbers	Years	Number of Expeditions	Numbers
1821	—	4,122	1826	14	3,738
1822	10	2,500	1827	10	3,500
1823	4	1,000	1828	28	8,002
1824	17	4,250	1829	32	8,250
1825	37	11,910			
TOTAL				152	47,272

Source: Annual reports of the Havana Commissioners, 1821-9.

The British officials in Havana in the 1840s became much more conscious of the importance of accurate statistics on the slave trade to Cuba, particularly after the publication of Thomas Fowell Buxton's *The African Slave Trade* in 1839. Buxton's purpose was to prove that the Atlantic slave trade was much greater in the 1830s than it had been before 1807. His statistics, far more than those provided by the Foreign Office, created a public controversy. By taking statements from the British Commissioners at Havana out of context, Buxton estimated that 60,000 slaves a year were brought to Cuba.⁵³ His figures were immediately challenged by other abolitionists as being too high.⁵⁴ Buxton stood his ground, but the controversy was a subject

⁴⁹ P.R.O., F.O. 84/68, Havana Commissioners to Canning, no. 3, 1 Jan. 1827.

⁵⁰ P.R.O., F.O. 84/80, Havana Commissioners to the Earl of Dudley, no. 3, 1 Jan. 1828.

⁵¹ P.R.O., F.O. 84/91, Macleay to the Earl of Aberdeen, no. 3, 1 Jan. 1829.

⁵² P.R.O., F.O. 84/106, Macleay to the Earl of Aberdeen, no. 3, 1 Jan. 1830.

⁵³ Thomas Fowell Buxton, *The African Slave Trade and its Remedy* (London, 1840, reprinted with an introduction by G. E. Metcalfe, Dawsons, London, 1968), pp. 29-34.

⁵⁴ See David Turnbull, *Travels in the West, Cuba; with Notices of Porto Rico and the Slave Trade* (London, 1840), pp. 361-7; and MacGregor Laird's review of Buxton's book in the *Westminster Review*, xxxiv (1840), 52-72.

of debate at the Anti-Slavery Convention held in London during June 1840.⁵⁵

British officials in Cuba were just as concerned with the inaccuracy of Buxton's statistics as were Buxton's abolitionist allies, especially since Buxton had obtained his statistics from the reports of the British Commissioners and the British Consul. David Tolmé, British Consul in Havana from 1833 to 1840, sent a dispatch to Lord Palmerston, dated 17 September 1839, which was essentially a refutation of Buxton's statistics.⁵⁶ Enclosed was a list 'which is an estimate of the number of Slaves imported in the years 1830 to 1838 inclusive . . . from vessels which afterwards entered this port . . .', based on the lists compiled by the British Commissioners. Tolmé doubted that very many slaves who had been landed at the outports had been left out of the list, because nearly all slavers eventually came to Havana. He was also convinced that relatively few slavers landed at the outports since the main agricultural area where demand for labour was greatest was in the Havana-Matanzas region. Tolmé believed a 20 per cent addition to his figures would more than cover unknown landings.⁵⁷

TABLE 5
British Consul Tolmé's Estimate of Slave Landings in Cuba, 1830-8

<i>Number of expeditions according to the reports of the Havana Commissioners</i>			<i>Number of expeditions according to the reports of the Havana Commissioners</i>		
<i>Years</i>	<i>Numbers</i>		<i>Years</i>	<i>Numbers</i>	
1830	9,808	(36)	1835	14,800	(50)
1831	10,400	(36)	1836	14,200	(43)
1832	8,200	(27)	1837	15,200	(51)
1833	9,000	(27)	1838	14,438	(50)
1834	11,400	(33)			
				TOTAL	107,438
					353

Source: P.R.O., F.O. 84/280, Tolmé to Palmerston, no. 18, 17 Sept. 1839.

His figure for 1838 was based on his own information of slavers arriving in Havana as well as on the reports of the British Commissioners. Aimes con-

⁵⁵ *Proceedings of the General Anti-Slavery Convention, called by the Committee of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, and held in London from Friday, 12 June 1840 to Tuesday, 23 June 1840* (London, 1841), p. 242.

⁵⁶ P.R.O., F.O. 84/280, Tolmé to Palmerston, no. 18, 17 Sept. 1839. See also P.R.O., F.O. 84/312, Havana Commissioners to Palmerston, no. 3, 1 Jan. 1840.

⁵⁷ P.R.O., F.O. 84/280, Tolmé to Palmerston, no. 18, 17 Sept. 1839.

sulted Tolmé's figures in preparing his own estimate. He attributed the increased demand after 1835 to a re-export trade in slaves to the United States, rather than accepting the explanation of the British officials that the increase was largely due to the replacement of slaves who died during the cholera epidemic in 1833.⁵⁸

Tolmé went to some trouble to justify the accuracy of his statistics, because a work recently published, by one whose talents and philanthropy, (to which the humble tribute of my praise is not wanting) entitle him to the confidence of the public, may create some misconception, and I hold it to be essentially important, for many reasons, and among others, that we may judge of the proportion of the vessels captured to those which arrive and thereby the probable effect of our naval operations against the Trade, that correct ideas should prevail on the matter.⁵⁹

After the Parliamentary Select Committee on the Slave Trade had reported in 1848, the British Commission Judge in Havana sent a dispatch to London also attacking Buxton's statistics on the slave trade.⁶⁰ Kennedy, like Tolmé, believed the number of African slaves brought into Cuba in any one year had never exceeded 25,000, and his dispatch justifies his views. But his reasons for exposing Buxton's mistakes ten years after Buxton had published his work are illuminating, especially in the light of Professor Curtin's recent judgement on the tactics of the Foreign Office in 1848. Curtin states that 'Like the anti-slavery propagandists themselves, the Foreign Office sometimes found it useful to make the slave trade appear as evil as possible by making it appear as large as possible'.⁶¹

Kennedy opened his attack on Buxton by declaring, 'Sir F. Buxton appears to me in all his statements to have taken extreme cases for the average, and thus has come to conclusions, which persons of very contrary feelings to his have warped to their own purposes'; and later in the dispatch Kennedy confesses: 'My principal object in submitting these observations to Your Lordship is to express my humble hope, that the propositions of that party, which is so desirous of removing the Cruisers from the coast and of allowing the free renewal of the slave trade, may not be admitted by the legislature'.⁶² All the officials of the Foreign Office in Cuba were staunch advocates of Palmerston's anti-slave trade policies. When these were attacked, ammunition for their defence was provided from Cuba. This ammunition was not inflated statistics of the slave trade to Cuba to make it

⁵⁸ Aimes, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

⁵⁹ P.R.O., F.O. 84/280, Tolmé to Palmerston, no. 18, 17 Sept. 1839.

⁶⁰ P.R.O., F.O. 84/716, Kennedy to Palmerston, no. 63, 20 Dec. 1848.

⁶¹ Curtin, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

⁶² P.R.O., F.O. 84/716, Kennedy to Palmerston, no. 63, 20 Dec. 1848. See also F.O. 84/753, Kennedy to Palmerston, no. 3, 1 Jan. 1849.

appear as evil as possible, but arguments to show that the slave trade was not as extensive as the British abolitionists alleged. William Hutt and his allies in Parliament were really after Palmerston's expensive policy of using British naval vessels to blockade West Africa. The British Judge in Havana was well aware that inflated statistics of the slave trade to Cuba could be used by Hutt as proof of the inefficiency of the naval blockade; by proving that Buxton's figures were too high, Kennedy hoped to undermine Hutt's case and reinforce his own belief in the effectiveness of the British cruisers.

In their annual report at the beginning of 1842, the British Commissioners included a list showing the numbers of slaves who had been landed in the Havana-Matanzas area from 1835 to 1841.⁶³ These figures were obtained from the books of the slave traders in Havana. They provide a check on the numbers in consul Tolmé's estimate for the years 1835-8, the biggest difference occurring for the year 1838. This list formed part of the estimate submitted by the Foreign Office to the Parliamentary Committee on the Slave Trade in 1848, and Curtin includes the total for the years 1836-40 as the British official estimate for Havana and vicinity.⁶⁴ This list is reproduced below as Table 6, with the British Commissioners' estimate of the number of expeditions each year in brackets.

TABLE 6

List of the Numbers of Slaves Imported into the Havana-Matanzas Area, 1835-41, taken from the Books of the Cuban Slave Traders

<i>Years</i>	<i>Numbers of Expeditions</i>		<i>Numbers of Slaves</i>
1835	47	(50)	15,242
1836	41	(43)	14,082
1837	29	(51)	12,240
1838	32	(50)	10,495
1839	31	(47)	10,995
1840	28	(44)	10,104
1841	21	(27)	8,893
<hr/>			
TOTAL	229	312	82,051
<hr/>			

Source: P.R.O., F.O. 84/395, Havana Commissioners to Palmerston, no. 4, January 1842 and annual reports of the Havana Commissioners, 1836-42.

In his report at the beginning of 1849, Kennedy, the British Commission Judge, again justified the accuracy of the statistics submitted by the British Commissioners. Referring to 1840, he stated that according to the books of

⁶³ P.R.O., F.O. 84/395, Havana Commissioners to Palmerston, no. 4, 1 Jan. 1842.

⁶⁴ Curtin, *op. cit.*, p. 39, Table 9A.

the slave traders, 11,756 slaves had been brought to the vicinity of Havana.⁶⁵ The figure of 10,104 for 1840 listed in the books of the slave traders, and given in Table 6, represented the numbers for the Havana district alone, but the addition of 1,652, representing the numbers of slaves landed at Matanzas, accounted for Kennedy's total of 11,756. In their annual report at the beginning of 1841, the British Commissioners added in the reported figures for the outports and arrived at a total of 14,470 slaves landed in forty-four expeditions during 1840.⁶⁶ They had reported forty-seven expeditions arriving during 1839, bringing probably about the same number of slaves as had been introduced in 1838, which consul Tolmé had estimated at 14,438. It seems probable, therefore, that a figure of 14,500 for each of the three years, 1838, 1839 and 1840 would represent an upper limit to the numbers of slaves brought to Cuba.

The slave trade to Cuba declined significantly during the 1840s primarily because the repressive measures against the slave trade carried out by two successive Captains-General, Valdés and O'Donnell, combined with the British naval blockade off the African west coast to discourage the Cuban slave traders. The British Commissioners in Havana reported that twenty-seven expeditions arrived in 1841 carrying 9,776 slaves.⁶⁷ Captain-General Valdés, on the other hand, put the figure for 1841 at 5,413 including captured slaves, but his total is lower even than the numbers entered on the books of the slave traders.⁶⁸ British and Spanish figures are closer to agreement for 1842, a year in which the British Commissioners reported the arrival of only nine expeditions, two of which did not land slaves.⁶⁹ The British Commissioners estimated that 3,000 slaves had been landed during 1842,⁷⁰ in contrast to Valdés' report that 2,292 had been landed, of whom 737 had been captured.⁷¹

In 1843 and 1844 the slave trade to Cuba increased. From 1843 the British Commissioners, in reporting their estimates of the number of slaves brought to Cuba, followed the practice of adding one-third to the total to account for unknown landings. They reported nineteen arrivals in 1843 with not more than 8,000 slaves, this figure including the one-third addition.⁷² Twenty-five

⁶⁵ P.R.O., F.O. 84/753, Kennedy to Palmerston, no. 3, 1 Jan. 1849.

⁶⁶ P.R.O., F.O. 84/348, Havana Commissioners to Palmerston, 1 Jan. 1841.

⁶⁷ The numbers are taken from the monthly reports of the Havana Commissioners, P.R.O., F.O. 84/348 and F.O. 84/395.

⁶⁸ AHN, estado, legajo 8.039, Valdés to Ministro de la Marina y Ultramar, no. 31, reservado, 1 June 1843.

⁶⁹ P.R.O., F.O. 84/451, Havana Commissioners to Aberdeen, no. 5, 2 Jan. 1843.

⁷⁰ P.R.O., F.O. 84/620, Havana Commissioners to Palmerston, no. 4, 1 Jan. 1846.

⁷¹ AHN, estado, legajo 8.039, Valdés to Ministro de la Marina y Ultramar, no. 31, reservado, 1 June 1843.

⁷² P.R.O., F.O. 84/508, Havana Commissioners to Aberdeen, no. 5, 1 Jan. 1844.

expeditions were reported in 1844, but only eighteen definitely brought slaves. There were 7,280 slaves known to have been landed, and the addition of one-third accounted for the Commissioners' estimate of 10,000.⁷³

From 1845 to 1848 the slave trade to Cuba reached its lowest level until its abolition. While the British Sugar Duties Act of 1846 undoubtedly encouraged the extension of slave-labour plantations in Cuba, as well as in Brazil, the Cuban demand for slaves was met initially through the transfer of slaves from the declining coffee plantations to the new sugar estates. The delayed effect of the Sugar Duties Act made itself felt in the increased demand for slaves in the late 1840s and 1850s. The Commissioners believed six expeditions arrived in 1845 bringing 950 slaves and, adding one-third, they reported an estimated total of 1,300.⁷⁴ The number of reported expeditions declined to four in 1846, and the Commissioners admitted that two of these were doubtful reports.⁷⁵ Kennedy reported three suspected landings in 1847 and a portion of a fourth expedition was seized by the Cuban authorities.⁷⁶ The respective estimates for these two years were 1,500 and 1,000. From 1848 the number of slaves landed in Cuba began to increase again. The British Commission Judge gave 1,500 as the number of slaves landed in 1848 from five expeditions, without adding in an estimate for unknown landings.⁷⁷

Professor Curtin has published the figures provided by the Havana Commissioners for the years 1849–64, taking his totals from the estimate prepared for the Parliamentary Committee on West Africa in 1865.⁷⁸ These figures are included in Table 7 below as annual estimates. The figures in brackets from 1849 to 1867 are the same as those used by Curtin, with the exception of 1853. There was a misprint in the return given by the Foreign Office to Parliament and the estimated total for 1853 should be 12,500 instead of 2,500. Three figures are shown for 1860. In that year the Havana Commissioners began sending their reports at the end of September. J. V. Crawford reported that 12,060 slaves were landed in Cuba during the first nine months of the year. He included the numbers of slaves captured by British and United States cruisers to arrive at the figure of 13,857, but he sent home a total estimate of 17,877, the original 12,060 with the usual addition of one-

⁷³ P.R.O., F.O. 84/561, Kennedy to Aberdeen, no. 4, 1 Jan. 1845.

⁷⁴ P.R.O., F.O. 84/620, Havana Commissioners to Aberdeen, no. 4, 1 Jan. 1846.

⁷⁵ P.R.O., F.O. 84/667, Havana Commissioners to Aberdeen, no. 3, 1 Jan. 1847.

⁷⁶ P.R.O., F.O. 84/714, Kennedy to Palmerston, no. 5, 1 Jan. 1848.

⁷⁷ P.R.O., F.O. 84/753, Kennedy to Palmerston, no. 3, 1 Jan. 1849.

⁷⁸ Curtin, *op. cit.*, p. 39. The table presented to the Parliamentary Committee on West Africa in 1865 is printed in full as an appendix to Archibald Hamilton, 'On the Trade with the Coloured Races of Africa', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, xxxi (1868), 25–48.

third.⁷⁹ The Foreign Office later did its own calculations, and arrived at a figure of 24,895.

TABLE 7

*Havana Commissioners' Estimate of the Number of Slaves Imported into Cuba, 1840-67**

Year	Number of Expeditions	Number of Slaves Landed	Year	Number of Expeditions	Number of Slaves Landed
1840	44	14,470 (14,470)	1855	13	4,806 (6,408)
1841	27	9,776 (9,776)	1856	14	5,478 (7,304)
1842	9	2,292 (3,000)	1857	23	7,827 (10,436)
1843	19	6,000 (8,000)	1858	19	12,744 (16,992)
1844	25	7,280 (10,000)	1859	39	22,855 (30,473)
1845	6	950 (1,300)	1860	21	13,857 (24,895)
1846	4	— (1,500)			17,877
1847	4	— (1,000)	1861	34	17,973 (23,964)
1848	5	1,500 (1,500)	1862	14	8,441 (11,254)
1849	20	6,575 (8,700)	1863	not reported	5,630 (7,507)
1850	7	2,325 (3,100)	1864	not reported	5,105 (6,807)
1851	7	3,687 (5,000)	1865	1	145 (145)
1852	12	5,943 (7,924)	1866	3	1,443 (1,443)
1853	17	9,383 (12,500)	1867	1	— —
1854	19	8,654 (11,400)			
TOTAL				407	187,639 222,834

* The totals in brackets are the estimates published by the Foreign Office, except for 1841 when no actual figure was published. For most years the published figures included the addition of one-third to account for unknown landings.

Source: Havana Commissioners' annual reports, 1841-68.

The estimates from Cuba were not always accepted unquestioningly by the Foreign Office officials, although the revisions were never made public. Thomas Ward, the Superintendent of the Slave Trade Department, questioned the accuracy of the figures submitted by the Havana Commission Judge for the year 1854.⁸⁰ Ward examined the dispatches of the British Consul-General in Havana who had reported a figure of 7,673 as the number of slaves landed, in contrast to Backhouse's estimate of 8,564. By adding one-third, Ward arrived at an estimate of 10,230 rather than the published figure of 11,400. The Superintendent of the Slave Trade Department

⁷⁹ P.R.O., F.O. 84/1106, J. V. Crawford to Russell, no. 15, 30 Sept. 1860.

⁸⁰ P.R.O., F.O. 84/959, Memorandum dated 20 Feb. 1855 on Backhouse to Clarendon, no. 5, 1 Jan. 1855.

in 1860, William Wylde, was also sceptical of the figures submitted from Havana for 1859. Instead of an estimate of 30,473, he thought the number introduced into Cuba was certainly not more than 25,000. He wrote: 'We know nearly every vessel that is engaged in the Slave Trade and the number that are known [to] have escaped with Slaves will hardly bear out Mr Crawford's calculations, even making a large allowance for vessels of which we may have heard nothing.'⁸¹

The slave trade to Cuba increased greatly during the late 1850s, as United States capital and ships poured into it. Improvements in technology enabled faster and larger ships to be employed as slave traders. Two steamships alone accounted for 3,000 of the slaves introduced during 1859, and one steamship in 1860 introduced 1,500 African slaves. With the expansion of the trade, the margin of error in reporting its dimensions necessarily widened. The arbitrary addition of one-third to an amount which was itself only an estimate, albeit an estimate made by experts on the best available information, was bound to be confusing. Yet the Foreign Office stuck to its method of calculating the number of slaves introduced. J. V. Crawford reported at the end of September 1864 that 5,105 slaves had been landed in Cuba during the previous year, of whom 2,980 had been captured by the Spanish authorities. But he admitted that Captain-General Dulce refused to believe that any slaves had entered Cuba, other than those captured. In spite of Crawford's uncertainty, the head of the Slave Trade Department added one-third to the figure of 5,105 to arrive at the published figure of 6,807 for the year.⁸²

Recently the estimates of the British Commission for the later years of the slave trade to Cuba either have been attacked as being completely unreliable⁸³ or have been implicitly accepted because they agree with official Spanish figures.⁸⁴ Neither view is correct. If properly understood, the figures provided by the British Commissioners from Havana are a useful guide to the extent of the African slave trade to Cuba. But it would be very surprising indeed if the Spanish officials accepted these as accurate, since this would have been an open admission that all the British charges of the continued violations of the slave trade treaties were true.

⁸¹ P.R.O., F.O. 84/1130, Memorandum dated 6 Feb. 1860.

⁸² P.R.O., F.O. 84/1215, Memorandum by William Wylde, 29 Nov. 1864 on J. V. Crawford to Russell, no. 19, 30 Sept. 1864.

⁸³ Warren S. Howard, *American Slavers and the Federal Law, 1837-1862* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1963), pp. 56-7.

⁸⁴ Curtin, *op. cit.*, p. 39. Professor Arthur F. Corwin in his work, *Spain and the Abolition of Slavery in Cuba, 1817-1886* (Austin and London, University of Texas Press, 1967), p. 143, falls into the same error, citing a Spanish figure as the estimated slave imports for 1862 when it is really the British estimate for 1861. The Spanish government refused to accept it as accurate.

The statistics of the slave trade were weapons in the war to abolish it. Each participant in the conflict produced his own for his own purposes. The abolitionists in Britain took the highest estimate produced by the British Commissioners and published it as an annual average, stating in 1862 that 30,000 to 40,000 slaves were taken to Cuba annually.⁸⁵ If British abolitionists claimed the Foreign Office underestimated the extent of the slave trade to Cuba, Spanish officials continually accused Britain of exaggerating it. The Spanish Foreign Minister in 1853, the Conde de Alcoy, who himself had been one of Cuba's Captains-General, wrote an official note accusing the British officials in Cuba of basing their statistics on unproven allegations of slave landings.⁸⁶

No Captain-General was prepared to accept the British statistics. Captain-General José de la Concha, who commanded in Cuba three times, the second time from 1854 to 1859, wrote annual rebuttals of the British Commissioners' annual reports.⁸⁷ Captain-General Dulce, during his first term of office from 1862-6, believed the British Consul-General had special instructions to inflate the slave trade statistics as part of British policy against Spain. He claimed the number of slaves brought into Cuba from September 1861 to the end of September 1863 did not exceed 3,475, a difference of over 15,000 from the British estimate.⁸⁸

III

No historian can say with any certainty how many African slaves were transported to Cuba during the period of the Atlantic slave trade. The approach used in this article has been to suggest a range of probability. Carrying this to total figures for the whole period prior to 1867, these would range between 766,600 and 801,800, the range during the years 1822 to 1867 being 367,200 to 402,400. Roughly half the slaves brought to Cuba during the whole history of the Atlantic slave trade were brought during the period of the illegal slave trade from 1821 to 1867. These totals do not differ very much from those of Curtin,⁸⁹ but the evidence on which the nineteenth-century figures were based suggests that the British information on the statistics of the illegal slave trade to Cuba was not as spotty as Curtin implies⁹⁰; properly used, the reports from Cuba can illuminate the nature and extent of the African slave trade to the island.

⁸⁵ *Spain and the African Slave Trade. An Address to Spaniards; from the committee of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society* (London, 1862), p. 1.

⁸⁶ AHN, estado, legajo 8.045, Conde de Alcoy to Lord Howden, 17 March 1853.

⁸⁷ AHN, ultramar, legajo 3547, Concha to Ministro de Estado y Ultramar, no. 340, 12 June 1857; Concha to Ministro de Ultramar y Guerra, reservado, 7 Nov. 1859.

⁸⁸ AHN, ultramar, legajo 4692, Dulce to Ministro de Ultramar, no. 83, 12 June 1864.

⁸⁹ Curtin, *op. cit.*, p. 44, note 40.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 238.