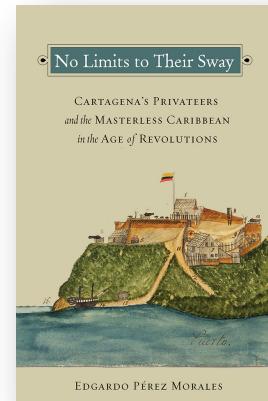


PEÉREZ MORALES, Edgardo (2018). *No Limits to Their Sway: Cartagena's Privateers and the Masterless Caribbean in the Age of Revolution.* Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 236 p.



Edgardo Pérez Morales, Assistant Professor of History at the University of Southern California, presents us with his new book, *No Limits to Their Sway: Cartagena's Privateers & the Masterless Caribbean in the Age of Revolutions* (2018). This is not the first time he has written about revolutions or enslaved people. In fact, he is the same author of *Voces de esclavitud y libertad. Documentos y testimonios. Colombia, 1701-1833* (2013) and *El gran diablo hecho barco. Corsarios, esclavos y revolución en Cartagena y el Gran Caribe. 1791-1817* (2012). His book is evidence that he knows the history of Cartagena like the back of his hand, but he also challenges and redefines current understandings of Colombia national history by bringing voice to black privateers in the independence of Cartagena and highlighting their help to Lieutenant Colonel Simón Bolívar. Experienced professors and graduate students will find in this book useful information about privateering with a special focus on African descendants, which makes this book a valuable asset.

His book starts with a chapter called *Slavery, Seamanship, Freedom*. Pérez Morales clearly connects these three concepts by telling the story of Olaudah Equiano¹ to exemplify how seamen had the opportunity to pay for their freedom, and although difficult, was possible. Subsequently, by using the runaway advertisements published in *Les Affiches Americaines* in Saint-Domingue, one might grasp how freedom was experienced by some crew members of famous vessels such as *Bellona*, *Augustus*, and the *Blanche*. Additionally, this chapter offers an understanding of an off-shore maroon which is not a common topic in the field. By using several vessels' names, the author provides greater content to the future reader.

The second chapter, called *Heralds of Liberty and Disobedience*, makes clear how privateers, especially French Negroes from the Antilles, were demonized because of their association with Haiti's revolution. These sailors generated, transmitted, and transformed information not only by word of mouth but also by transporting and reading out loud newspapers and handwritten documents. Pérez Morales discloses how smuggling was a key factor to affect bureaucrats and merchants' businesses in Cuba with the example of Antoine Labarière, a Parisian presumably involved in smuggling. However, bureaucrats were afraid of black privateers for other reasons. By using letters of and other historical references to people, such as Governor Anastasio Cejudo and José Ignacio de Pombo², the author clarifies his

¹ Gustavus Vassa is a former slave who published his autobiography in 1789 called *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*.

² Cartagena patrician who prejudiced against people of African descent.

argument. He explicates how the fear of revolution was experienced by Cartagenaian bureaucrats because of the arrival of French Negroes in Rioacha, Santa Marta, and Cartagena. This book mentions several names that might confuse the reader; however, there is a section for key figures where you can find eleven people and their roles in the book. Nevertheless, by interchanging well-known and non-famous people, it is clear how the revolution was experienced by members of different classes.

In chapter three, one might comprehend the origins, independence, and the commerce of Cartagena. It presents the alliances between artisans, free men, and *Criollos* by using historical documents. The first group of people, exemplified by Juan de Dios Amador³, wanted to have free trade with Jamaica and the United States to expand their businesses. Free men, represented by Pedro Romero, a blacksmith, wanted to change their social condition stained by their African legacy. The last group, the *Criollos*, exemplified by José María García de Toledo⁴, wanted to take control of Cartagena from *Peninsulares* by making a bond with artisans and free men. These three groups colluded to start a revolution that concluded with the independence of Cartagena. Finally, Pérez Morales tells how this new state attracted immigration of privateers because of its commerce and connections, especially with the United States.

The fourth chapter, *The American Connection*, demonstrates Cartagena's admiration of the United States. Some of Cartagena's leaders sought to emulate its political and economic development. Indeed, Cartagena's declaration of absolute independence to its federalism and privateering tactic were designed with reference to the United States. This chapter also reveals the connection between these two territories by studying the switch from US-sponsored to Cartagena-sponsored privateering with the example of the *George Washington* vessel commanded by Captain S. Sisson. Later in this chapter, it is shown how Cartagena advertised its privateering policy in the United States to attract seafarers. Through the biography of Andé Ranché, it is possible to understand how Cartagena naturalized foreign privateers to increase its war force. Lastly, through the example of José Ignacio de Pombo, this book presents an uncommon racist facet of the early Cartagena. Pombo was selective about who should settle in Cartagena and rejected people of color because they were "barbarous," therefore, he preferred European populations such as German, Flemish, Irish and so forth.

In the next chapter called *Detachment from the Land and Irreverence at Sea*, Pérez Morales recounts the freedom of seamen. By using the example of José Miranda, it is evident that privateers spent most of the time on ships. They did not have a fixed place of residence and worked for more than one flag at a time. Bureaucrats thought that sailors' attitudes and ways of life raised serious concerns. For this reason, seafarers did not recognize any authority and did not bow their head in deference to anyone; privateers were irreverent. In this context, this research

³ Merchant and member of Cartagena's revolutionary government.

⁴ Cartagena patrician who opposed Spanish American independence.

reveals the social impact caused by black privateers in Cartagena who have been ignored by traditional historians.

The last part of the book, which starts at chapter six, does a similar job as a seaman — it follows the ocean currents and studies the connection between Cartagena, Cuba, and Haiti. It focuses on the relationship between Cuba and the state of Cartagena in the context of slavery. Cartagena outlawed slavery, while Cuba promoted plantations as the most important economic source. Due to the anti-Spanish sentiment spread through Cartagena's privateers, Cuba and its vessels were often attacked. Chapter seven focuses on Haiti and the author exhibits how Les Cayes functioned as the epicenter between Haiti and Tierra Firme. This place was the safest destination for émigrés such as Lieutenant Colonel Simón Bolívar, and revolutionaries/former slaves were free to stay in this republic. Pérez Morales explains in the last two chapters, *Horrors of Carthage* and *Robbery, Mutiny, Fire*, how privateers experienced the last years of the state of Cartagena.

Throughout the whole book, Pérez Morales uses a wide range of resources to prove and support his assertions. Firstly, the notes offer information from historical archives in Spain, Colombia, Cuba, France, The United States, and Jamaica; this well documented section confirms that the author immersed himself in the Age of Revolutions. Secondly, the notes also offer an opportunity for the readers to expand their research area which might be race, privateering, or Cartagena. The port of Cartagena is often depicted as another port in South America where smuggling and privateers were present, but what makes this book special is the approach Pérez Morales takes. He is the first writer to highlight the importance of the state of Cartagena and its connections with Haiti, Jamaica, and United States, which is beneficial for Circum-Caribbean studies. He also illustrates the role of black privateers in the independence of Cartagena which makes this book important in revealing of the support of black people in the creation of a nation in cases like the state of Cartagena. In this book, one might say that Pérez Morales has shown there are thousands of stories in the masterless Caribbean waiting to be told.

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