
The May 1683 raid on the port of Veracruz forever altered the course of Black history in Mexico, Saint-Domingue, and Santo Domingo. In the months that followed, no less than 1,400 people of African descent were taken from Veracruz by a buccaneer fleet and violently dispersed throughout the Atlantic seaboard. Yet, the experiences of those free and enslaved captives have been largely forgotten in favor of narratives on the next pirate attack and subsequent acts of retaliation. This paper asks us to center the documented (and perhaps, the undocumented) experiences of captives-turned-refugees on the rugged borderlands of Hispaniola instead. In particular, I focus on the legal strategies and cultural scripts that African-descended people performed when presented before Spanish authorities in Santo Domingo. How did afrodescendiente refugees frame their lifestories and to what end? If permanence in, or departure from, Santo Domingo depended on a persuasive narrative, what rhetorical strategies do we detect in these depositions? Finally, how do refugee thoughts, actions, and motivations alter our perception of Mexico, the Caribbean, and African diaspora?

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