Illicit Ideologies

Author(s): Jesse Cromwell

Source: *The Americas*, JULY 2017, Vol. 74, No. 3 (JULY 2017), pp. 267-297

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26361109

THE AMERICAS
74:3/July 2017/267–297

doi:10.1017/tam.2017.9

ILLICIT IDEOLOGIES: *Moral Economies of Venezuelan Smuggling and Autonomy in the Rebellion of Juan Francisco de León, 1749–1751*

On the afternoon of April 20, 1749, a force of between 400 and 600 armed men amassed on Caracas's central plaza. Entering the city under blue and white flags emblazoned with red crosses, to the sound of beating drums, the deployment comprised a cross section of Venezuela's socio-racial groups, social estates, and occupations.[1] The men followed Juan Francisco de León, a cacao planter and small-town sheriff (*teniente*), and had shouldered their weapons as a popular protest "in the name of the city [of Caracas], the nobility, and the masses." Disregarding the potentially ominous specter of so many armed insurgents, *Caraqueños* instead welcomed León's troops with open arms. As one observer remarked, all in the city from shopkeepers "to the nuns give thanks to León, wishing him success and commending him to God."[2]

I wish to thank Ann Twinam, Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, Fabricio Prado, Ryan Kashanipour, Brett Rushforth, Nadine Zimmerli, and participants in the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture's Colloquium at William and Mary for their invaluable aid in shaping this article. The helpful suggestions of two anonymous reviewers commissioned by *The Americas* also greatly improved this piece in the revision process. Finally, research for the article was made possible by generous support from the John Carter Brown Library, the Program for Cultural Cooperation between Spain's Ministry of Culture and United States universities, and the Department of History, the College of Liberal Arts, and the Institute for Historical Studies at the University of Texas at Austin.

1. Discussing class and race in the colonial period is admittedly complicated. To describe socioeconomic status, I employ the term "social estate" (*estamento*), as it implies the social networks, occupational identities, and free/unfree status inherent in social class in the eighteenth century. I use "socio-racial" and "socio-racial group" to denote what we would call "race" in the twenty-first century; the latter concept was much more fluid and multivariate in eighteenth-century Spanish America. For the basis of these distinctions, see Ann Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness: Pardos, Mulattos, and the Quest for Social Mobility in the Spanish Indies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 42–48; and Joanne Rappaport, *The Disappearing Mestizo: Configuring Difference in the Colonial New Kingdom of Granada* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 3–7, 208–209; This information on the entry of the León insurgents into Caracas comes from the Certificación de Faustino Areste y Reina, vecino y escribano publico de Caracas. Caracas. May 23, 1749, Archivo General de Indias in Seville, Spain [hereafter AGI], Audiencia de Caracas, legajo 937.

2. Extracto de los Testimonios,y papeles que ha remitido el Govr., y de los que sobre ellos dice en quatro Cartas, Caracas, 1749, AGI, Caracas, 419.

Royal officials and Caracas Company employees living in the city, however, felt none of this gratitude. The rebels, with León as their mouthpiece, declared that the central aims of their uprising were the extermination of this joint stock company and the expulsion of its hated Basque agents from the province. The Spanish crown had given the Basque Caracas Company (Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas) broad powers over commerce in the Province of Venezuela and a monopoly over the region's cacao trade with Spain, in return for the company's aid in suppressing inter-imperial smuggling and the provision of European goods to the province. Established in 1728, the Caracas Company had grown into the region's dominant commercial, economic, and political entity by the mid eighteenth century. Now, approximately 400 of its Basque employees fled the city as León's forces entered the capital. The rebels put the governor of Venezuela under de facto house arrest while they presented their demands.[3] Several days after they entered Caracas, the hapless governor, Luis Francisco Castellanos, acceded to their terms, suspending the company and formally expelling the outsiders.

On April 23, a slave named Florenzio, the property of Simón Bolívar's father Juan Vicente Bolívar, read the news to a large crowd in the plaza central. When he rhetorically asked three times who had demanded the expulsion of the Caracas Company, the crowd enthusiastically cheered: "The whole province!"[4] By August of that year, rumors were circulating that León's forces in the province numbered between 4,000 and 7,000 men.[5] This figure was particularly striking in a province where the coastal population (excluding Caracas) consisted of merely 65,000 people and where the population of the capital city itself was somewhere between 18,000 to 24,000 inhabitants (by estimates made in the second half of the eighteenth century).[6] Florenzio was heralding what would be the largest, and arguably the most important, revolt witnessed in Venezuela up to the time of the independence wars.[7]

3. Ibid.

4. Diligencia del Escribano Gregorio del Portillo, Caracas, April 23, 1749. Archivo General de la Nación–Venezuela in Caracas, Venezuela [hereafter AGNV], Insurrección del Capitán Juan Francisco de León, Tomo 1, fols. 33–39, in *Documentos relativos a la insurrección de Juan Francisco de León*, Augusto Mijares, ed. (Caracas: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 1949), 55.

5. Auto de Gregorio del Portillo, escribano público, Caracas, August 1, 1749; Auto del Teniente General Domingo de Aguirre y Castillo, Caracas, August 2, 1749, in *Juan Francisco de León: diario de una insurgencia, 1749* (Caracas: Tipografía Vargas, S.A., 1971), 115–116.

6. These numbers come from Federico Brito Figueroa's compilation of estimates between 1771 and 1784. He estimates that the population of Caracas between 1771 and 1784 was between 18,669 and 24,187 people. Not including Caracas, he puts the coastal population of the province at 65,593. For reference, the population of Caracas's primary port, La Guaira, in these estimates was 3,463 people. Population figures in the first half of the eighteenth century are much harder to come by. The province of Venezuela would have been smaller in population in 1749-51, but probably not significantly so. Federico Brito Figueroa, *La estructura social y demográfica de Venezuela colonial* (Caracas: Tipografía Venevas, 1961), 38–39, 47, 50.

7. Other insurgencies of note in the province were the Coro Rebellion (1795) and the Gual y España Conspiracy (1795–97). Although both movements were ideologically charged, neither uprising had numbers, duration, or appeal

How did the colonial relationship between subjects and imperial authority reach this fever pitch of near-insurrection? What passions and convictions brought subjects from throughout the province into the streets of Caracas to upend and drive out the Caracas Company? The answers to these questions are entwined deeply with Venezuela's coastal history of smuggling and marginality. The historiographies of both Venezuela and Spanish America have largely neglected the León Rebellion and its connections to illicit trade. Scholarship on the major late eighteenth-century rebellions in Spanish America typically ignores León's revolt, or references it only obliquely.[8] To my knowledge, only two English-language works devote more than a couple of sentences to the uprising.[9] Many Venezuelan scholars have investigated the León Rebellion as part of their broader projects, but only a handful have made it the central theme of their studies.[10] Among those, the traditional interpretations of the rebellion's causes have painted it as, variously, a proto-nationalist struggle, a battle between Basques and Canary Islanders for control of the province, a result of economic hardship, or a fight strictly over the fate of the Caracas Company.[11] None

across social and economic divisions to match the León Rebellion. Michael P. McKinley, *Pre-Revolutionary Caracas: Politics, Economy, and Society, 1777–1811* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 125–138; H. Michael Tarver and Julia C. Frederick, *The History of Venezuela* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 46; Guillermo Morón, *A History of Venezuela*, John Street, trans. (New York: Roy Publishers, 1963), 86; Linda M. Rupert, *Creolization and Contraband: Curaçao in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 205–206.

8. Anthony McFarlane's three articles on the comparative history of the Quito, Comunero, and Túpac Amaru rebellions refer to the León Rebellión only once. Anthony McFarlane, "Rebellions in Late Colonial Spanish America: A Comparative Perspective," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 14:3 (September 1995): 313–338; McFarlane, "Civil Disorders and Popular Protests in Late Colonial New Granada," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 64:1 (February 1984): 17–54; McFarlane, "The Rebellion of the Barrios: Urban Insurrection in Bourbon Quito," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 69:2 (May 1989): 283–330; The rebellion is entirely absent from five major monographs on late colonial unrest. Sergei Serulnikov, *Subverting Colonial Authority: Challenges to Spanish Rule in Eighteenth-Century Southern Andes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Sinclair Thomson, *We Alone Will Rule: Native Andean Politics in the Age of Insurgency* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002); Ward Stavig, *The World of Túpac Amaru: Conflict, Community, and Identity in Colonial Peru* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999); John Leddy Phelan, *The People and the King: The Comunero Revolution in Colombia, 1781* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978); Carlos de la Torre Reyes, *La revolución de Quito de Agosto 1809* (Quito: Banco Central de Ecuador, 1990); Only Joseph Pérez seems to acknowledge the León Rebellion in any substantial way, and he devotes only 13 pages out of a 156-page book to it. Pérez, *Los movimientos precursores de la emancipación en Hispanoamérica* (Madrid: Editorial Alhambra, 1977), 31–44.

9. Ronald Hussey and Robert Ferry each spend a chapter of their respective books on the Caracas Company and the elites of Caracas, discussing the rebellion. Both focus on the rebellion as an economic consequence of Caracas Company rule. Roland Dennis Hussey, *The Caracas Company, 1728–1784: A Study in the History of Spanish Monopolistic Trade* (New York: Arno Press, 1977 [1934]); Robert J. Ferry, *The Colonial Elite of Early Caracas: Formation & Crisis, 1567–1767* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

10. The most recent of these works was published more than 25 years ago. Francisco Morales Padrón, *Rebelión contra la Compañía de Caracas* (Seville: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1955); Enrique Bernardo Núñez , *Juan Francisco de León o el levantamiento contra la Compañía Guipuzcoana* (Caracas: Biblioteca de Autores y Temas Mirandinos, 1979 [1950]); Lucas Guillermo Castillo Lara, *La aventura fundacional de los Isleños: Panaquire y Juan Francisco de León* (Caracas: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 1983).

11. For the idea of the rebellion as a proto-nationalist movement, see Luis Alberto Sucre, *Gobernadores y capitanes generales de Venezuela*, 2nd ed. (Caracas: Litografía Tecnocolor, 1964, [1928]); Mercedes Álvarez de Ramos Márquez, *Aspectos de nuestros orígenes patrios* (Caracas: La Asociación Cultural Interamericana, 1944); Augusto Mijares, prologue to *Documentos relativos;* and J. A. de Armas Chitty, prologue to *Juan Francisco de León: Diario,*in Núñez, *Juan Francisco de León*. Arguments for the uprising as an ethnic conflict between Basques and Canary Islanders can be found

of these treatments has emphasized sufficiently the role of smuggling in the rebellion's development.

The León Rebellion brings into sharp focus the interplay between community standards of economic fair play and contraband trade. The uprising followed many patterns consistent with the eighteenth-century English food riots described by E. P. Thompson.[12] Like those disturbances upon which Thompson built his concept of the moral economy, protesters in the León Rebellion acted out against a disruption in their common consensus of legitimate and illegitimate economic practices. Similarly, León's supporters took up arms because they lacked other means to rectify their grievances and showed restraint in their public attempts to legitimize their cause.

Two major divergences from Thompson's analysis of riots in the rebellion's ideology help expand the concept of the moral economy. First, although the León rebels protested the state's intervention in the marketplace, their demands differed from those of Thompson's bread rioters in that León's supporters implicitly championed greater freedom and more diverse markets through *inter-imperial* contraband trade. This behavior addresses critiques of Thompson's model that claim it is overly concerned with local markets and incompatible with unregulated commerce. Second, the underlying illegality of what the rebels desired leads us to rethink how protesters legitimize their uprisings in the schema of the moral economy. The León partisans framed their conflict with the Caracas Company as a defense of traditional rights of commerce. The fact that the basis for these customs was an economic practice outlawed by the state (that is, smuggling) put the insurgents in an awkward position.[13] The protesters' attempts to rationalize or play down the true motives for their uprising offer a window into the ideological potency of early modern contraband trade.

Too often, historians have viewed transimperial illicit exchange mainly as an act of naked self-interest.[14] This interpretation overlooks the way that smuggling

in Vicente Amenzaga Aresti, *Hombres de la Compañía Guipuzcoana* (Caracas: Banco Central de Venezuela, 1963); Ramón de Basterra, *Los navios de la ilustración: una empresa del siglo XVIII* (Madrid: Ediciones Cultura Hispánica, 1970); and Castillo Lara, *La aventura fundacional.* Works prioritizing the economic dimensions of the rebellion include José Estornés Lasa, *La Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Navegación de Caracas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Vasca Ekin, 1948); Analola Borges, "Los Canarios en las revueltas venezolanas del siglo XVIII (1700–1752)," *Boletín de la Academia Nacional de la Historia* 46:181 (1963): 128–140; and John V. Lombardi, *Venezuela: The Search for Order, The Dream of Progress* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). Francisco Morales Padrón emphasizes the rebellion as strictly a struggle against the Caracas Company. Morales Padrón, *Rebelión contra la Compañía de Caracas.*

12. E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* 50 (February 1971): 78–79, 86, 98, 112.

13. For a work that extends Thompson's moral economy beyond its ideological confines, in this case toward the spiritual world, see Kevin Gosner, *Soldiers of the Virgin: The Moral Economy of a Colonial Maya Rebellion* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992).

14. Among larger works on imperial politics and society, Clarence Haring, J. H. Parry, John Elliott, and Henry Kamen all emphasize the impact of smuggling on imperial balance sheets, diplomatic affairs, colonial economies, and

fits into the worldviews and politics of merchants and consumers.[15] Otherwise loyal Spanish subjects, such as the León insurgents, benefited from everyday illegal trade and used popular protest to defend it against commercial concessions that encroached upon contraband's central position in their economy of makeshifts. Smuggling and its suppression represented commonplace modes of conflict along the coast. In the case of the León Rebellion, these struggles were, in the words of Sergio Serulnikov, "the forms whereby routine dissension at the local level shaped the nature of mass rebellion."[16] That is, whereas illicit trade may have been a form of resistance to the more intrusive parts of imperial control, serious attempts to thwart it boiled over into active revolt.

Contraband commerce also influenced colonial politics. Though illegal traders were not a formal political faction themselves, they heavily swayed how provincial subjects reacted to metropolitan orders. Those who smuggled or benefited from smuggled goods were equal parts political reactionaries (in their wish to reinstitute a Hapsburg period of salutary neglect) and forward thinkers (in their desire to create free trade from the bottom up). Illicit commerce and the response to the company's threat to it also united, at least for a moment,

reform measures, but do not discuss the practice as a social issue. While Jeremy Adelman's work underscores the importance of illicit trade in colonial politics, his analytical scope rarely strays from the elite merchants of the *consulados.* Anthony Pagden's monumental study of the ideologies of Spanish, French, and British imperialism devotes a scant two pages to smuggling, mainly as a means to frame eighteenth-century reforms in trade policy. Scholarship focused on illegal trade often uses the same interpretive lenses. See C. H. Haring, *The Spanish Empire in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1963 [1947]); J. H. Parry, *The Spanish Seaborne Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990 [1966]); Henry Kamen, *Empire: How Spain Became a World Power, 1492–1763* (New York: Penguin, 2002); J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492–1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Jeremy Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); and Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France, c. 1500–c. 1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

15. The historiography of smuggling, as opposed to that of larger imperial politics and commerce, has investigated how illicit trade shaped colonial society in several ways. Ramón Aizpurua, Lance Grahn, and Celestino Araúz Monfante all concentrate on the political economy of smuggling. The works of Wim Klooster, Zacarias Moutoukais, Alan Karras, Christian Koot, Casey Schmitt, and Jeremy Cohen examine how common colonial subjects perceived smuggling and how the practice shaped their ideologies and politics. See Ramón Aizpurua, *Curazao y la costa de Caracas: introducción al estudio del contrabando de la Provincia de Venezuela en tiempos de la Compañía Guipuzcoana, 1730–1780* (Caracas: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 1993); Lance Grahn, *The Political Economy of Smuggling: Regional Informal Economies in Early Bourbon New Granada* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997); Celestino Andrés Araúz Monfante, *El contrabando holandés en el Caribe durante la primera mitad del siglo XVIII*, Vol. 1 (Caracas: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 1984); Wim Klooster, "Inter-Imperial Smuggling in the Americas, 1600–1800" in *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500–1830,* Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault, eds. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Zacarias Moutoukias, *Contrabando y control colonial: Buenos Aires, el Atlántico y el espacio peruano en el siglo XVII* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1988); Alan L. Karras, *Smuggling: Contraband, and Corruption in World History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010); Christian Koot, *Empire at the Periphery: British Colonists, Anglo-Dutch Trade, and the Development of the British Atlantic, 1621–1713* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Casey S. Schmitt, "Virtue in Corruption: Privateers, Smugglers, and the Shape of Empire in the Eighteenth-Century Caribbean," *Early American Studies* 13:1 (Winter 2015): 80–110; and Jeremy David Cohen, "Cultural and Commercial Intermediaries in an Extra-legal System of Exchange: The Prácticos of the Venezuelan Littoral in the Eighteenth Century," *Itinerario* 27:2 (July 2003): 105–124.

16. Serulnikov, *Subverting Colonial Authority*, 4.

a broad coalition of social groups that normally navigated tense relationships with one another.

Finally, clandestine trade was an indicator of a strong sense of colonial autonomy and association.[17] Venezuelan contrabandists and their accomplices were notoriously hostile to outsiders' attempts to enforce anti-smuggling ordinances. They identified strongly with their Venezuelan homeland, although in the mid eighteenth century very few harbored any desire to be politically independent of Spain. Though Venezuelan traders, producers, and consumers looked to Spain for many of their cultural and political allegiances, they formed close partnerships with foreign merchants to fill their shopping baskets and bring their produce to market. The tension in this dichotomy of colonial character manifested itself in the actions and words of León and his insurgents.

The uprising's causes, course, and consequences are complex and demand multifaceted coverage. The first part of this article places the León Rebellion in the context of the eighteenth-century history of Venezuela's central coast.[18] In this period, a common undercurrent of frustration with Caracas Company privilege, commercial enforcement, and economic and political monopolization lurked just beneath the surface of colonial politics. Following this treatment, a second section reconstructs the events of the León uprising from accounts and correspondence of both colonial officials and rebels. This trade rebellion allowed Venezuelan subjects, via popular protest, to participate informally in the colonial political arena. The third and final part of this essay analyzes petitions and correspondence of the insurgents to reveal elements of their sense of justice, commercial thought, and communal identities.

Like the better-known Quito, Comunero, and Túpac Amaru rebellions, the León uprising of 1749–51 was not just a spontaneous outbreak of violence bred from desperation. Rather, it expressed basic political beliefs grounded in the defense of consumption patterns and community rights. The uprising shed light on characteristics of a Venezuelan society shaped by illicit trade. The León Rebellion and the popular protests that preceded it transcended the simple definition of smuggling as an illegal economic exchange and became pivotal building blocks for informal political expression and local identity formation.

17. For works addressing the theme of autonomous, and potentially counter-colonial, identity formation through illicit commerce, see Ernesto Bassi, *An Aqueous Territory: Sailor Geographies and New Granada's Transimperial Greater Caribbean World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Fabrício Prado, *Edge of Empire: Atlantic Networks and Revolution in Bourbon Río de la Plata* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015); Shannon Lee Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire: French Colonial New Orleans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); and Rupert, *Creolization and Contraband*.

18. By "central coast," I refer to Venezuela's Caribbean littoral and its surrounding inland communities, from Coro in the west to Barcelona in the east.

THE CARACAS COMPANY AND ITS MALCONTENTS

From its founding in 1522, the province of Venezuela's peripheral status within the Spanish Empire had made it uniquely situated to flourish in the illicit international economy. Its long coastline was full of secluded coves and rivers running to the sea. By the second half of the seventeenth century, coastal cacao production was thriving in the colony and subjects of nearby non-Spanish colonies regularly sent ships to trade for the cash crop. Traders based in Dutch Curaçao, only 40 miles away, were especially close trading partners. Legal trade from Spain had been particularly anemic in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.[19] Years of neglect and the War of Spanish Succession (1701-14) had defanged any threat posed to smugglers by Spanish ships guarding the coast. In the early eighteenth century, as much as half the province's trade came illegally from sources outside of the Spanish Empire.[20] In the words of Pedro José de Olavarriaga, a special envoy of the king to Venezuela and one of the Caracas Company's founding fathers, the province's ports proved so friendly to inter-imperial illicit commerce "not only because they were undefended," but also because non-Spanish merchants found "the inhabitants of this province inclined to this vice so contrary to the

19. In the latter half of the seventeenth century, merchants sent fewer than five ships from Spain directly to Venezuela. Fewer than six vessels embarked for Venezuela from Spain between 1700 and 1728 and no ship made the return course directly between 1700 and 1721. Jean François Dauxion-Lavaysse, *A Statistical, Commercial, and Political Description of Venezuela, Trinidad, Margarita, and Tobago: Containing Various Anecdotes and Observations, Illustrative of the Past and Present State of these Interesting Countries, from the French of M. Lavaysse, with an Introduction and Explanatory Notes by the Editor* (London: Printed for G. and W. B. Whittaker, 1820), found at The John Carter Brown Library, Providence, Rhode Island [hereafter JCB], 17–18; Andrés Bello, *Resumen de la historia de Venezuela* (Caracas: La Casa de Bello, 1978 [1810]), 44; Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas, *Manifiesto, que con incontestables hechos prueba los grandes beneficios, que ha producido el establecimiento de la Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas; y califica quan importante es su conservacion al Estado, a la Real Hacienda, al buen publico, y a los verdaderos interesses de la misma Provincia de Caracas* (Madrid: 1749), JCB, 2 vols.; Hussey, *The Caracas Company,* 53–58; Haring, *The Spanish Empire*, 318.

20. Getting accurate estimates of the amount of contraband trade in Venezuela is problematic. Wim Klooster says that the Dutch owned at least a 30-percent share in Venezuelan cacao in the from the 1730s to the 1750s, even before unregistered cacao was counted. In the first half of the eighteenth century, Venezuelan hides made up 72 percent of the over one million pounds annually of that commodity that Curaçao shipped to the Netherlands. Ramón Aizpurua believes that the value of total trade (licit plus illicit) per year in Venezuela was around 1,000,000 pesos per year, or double previous estimates of the value of licit trade alone. Celestino Araúz Monfante contends that by 1720 only one-third of Venezuelan cacao made its way legally to Spain. José de Ábalos, the first intendant of Caracas, estimated that between 1766 and 1775, 500,000 pesos worth of cacao was sold by Venezuelans to Mexico. However, during that time, 450,000 pesos from those sales ended up in foreign hands. Using Spanish imperial statistics, Stanley and Barbara Stein have demonstrated that the province of New Granada, which encompassed Venezuela, smuggled at a much higher rate than did New Spain or Peru. Between 1747 and 1761, smuggling represented 3 million of the viceroyalty of New Granada's 5.5 million pesos of annual exports. Suffice it to say that the volume of contraband trade in the colony of Venezuela was large. Wim Klooster, *Illicit Riches: Dutch Trade in the Caribbean, 1648–1795* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1998), 185, 196; Klooster, "Curaçao and the Transit Trade," in *Riches from Atlantic Commerce: Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585–1817*, Johannes Postma and Victor Enthoven, eds. (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2003), 216; Aizpurua, *Curazao y la costa de Caracas*, 124; Araúz Monfante, *El contrabando holandes*, Vol. 1, 217; Eduardo Arcila Farias, *Economía colonial de Venezuela* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1946), 260–261; Stanley J. Stein and Barbara H. Stein, *Apogee of Empire: Spain and New Spain in the Age of Charles III, 1759–1789* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 72.

Real Hacienda and the interests of his Majesty."[21] Given its involvement in such trade, bringing Venezuela's potentially profitable cacao into the Spanish state's revenue stream would require drastic action.

Basing their ideas on an economic platform that was very much in vogue at the time, the crown and Council of the Indies approved a proposal for a royal trading company to run Venezuela's cacao commerce.[22] This plan represented the advantageous partnership of maritime-oriented Basque merchants who wished to circumvent the Andalusian trading monopoly, a cash-strapped crown that desired to better integrate peripheral overseas territories into the empire, and the tireless efforts of the Caracas Company's principal booster, Olavarriaga.[23] In 1728, the crown gave a monopoly over the Venezuelan cacao trade with Spain to the Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas. Among other privileges, this group of Basque investors and merchants received royal protection, privileged rights to the shipping of cacao between Venezuela and Spain, reductions in port duties, and exemption from the requirement to stop at the House of Trade (Casa de Contratación) in Cádiz before departing for the Americas. Some 14 years later, the company secured a new concession: the rights to ship cacao to New Spain, Venezuela's other major legal trading partner. In return for these grants, the crown expected the company to supply the province with European goods, provide coastal patrols to deter foreign interlopers to Venezuelan trade, and ship a fixed amount of cacao on Venezuelan planters' private accounts (usually around one-third of a ship's cargo).[24]

The company's carte blanche in Venezuelan ports ushered in the province's first substantial legal trading system, dramatically increased the royal revenues

21. Pedro José de Olavarriaga, *Instrucción general y particular del estado presente de la provincia de Venezuela en los años de 1720 y 1721* (Caracas: Edición Fundación Cadafe, 1981 [1722]), 123.

22. Proposals for privileged Spanish trading companies pre-dated the formation of the Caracas Company. One Spanish merchant floated an early petition for a monopoly company of the Indies in 1705. Petición de don Manuel de Bustamante, Madrid, August 15, 1705, AGI, Indiferente General, 2046A; For the economic theory behind trading companies, see P. W. Klein, "The Origins of Trading Companies," in *Companies and Trade: Essays on Overseas Trading Companies during the Ancien Régime*, Leónard Blussé and Femme Gaastra, eds. (Leiden, Netherlands: Leiden University Press, 1981), 17–28; Gerardo Vivas Pineda, *La aventura naval de la Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas* (Caracas: Fundación Polar, 1998), 267; John Lynch, *Bourbon Spain, 1700–1808* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 145–148; and Morón, *A History of Venezuela*, 74. For the founding precepts and organizational structure of the major eighteenth-century Spanish trading companies, see Raquel Rico Linage, *Las reales compañías de comercio con America: los organos de gobierno* (Seville: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1983), 5–27.

23. Montserrat Gárate Ojanguren, *La Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas* (San Sebastián, Spain: Grupo Doctor Camino de Historia Donostiarra, 1990), 11, 20; Margarita Eva Rodríguez García, *Compañías privilegiadas de comercio con América y cambio político (1706–1765)* (Madrid: Banco de España, 2005), 21, 29–31.

24. For the initial royal order establishing the Caracas Company and its privileges, see Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas, *Real Cédula de la Fundacion de la Real Compañia Guipuzcoana de Caracas, y Reglas Economicas de buen govierno con que la estableció la M. N. y M. L. Provincia de Guipuzcoa, en Junta General del año de 1728. Con adicion de las Posteriores Declaraciones de S. M. sobre varios puntos, hasta el año de 1753. donde se comprehenden tambien algunas Gracias, y el Fuero privilegiado para las Causas de los Dependientes de la Compañia* (Madrid: Oficina de Don Antonio Sanz, 1765), JCB. For additional concessions given to the company, see Vivas Pineda, *La aventura naval*, 39.

coming from the colony, and generally brought Venezuela back to the economic attention of Madrid.[25] Annual Venezuelan cacao exports to Spain between 1700 and 1730 averaged approximately 21,000 *fanegas* (about 2.3 million pounds in today's measurements). From 1730 until 1748, the first 18 years of the Caracas Company, annual Venezuelan cacao exports to Spain more than doubled, to around 50,000 fanegas (5.5 million pounds).[26] To ferry this cargo and patrol for interlopers, the company used its own private fleet for all commercial traffic and coast patrol activities. The company's initial tenure in Venezuela witnessed the most stringent anti-contraband measures in the colony's history. A paramilitary fleet of between ten and 20 ships and several hundred men a year patrolled coastal waters, harassing foreign and domestic shipping suspected of smuggling.[27]

That individuals from many parts of the complex socio-racial and socioeconomic strata of eighteenth-century coastal Venezuela temporarily put aside their structural animosities to join together to defend their common interests in commercial autonomy demonstrates the extent and impact of company intrusion into legal and illegal commerce. Though an in-depth analysis of social divisions within the province is behind the scope of this study, several characteristics deserve mention here.[28] As with other colonies in Spanish America, socio-racial and social estate categories could be murky and multivariate. Venezuela's population was notable for being majority *pardo* (free people of mixed white and African ancestry).[29] Enslaved Africans never made up

25. François Joseph Depons, *A Voyage to the Eastern Part of Terra Firma or the Spanish Main in South-America During the Years 1801, 1802, 1803, and 1804. Containing A description of the Territory under the jurisdiction of the Captain-General of Caraccas, composed of the Provinces of Venezuela, Maracaibo, Varinas, Spanish Guiana, Cumana, and the Island of Margaretta; and embracing every thing relative to the Discovery, Conquest, Topography, Legislation, Commerce, Finance, Inhabitants and Productions of the Provinces, together with a view of the manners and customs of the Spaniards, and the savage as well as civilized Indians*, Vol. 2 (New York: I. Riley & Co., 1806), 271–277; Morales Padrón, *Rebelión contra la Compañía de Caracas, 89; Otto Pikaza, Don Gabriel José de Zuloaga en la gobernación de Venezuela (1737–1747)* (Seville: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1963), 90–91; Amenzaga Aresti, *Hombres de la Compañía Guipuzcoana*, 31.

26. Depons, *A Voyage to the Eastern Part of Terra Firma*, 273; Vivas Pineda, *La aventura naval*, 43; Morales Padrón, *Rebelión contra la Compañía de Caracas,* 19; In the 15 years between 1749 and 1764), annual company cacao exports to Spain would reach the 50,000-fanega mark only twice, in 1763 and 1764. Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas, *Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas: noticias historiales practicas de los sucessos, y adelantamientos de esta compañía, desde su fundación año de 1728, hasta el de 1764, por todos los Ramos que comprehende su Negociacion* (Madrid: 1765), JCB, 158–159.

27. *Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas: noticias historiales*, 114; Depons, *A Voyage to the Eastern Part of Terra Firma*, Vol. 2, 276; Pikaza, *Don Gabriel José de Zuloaga en la gobernación de Venezuela (1737–1747)*, 64.

28. For general primers on the socio-racial hierarchy of colonial Venezuela, see J. L. Salcedo-Bastardo, *Historia fundamental de Venezuela* (Caracas: Fundación Gran Mariscal de Ayacucho, 1977), 143–151; Morón, *A History of Venezuela*, 58–63; and Lombardi, *Venezuela: The Search for Order*, 40–49.

29. The term *pardo*, strictly speaking, referred to those of European and African ancestry, but in practice came to characterize a wide variety of mixed-race people; it could be more nearly synonymous with the term "*casta*" in the Spanish American colonial context. Frederick P. Bowser, "Colonial Spanish America," in *Neither Slave nor Free: The Freedman of African Descent in the Slave Societies of the New World*, David W. Cohen and Jack P. Greene, eds.

more than 10 percent of the population of the province.[30] Indigenous groups in coastal regions of the province were much smaller than those in other colonies in Spanish America.

Venezuela's white population included a tiny contingent of peninsular Spaniards, an extremely tight-knit group of urban creole elites known as the *mantuanos*, and two groups of Spanish immigrants whose ethnicities sometimes brought their Spanishness into question: Canary Islanders (*Isleños*) and Basques.[31] Most Isleños arrived in state-sponsored waves over the last decades of the seventeenth century and the first decades of the eighteenth. Basque immigration had been individual and irregular before the arrival of the Caracas Company, but ballooned thereafter. As this article will go on to discuss, Basques and Isleños competed for the same economic and social niches that were not already occupied by peninsular Spaniards and mantuanos and thought of one another as inferior whites.[32]

While it would be a mistake to say that socio-racial categories were clearly defined or immutable, they did influence the status, occupations, and privileges that Venezuelans could hope to attain. Mantuanos occupied positions as large-scale merchants and planters; they were also known as the *grandes cacaos* due to their extensive cacao holdings. Smuggling appealed to them, as it provided an alternate set of traders and markets for their produce. The mantuanos felt an ongoing need to reassert their position at the top of the hierarchy. Their anxiety stemmed from the province of Venezuela's high concentration of mixed-race free people who were upwardly mobile. Likewise, mantuanos viewed the Isleño presence as an unwelcome encroachment on their exclusive position as whites. Both pardos and Isleños inhabited the colonial middle as urban artisans, petty traders, and minor agricultural producers. For them, contraband trade was a

(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 37; Salcedo-Bastardo, *Historia fundamental de Venezuela*, 145; Lombardi, *Venezuela: The Search for Order*, 48; Tarver and Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, 44.

30. Angelina Pollak-Eltz, *La esclavitud en Venezuela: un estudio histórico-cultural* (Caracas: Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, 2000), 8.

31. Historians have best analyzed the socio-racial breakdown of Venezuela for the end of the eighteenth century. For these demographics, see Brito Figueroa, *La estructura social*, 38–39, 58.

32. On the history of Canary Islanders in Venezuela, see John Lynch, "Spanish America's Poor Whites: Canarian Immigrants in Venezuela, 1700–1830," in Lynch , *Latin America between Colony and Nation: Selected Essays* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 58–73; María del Pilar Rodríguez Mesa, "Los blancos pobres: una aproximación a la comprensión de la sociedad venezolana y al reconocimiento de la importancia de los Canaries en la formación de groups sociales en Venezuela," *Boletín Academia Nacional de la Historia de Venezuela* 80:317 (1997), 133–188; and James J. Parsons, "The Migration of Canary Islanders to the Americas: An Unbroken Current since Columbus," *The Americas* 39:4 (April 1983): 464–466. On Basque migration to Venezuela, see Vicente Amézaga Aresti, *El elemento vasco en el siglo XVIII venezolano* (Caracas: Comisión Nacional del Cuatricentenario de la Fundación de Caracas, 1966), 11; and Arantzazu Amézaga Iribarren, "La Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas. Crónica sentimental con una vision historiográfica. Los años áuricos y las rebeliones (1728–1751," *Sancho el Sabio* 23 (2005): 198.

potential occupation as well as a crucial means of attaining European goods and selling cacao.

Colonial law and custom codified distinctions between Venezuelan social groups into a dizzying array of categories, from which stemmed discrimination affecting occupations, office-holding, militia service, sumptuary choices, and even parish access.[33] Given the fissured dynamics of this society, the broad dissatisfaction with the company is telling. It highlights just how pervasive the Caracas Company's influence had become and how important smuggling was to Venezuelan subjects. Even though, as this article will point out, León's uprising started as a local and Isleño-centric event, many social groups eventually joined it. Each had a stake in contraband trade or the degree of economic autonomy it engendered for them as colonials, and each had their reasons to wish for the Caracas Company's demise.

Despite the company directors' promises of greater prosperity for Venezuela as a whole, colonial subjects of various social groups rapidly coalesced around their resentment of these outsiders. The mantuanos saw the company's meddling in local government as a threat to the political control they maintained over the province through the Caracas cabildo.[34] Moreover, both elite and petty merchants perceived the danger to their interests posed by the company's ascendancy in the cacao trade. With their dominant share of the province's legal commerce, Caracas Company merchants depressed the prices producers received for their cacao. From a pre-Company going rate of around 22 pesos per fanega of cacao (a fanega equaling 110 pounds), the price paid for cacao during the company's initial 20 years plummeted to an average of eight pesos per fanega and, in some cases, as low as four or five pesos.[35]

Locals were also dismayed by how company merchants shirked their responsibility to provision the colony. Complaints of inadequate, substandard, and prohibitively expensive goods and foodstuffs were common. On several occasions during the company's first 20 years, delays and lapses in its shipments

33. Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness*, 205–214; Salcedo-Bastardo, *Historia fundamental de Venezuela*, 144–148; Lombardi, *Venezuela: The Search for Order*, 147–149.

34. According to reports by the governor of Venezuela, more than 97 "noble people" turned out for the first *cabildo abierto* after León first entered the city in April of 1749, thereby demonstrating elite anger with the company's political ambitions. Extract from a letter from the governor of Caracas, undated, AGI, Caracas, 418; Francisco Morales Padrón, "La Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas y la sociedad venezolana." in *Los Vascos y América: el comercio vasco en el siglo XVIII–La Real Compania Guipuzcoana de Caracas*, Ronald Escobedo Mansilla, Ana María Rivera Medina, and Álvaro Chapa Imaz, eds. (Bilbao: Fundación Banco de Viscaya, 1989), 217; Morales Padrón, *Rebelión contra la Compañía de Caracas*, 33–34, 43.

35. Junta, Caracas, April 22, 1749, AGI, Caracas, 937; Don Julián de Arriaga y Rivera, governor of Venezuela to don Juan Manuel de Goyzueta and don Mathiais Urroz, factors of the Compañía Guipuzcoana, Caracas, March 29, 1750, AGI, Caracas, 418; Ferry, *The Colonial Elite*, 138; Núñez, *Juan Francisco de León*, 66.

forced Venezuelan residents to petition to buy flour from neighboring colonies.[36] Just five years before León's uprising, King Felipe V wrote to Caracas Company directors regarding Caraqueño officials' complaints of a dearth of wheat flour, liquor, and clothing.[37] Clothes became so scarce in 1749 that the rector of the university in Caracas chastised the company, noting that "since its establishment [it] has allowed for a continual dearth of the most common and usual goods, of foodstuffs and supplies . . . subjecting [the province's] inhabitants to an intolerable nudity and compelling them by necessity to look for a remedy wherever the possibility presents itself."[38] When company merchandise did reach Venezuela, price gouging frequently put it out of the populace's reach. One complaint noted that the company bought barrels of flour at ten pesos each and then sold them to the public at 23 pesos per barrel.[39]

At the same time that Venezuelans went without basic supplies, the company was hauling in tidy profits. Shareholders earned dividends between 20 and 30 percent for the 1730s and 1740s. A 20-peso per fanega difference between company merchants' buying and selling prices on cacao easily covered overhead.[40] These developments fueled a shared anxiety among Venezuelan coastal inhabitants that the company had come to monopolize the province's economic and political resources for its own extractive gain. Whether through neglect or commercial restrictions, Venezuelan consumers were used to sparse legal trade opportunities, but the company's patrols gradually tightened even the provincial safety valve of smuggling. Most scholarly estimates of Venezuelan illicit trade say it dropped during the first 20 years of company rule.[41] Coastguard ships rounded up contrabandists in record numbers: their prize court cases fill 42 volumes in Venezuela's Archivo General de la Nación.

Tighter enforcement of illicit trade did nothing to quiet Venezuelans' unease in the face of persistent whispers that company officials themselves were deeply

36. Declaración de don Juan Camejo, vecino de Caracas, Caracas, December 14, 1747, and declaración de Francisco Domingo Bejaramo, Caracas, December 15, 1747, AGI, Caracas, 891; Governor Luis Francisco de Castellanos to the king, La Guaira, October 15, 1749, AGI, Caracas, 418; Montserrat Garate Ojanguren, *La Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas* (San Sebastián, Spain: Grupo Doctor Camino de Historia Donostiarra, 1990), 301; Morales Padrón, *Rebelión contra la Compañía de Caracas*, 22–23; Morón, *A History of Venezuela*, 33.

37. The king to the directors of the Real Compania Guipuzcoana de Caracas, Madrid, September 30, 1744, AGI, Caracas, 928.

38. Petición del Sr. Rector de la Real y Pontificia Universidad, Caracas, June 12, 1749, AGI, Caracas, 419.

39. Interrogatorio, undated, AGI, Caracas, 418.

40. Garate Ojanguren, *La Real Compañía Guipuzcoana*, 46; Vivas Pineda, *La aventura naval*, 43; Morón, *A History of Venezuela*, 70.

41. Eugenio Piñero points to the increase in cacao prices in Amsterdam during this period as proof of decreased smuggling. Piñero, "The Cacao Economy of the Eighteenth-Century Province of Caracas and the Spanish Cacao Market," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 68:1 (February 1988): 91. See also Hussey, *The Caracas Company,* 76; Aizpurua, *Curazao y la costa de Caracas*, 154–159; and Klooster, *Illicit Riches,*146–152.

involved in smuggling. Tax fraud resulting from company ships transporting undeclared cacao to Spain and untaxed luxury items to Venezuela was common. In 1738, customs officials in Spain seized one company ship that had failed to declare 40,000 pesos of Mexican silver.[42] Juan Francisco de León himself would later accuse one company employee of working at a store full of Dutch goods known as the "warehouse of Curaçao," and another of illegally importing slaves into Venezuela under the pretext that they were captured goods. [43]

Venezuelan subjects thus viewed company employees not only as hypocrites, but also as pernicious monopolizers of the vital black market. Aline Helg and John Elliott have observed that subjects on the Spanish American periphery engaged in illicit trade as an indirect means of commercial protest. Their actions defused grievances that might otherwise have led to colonial rebellion.[44] The Caracas Company's intrusion into the underground economy snuffed out these modes of tacit resistance to Spanish commercial regulations. Though subjects would cloak their complaints about the company in the appropriate language of lost legal trade opportunities, it was the company's anti-smuggling operations that animated their claims for redress and eventual revolt.[45]

To protect its image in Spain, the Caracas Company parried colonial subjects' criticism with its own narrative of its 20 years in the colony. Numerous letters to royal officials offered a full-throated defense of company patrols as "the brake on illicit trade" and the only real military measure against foreign invasion.[46] More importantly, at the height of the León Rebellion several senior company officials, led by its director Joseph de Yturriaga, published a manifesto defending the company's continued presence in Province of Venezuela. It minimized the rebellion's importance, claiming that a few bad apples (mostly elite Caraqueño merchants and foreigners) had led an otherwise loyal populace astray. In the view of these company men, the minority who hated the Basque merchant venture did so because it enforced anti-smuggling prohibitions.

42. Expediente sobre aberiguar el fraude de 13 cajones que se tubo noticia traia de Caracas el navio de la Compania Santa Ana que arrivo a Cadiz, Caracas, 1738, AGI, Caracas, 926; Vivas Pineda, *La aventura naval* 18, 64–66.

43. Interrogatorio, undated, AGI, Caracas, 418; Letters 1–10, 1746 and 1747, AGI, Caracas, 418.

44. Aline Helg, *Liberty and Equality in Caribbean Colombia, 1770–1835* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 72; Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World*, 316–317.

45. In this interpretation, I agree mostly with Ronald Hussey's argument, which emphasizes the anti-contraband operations of the Caracas Company as their original sin in the minds of colonists. However, I find Hussey's argument moralistic and overly determinist in its belief "that monopoly and all-inclusive governmental regulation were evil principles upon which to found an economic system" and its overriding assumption that colonists single-mindedly wanted free trade. See Hussey, *The Caracas Company*, viii, 99. Mercedes Álvarez de Ramos Márquez supports Hussey's contention. Álvarez de Ramos Márquez, *Aspectos de nuestros orígenes*, 106–109. However, this interpretation almost entirely lacks supporting documentation.

46. El Yngeniero Don Juan Gayangos, Puerto Cabello, May 19, 1749, AGI, Caracas, 418; Directores de la Compañía de Caracas to Marqués de la Ensenada, San Sebastián, October 12, 1750, AGI, Caracas 929.

The manifesto rejected the idea of the company as a malevolent monopoly, reasoning that colonists could legally trade with Mexico, the Canary Islands, and the interior provinces outside of the company's control. Moreover, the company had benefited the region. The authors pointed to increased cacao production, the construction of deep harbors and forts, and defensive outlays of 15,000 pesos annually as proof that the company had Venezuela's best interests in mind. These gains were not, as petitioners had misconstrued them, the result of "*tyranny*, *oppression*, *mistreatment*, or *poverty*, but rather advantages that gave *help*, *assistance*, *opportune aid*, and *fecundity* to the province."[47]

León's revolt did not constitute the first armed protest against the company. Its own inflated portrayal of itself to Madrid notwithstanding, coastal Venezuela was the scene of frequent unrest prior to the 1749 uprising. Coastal inhabitants had voiced their dismay through two previous smaller and unsuccessful tumults, the Andresote (1730) and San Felipe Rebellions (1741). Earlier uprisings indicated the consistent current of unrest that Juan Francisco de León would later channel into a substantial movement.[48]

Like León and his followers, Spain's competitors recognized and sought to capitalize on local frustration with the Caracas Company. Smugglers based in Dutch territories helped supply pre-León uprisings. English subjects also sympathized with anti-company protests. One Boston newspaper cheerily recognized the bravery of "Andrew Scoso [Andresote], a Mulatto agitated by a generous Passion of relieving his distress'd Countrymen."[49] In addition to continuing its illicit trade with Spanish subjects and thus undermining the Caracas Company's cacao monopoly, the English made several overtures to Venezuelan coastal inhabitants to encourage them in rebellion against the company and the Spanish crown. During the War of Jenkins' Ear (1739-48), the English admiral Charles Knowles sought to create a fifth column of coastal inhabitants disaffected by the company to aid his 1743 invasions of the port towns of La Guaira and Puerto Cabellos. He sent leaflets in Spanish ahead of himself to both ports, explaining that the war between the English and Spanish had begun only out of a present need: "to reprimand the insolence of these pirates commonly called coast guards (*guarda costas*) of which the Viscayans

47. Italicization is in the original text. Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas, *Manifiesto, que con incontestables hechos prueba los grandes beneficios, que ha producido el establecimiento de la Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas, y califica quan importante es su conservacion al Estado, a la Real Hacienda, al buen publico, y a los verdaderos interesses de la misma Provincia de Caracas,* Madrid, 1749, JCB, 13f.

48. León Trujillo, *Motín y sublevación en San Felipe* (Caracas: J. Villegas, 1955), 30–32, 91, 122; Carlos Felice Cardot, *La Rebelión de Andresote (Valles del Yaracuy, 1730–1733),* (Caracas: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 1952), 15, 49.

49. "Barbados, March 3," *Boston News-Letter*, April 20, 1732, 2. I wish to thank Charles Foy for providing me with this citation.

are particularly noteworthy. They practice acts of cruelty and barbarism not just against the English, but against their own countrymen, the Spanish, treating them worse than Turks, jailing them, violating their ancient right to trade with other nations, and daily throwing them into the galleys."

Knowles proposed establishing a British colony at Puerto Cabello and promised protection from marauding company forces.[50] One British officer involved in the campaign against both ports recalled Knowles's orders to his subordinates: "To let the Inhabitants of the Country know, that the English did not come there to take from them their Rights, Religion, or Liberties, but that they would from us enjoy them with great Certainty, and more Happiness, than when under the Tyranny and Cruelty of the *Guiapesco* Company, which we were now come to rid them of."[51]

Six years later, during Juan Francisco de León's rebellion, the rebel chief received a letter from a British captain named Ian Burr offering the military aid of his convoy of three ships if León's forces would swear allegiance to the British sovereign.[52] That neither of these plots succeeded in swaying imperial loyalties confirmed the strength of Venezuelan fidelity to the Spanish crown. Nonetheless, the very proposal demonstrated that locals' exasperation over the Caracas Company's control of the commercial, political, and military resources of the province had intensified to the point where it was known across imperial boundaries.

Marching on Caracas: The Rebellion of Juan Francisco de León

Nowhere was anger over the Basque monopolization of Venezuela more palpable than in Panaquire. This town, formed early in the eighteenth century from the boom in cacao production, was the seat of Juan Francisco de León's rebellion. Located in the fertile, inland Tuy River Valley, Panaquire became a haven for Canary Islanders to settle and grow cacao. They found fellowship

50. Don Carlos Knowles Cavallero, Comandante en Principal de una Escuadra de Fragatas de S. M. Bretanica de presente en la Costa de Caracas, a Los Vecinos y Moradores de la Provincia de Benevuela, undated, AGI, Caracas, 927.

51. *Journal of the Expedition to La Guira and Porto Cavallos in the West-Indies under the Command of Commodore Knowles. In a Letter from an Officer on board the* Burford *to his Friend at London* (London: Printed for J. Robinson, at the Golden Lyon in Ludgate-Street, 1744, JCB, 6–7.

52. Captain Ian Burr to Juan Francisco de León, on board the ship *El Aspa*, Puerto de Unare, October 2, 1749, in *Juan Francisco de León: Diario*, 189. The authenticity of this letter was challenged by Interim Governor Julian de Arriaga, who believed it was a forgery. See Fray Don Julián de Arriaga y Rivera to Marqués de la Ensenada, Caracas, April 5, 1750, AGI, Caracas, 418.

with Isleños who lived in the Candelaria district of Caracas.[53] Though royal permissions initially encouraged the efforts of these small cacao planters to settle, the Caracas Company and governors beholden to it connected Isleños to illicit trade and portrayed them as shifty, lazy, and rebellious. For example, the interim governor of Venezuela, Fray Julian de Arriaga y Rivera, in 1750 conflated "*zambos*, *mulatoes*, *negroes*, *Ysleños*, deserters, and other elements of vagrants (*gente vaga*) that only obey the *alcalde* if they like and if not, they laugh at him and the priest. Most of them make a living combining the bounty of the haciendas and throwing themselves into [illegal] commerce on the coast."[54]

Such characterizations sprung from the weak royal presence in the Tuy River Valley and the ease with which cacao could be shipped downriver and out to coastlines frequented by smugglers based in the Dutch Caribbean. Orders designed to slow contraband commerce, via restrictions on how Tuy Valley residents and other coastal dwellers could conduct legal trade, instead caused poverty and pushed subjects into the black market in increasing numbers.[55] Other subjects felt a similar squeeze on their commercial freedoms. A petition from the citizens of Caracas attributed their plight to living in a dysfunctional province where "there are many sellers and abundant produce, but few or only one buyer."[56] Clergy complained that tithes and contributions from cacao-producing parishes were insufficient to support their churches.[57] One priest summed up the unintended consequences of increased policing of trade by arguing that closing ports to prevent contraband would "prohibit residents from exporting cacao by way of legal commerce and, as a consequence, open the danger of illicit trade because only criminals (*vasallos de mala ley*) and foreign ships would come to these less-traversed ports."[58]

In the case of the Tuy Valley and other primarily Isleño areas, officials from Caracas wishing to limit independent commerce met stubborn resistance. Teniente Juan Francisco de León, the titular leader of the coming revolt, ruled local government in the region. A cacao planter who had been instrumental in Panaquire's founding, León was incredibly pro-Isleño and reviled the

53. Lynch, "Spanish America's Poor Whites," 58–61; Parsons, "The Migration of Canary Islanders," 464–466; Castillo Lara, *La aventura fundacional de los Isleños*, 11; Morales Padrón, "La Real Compañía Guipuzcoana," 215.

54. Fray Don Julián de Arriaga y Rivera a los factores en que les significó su juicio sobre el estado de la Provincia y Compania, Caracas, March 29, 1750, AGI, Caracas, 929.

55. Ferry, *The Colonial Elite*, 106–139.

56. Ciudad de Santiago de León de Caracas to the king, Caracas, November 19, 1741, AGI, Caracas, 925.

57. Las religiosas dominicas to the king, *Representan los graves perjuicios que se le siguen, por la restricción de buques a que se ha reducido el embarque de cacao en aquella Provincia*, Caracas, November 27, 1731, AGI, Caracas, 925.

58. Memorial de Padre Pedro Díaz Cienfuegos, 1745, AGNV, Diversos, Tomo 27, fols. 2–16, in Castillo Lara, *La aventura fundacional de los Isleños*, 174.

Basques.[59] An uneasy standoff developed as successive governors' desires to rein in contraband suffered from Isleño disobedience and local governmental autonomy. By the end of the 1740s, Panaquire's simmering frustration would boil over into a province-wide rebellion, following on new company attempts to assert governmental control over the Tuy River Valley. On April 3, 1749, Martín de Echeverría arrived in Panaquire to assume the position of prize court judge of the town. As an outside official handpicked by the Caracas Company to adjudicate cases of illegal trade in the area, confiscate contraband goods, and judge captured contrabandists, Echeverría's appointment drove the townspeople to revolt. Believing erroneously that Echeverría intended to replace him as teniente, Juan Francisco de León met the official and informed him that the town would not allow him to accept Echeverría in any official capacity.[60] When Echeverría pressed the issue, León's forces fired on him and Echeverría withdrew. The Rebellion of Juan Francisco de León had begun.

The uprising, which lasted from 1749 to the beginning of 1752, comprised roughly four phases. In the first phase, León marched for Caracas with an army of between 600 and 800 armed men. Three quarters of León's forces were Isleños or white Spaniards by ancestry, and the rest were blacks, mulattos, zambos, and a few Indians. The protestors' social estates ran the gamut from wealthy planters, to middling tradespeople, to slaves.[61] Although the movement did not spring from a multiracial and socioeconomically diverse coalition, León's forces gained a broad base. Producers in the cacao sector of the provincial economy hardly needed convincing that a monopoly company hurt their livelihoods. The rebels sought to persuade Venezuelans not involved in cacao production that the expulsion of the Caracas Company would serve their interests as well. One of León's subordinates told a group of "tailors, barbers, cobblers, and other tradesmen" that "though they did not own a cacao hacienda or plant tobacco, by expelling the company they would enjoy benefits in the purchase of their goods and in the compensation for their work." To illustrate, he pointed to the barber saying that "normally given a half *real* for each haircut [he] would now receive two because there would be more money [in the province]."[62] On the other end of the socioeconomic spectrum, León received anonymous letters of support from elite Caraqueños who would later

59. Tenientes were rural sheriffs who were the most important officials in Venezuelan communities before the arrival of the Caracas Company. They were both police officers and justices of the peace. Ferry, *The Colonial Elite*, 141.

60. Juan Francisco de León to Governor Castellanos, Chacao, April 3, 1749, AGI, Caracas, 937; Confesión de Juan Francisco de León, Caracas, February 9, 1752, AGNV, Insurrección del Capitán Juan Francisco de León, fols. 277–284, in *Documentos relativos*, 195; Ferry, *The Colonial Elite*, 144.

61. Auto de Domingo de Aguirre, April 20, 1749 in *Juan Francisco de León: Diario*, 8; Acta del Ayuntamiento de Caracas, April 20, 1749 in *Documentos relativos*, 25, 173.

62. Confesión de Matias de Ovalle, Caracas, January 5, 1752, AGNV, Insurrección del Capitán Juan Francisco de León, Tomo 2, fols. 228–239, in *Documentos relativos*, 174.

feed and shelter his men when they got to Caracas.[63] As he marched toward the capital, León sent letters of protest ahead of him to air common grievances He accused the Caracas Company of impoverishing the province by lowering cacao prices to levels that forced producers to abandon their haciendas. He also charged individual company officials with setting obscenely high prices on food and goods, smuggling for their own enrichment, and generally abusing Venezuelan subjects. León demanded the immediate extinction of the company and the expulsion of all Basques from the province.[64]

Although the invaders conveyed the appearance of an armed revolt, the initial stages of the León uprising in Caracas were peaceful and orderly. By April 19, 1749, León's forces were on the outskirts of the city of Caracas in the Isleño-dominated neighborhood of La Candelaria. As Governor Luis Francisco Castellanos had no standing army, León held him as a de facto hostage. Yet, despite the rebels' control over the city, no looting or violence took place.[65] All correspondence and public proclamations from León's men asserted their loyalty to the king and agreed that the uprising's only mission was the destruction of the company. León and the governor declared an emergency open town council meeting (*cabildo abierto*) to voice complaints about the company. In all, 97 attendees showed up for a meeting that normally produced no more than a dozen people.[66] The cabildo's show of solidarity and Governor Castellanos's own captivity persuaded him to declare the expulsion of the company and all Basques. After 15 days of captivity, Castellanos disguised himself as a friar and fled to La Guaira on the night of May 3. He immediately joined company employees, many of whom had already retreated from Caracas. Governor Castellanos quickly declared all proclamations he had made in Caracas null and void and set himself up to wait for reinforcements.

Castellanos's flight changed the dynamics of the uprising. No longer could it simply be classified as a protest, for León's men had run a crown-appointed official out of the capital and into hiding. From this point onward, the correspondence of León and his men evinced a more anxious and defensive tone. They shifted blame onto the governor for running away and thus leaving the province vulnerable to slave revolts and other tumults. They also attempted

63. Juan Francisco de León to Governor and Captain General Don Phelipe Ricardos, December 16, 1751, AGI, Caracas, 421; Ferry, *The Colonial Elite*, 148.

64. Juan Francisco de León to Governor Castellanos, Chacao, April 19, 1749, AGI, Caracas, 937; Extract of a letter from the governor of Caracas, undated, AGI, Caracas, 418; Juan Francisco de León to Domingo Aguirre, Caracas, November 5, 1749, AGI, Caracas, 418; Interrogatorio, undated, AGI, Caracas, 418; El Cabildo, Justicia, y Regimiento de la Ciudad de Caracas, to the king, Caracas, January 14, 1750, AGI, Caracas, 419.

65. Petición del abogado José Pablo de Arenas, a nombre del Capt. León y demás vecinos y naturales de la provincia, undated, in *Documentos relativos*, 29–30.

66. Ferry, *The Colonial Elite*, 148; Morales Padrón, *Rebelión contra la Compañía de Caracas*, 71.

to legitimize their protests and petitions with the help of notaries public and asked colonial officials to bring them legal counsel.[67] Though they continued to petition for an end to the company and its abuses, the insurgents sensed the strategic urgency of the moment. They blockaded the road to La Guaira to starve company partisans of supplies from inland and fought several skirmishes between the two cities with company troops in July 1749.

León's supporters now held Caracas with a force estimated at its upper limits to be between 4,000 and 7,000 men.[68] The arrival of a new interim governor, Julián de Arriaga, 300,000 pesos of Mexican silver, and reinforcements in November of 1749 altered negotiations.[69] Arriaga was more conciliatory than Castellanos. He conceded to the rebels that the king would re-evaluate the Caracas Company and correct the worst of its abuses. Shortly after assuming command, Arriaga marched to Caracas and met with León. By this juncture, the rebel leader's forces had become fearful of the consequences of being labeled traitors. By December 1749, they were more than willing to take the pardon extended to them by Arriaga, so long as the company's demise seemed assured.[70]

In the second phase of the rebellion, a year and five months of tense peace settled over Caracas. León's army disbanded and went home, but Governor Arriaga still worried about their potential return. His term ended in May 1751 with the appointment of his successor Phelipe Ricardos. Ricardos was an ally of the company and its choice to replace Arriaga.[71] On taking command, the new governor began immediately to execute his orders to capture Juan Francisco de León and his accomplices and re-establish the company under new terms.

The third phase of the rebellion saw the destruction of the peace. León, incensed by the re-establishment of the company, began his second uprising

67. León's relationship with slavery was a complicated one. He was a slave owner, but also incorporated slaves and free people of color into his rebellion. Although he did not remark on it, León most likely separated slave-led uprisings from revolts that contained slaves among their numbers. Thus, in the case above, the rebel chief invoked slave revolt as a rhetorical specter meant to demonstrate the instability produced by the governor's irresponsible flight from the city. Juan Francisco de León to Governor and Captain General Castellanos, Caracas, undated, AGNV, Insurrección del Capitán Juan Francisco de León, Tomo 1, fol. 4, in *Documentos relativos*, 39.

68. Auto de Gregorio del Portillo, Escribano Público, Caracas, August 1, 1749; Auto del Teniente General Domingo de Aguirre y Castillo, Caracas, August 2, 1749, in *Juan Francisco de León: Diario*, 115–116; Ferry, *The Colonial Elite*, 152.

69. Alejandro Cardozo Uzcátegui, *Los mantuanos en la corte española: una relación cisatlantica (1783–1825)*, (Bilbao: Servicio Editorial de la Universidad del País Vasco, 2013), 150.

70. Domingo de Aguirre y Castillo to Don Julián de Arriaga, December 5, 1749, AGI, Caracas, 418; Fray Don Julián de Arriaga to Marqués de la Ensenada, Caracas, January 14, 1750, AGI, Caracas, 419; Núñez, *Juan Francisco de León*, 85; Hussey, *The Caracas Company*, 133.

71. Cardozo Uzcátegui, *Los mantuanos*, 225.

by marching toward Caracas in August 1751.[72] The province was abuzz with rumors of thousands of León partisans rising up in various separate cacao-producing districts. However, this new revolt lacked the crucial support of the elite, who had come dangerously close to being branded traitors by León's first rebellion. With much more grave potential consequences for insurgents this time around, many elites refused to back an uprising that did not seem like a sure thing and was led by Isleños rather than mantuanos. The diverse coalition that had bolstered the rebellion in its early days vanished.[73] This event, combined with the troops assembled by Arriaga and Ricardos, frustrated León's plans for a second trip to Caracas. His men ran into forces sent by the governor to apprehend him and fought a skirmish in the small inland town of Caucagua on the way to the capital. In the process, they wounded a royal officer. The incident represented the turning point in the second uprising. The insurgents now had drawn blood and could no longer sustain their claim to be peaceful protest movement. After retreating, León's men, who feared the governor's substantial forces, began to desert in large numbers. León himself escaped capture by catching passage on a Dutch ship that transported him eastward down the Venezuelan coast.

Retreat marked the fourth stage of the León Rebellion. The Leonistas began to resemble a group of hunted men more than an army. The governor's forces pursued the fugitives for more than four months. Finally, in January of 1752, León, hungry, beaten down, and tired of running, turned himself in along with several of his supporters and sons. Authorities apprehended other rebels later. The weary leader wrote in a final letter to Governor Ricardos that a government run by Basques had "declared me culpable and… pursued me. They have dishonored me and taken my livelihood as well as that of my sons, my wife, and the rest of the poor in this Valley of Panaquire."[74]

The aftermath of León's rebellion produced tremendous upheaval for both its participants and the province as a whole. Company ships carried León and his sons in chains to Spain. León died of disease in prison shortly after his arrival in Cádiz, and his sons served lengthy terms in the presidios of Spanish North Africa. Spanish judges exiled and condemned to forced labor 28 other close confidants of León. That these ardent followers were sentenced and sent to

72. Testimonio de Bernardo Curbelo, vecino de Victoria, July 1, 1751, AGI, Caracas, 420.

73. For rumors of the rebel numbers, see Juan Rossel to Governor Phelipe Ricardos, June 27, 1751, AGNV, Insurrección del Capitán Juan Francisco de León, Tomo 1, fol.132; and Antonio Baez to Governor Don Phelipe Ricardos, Maracay, June 29, 1751, AGNV, Insurrección del Capitán Juan Francisco de León, Tomo 1, fol. 136, in *Documentos relativos*, 80–81; For reports on the end of elite support for the rebellion, see Fray Don Julián de Arriaga y Olivera to Marqués de la Ensenada, December 7, 1751, AGI, Caracas, 421; and Auto de Domingo de Aguirre, Caracas, October 9, 1749, in *Juan Francisco de León: Diario*, 147–150.

74. Juan Francisco de León to Governor Don Phelipe Ricardos, December 16, 1751, AGI, Caracas, 421.

presidios and fortifications in Spain, North Africa, Havana, Vera Cruz, and the Canary Islands) confirmed the need to separate and isolate them as dangerous instigators of unrest. Authorities also executed more than ten Leónistas.[75]

In addition to dispensing justice, colonial officials also sought to make an example of León by way of several heavily symbolic gestures. The governor's forces left the head of one rebel executed for his part in the revolt on the doorstep of León's Panaquire home during the last days of the rebellion. Foreshadowing the punitive ritual later performed on the memory of the Andean rebel Túpac Amaru, royal officials tore down León's city house in La Candelaria, salted the earth so that nothing would grow on the land, forbade the utterance of his name, and placed a plaque on the site declaring his infamy as a traitor to the king.[76] In effect, the colonial government attempted simultaneously to emphasize León's villainy and to blot out his existence. The inherent contradiction in this approach revealed profound anxieties concerning the pernicious influence of smuggling in peripheral unrest.

Following the arrest and sentencing of rebel instigators, colonial bureaucrats increased the royal military presence in the province. Robert Ferry has pointed out, correctly, that the Bourbon push for standing armies in Spanish America may have had its origins in the events of 1749–51 in Caracas, rather than in the siege of Havana that took place a decade later. After the dust settled from the uprising, Governor Phelipe Ricardos installed a permanent garrison of troops in Caracas at a cost of 100,000 pesos annually.[77] No doubt prompted by memories of the chaos of the uprising, successive governors continued to maintain this standing army.[78]

Further, the León uprising spurred important administrative and commercial reforms. The king and council, now mindful of the explosive possibilities of provincial hatred for the Caracas Company, mandated that the company submit to increased imperial oversight to prevent future rebellions. To afford greater access to the company's books and practices, the crown ordered its headquarters transferred from the Basque city of Pasajes to Madrid. The king

75. Noticia de las Personas que se deben embarcar en los navios, el *Pablo Galera* y la *Concordia*, Caracas, November 14, 1751, AGI, Caracas, 421; Governor Don Phelipe Ricardos to Joseph Banfi, Caracas, March 2, 1752, AGI, Caracas, 421; Núñez, *Juan Francisco de León*, 95–101.

76. Don Phelipe Ricardos to Marqués de la Ensenada, Caracas, September 11, 1751, AGI, Caracas, 421; Auto de Don Phelipe Ricardos, Caracas, February 5, 1752, AGI, Caracas, 421; Stavig, *The World of Tupac Amaru*, 248. The practice of salting the earth of a rebel or traitor's dwelling can be traced back to biblical times. R. T. Ridley, "To Be Taken with a Pinch of Salt: The Destruction of Carthage," *Classical Philology* 81:2 (1986): 140–146.

77. Rosario Salazar Bravo, *El comercio diario en la Caracas del siglo XVIII: una aproximación a la historia urbana* (Caracas: Fundación para la Cultura Urbana, 2008), 198–199; Ferry, *The Colonial Elite*, 5–6, 247.

78. Sucre, *Gobernadores y capitanes generales*, 277–279.

also stipulated that a commission consisting of the governor, a company factor, and a representative (*regidor*) from the Caracas cabildo would set new price lists annually on European goods and cacao.[79] As a result, the price paid to Venezuelan producers for their cacao increased. Mandatory changes also put elite Caraqueños on the company's board of directors and allowed them to be stockholders. Finally, the crown abrogated the company's rights to trade cacao with New Spain, thereby quieting the fears of Venezuelan producers and merchants that the company sought to monopolize Venezuelan cacao shipping to Mexico and cut Venezuelan producers out of a cost-effective means to transport chocolate to this crucial market.[80]

Regardless of these newly granted privileges, most Venezuelans continued to resent the Caracas Company. Some elite Venezuelan families did drop their opposition to the company after their sons and daughters married into the families of Basque company men. These partnerships were meant to expand Venezuelan patricians' influence in the province and the Spanish court.[81] Notwithstanding these relationships, most Venezuelans involved in commerce viewed the company as an intruder that continued its attempts to monopolize all trade. These sentiments remained strong decades after the León Rebellion. As late as 1778, one Spanish bureaucrat wrote to José de Gálvez, the minister of the Indies, informing him that "the residents of Caracas complain bitterly of the monopoly and extortions of the company whose unsatisfactory prices would have discouraged the Caraqueños entirely were it not for the recourse of contraband trade, which they find absolutely necessary."[82] Although estimates are problematic, it appears that despite the post-León legal trade opportunities presented to wealthier Venezuelans by the reformed Caracas Company, contraband trade continued and even increased in frequency, given the company's weakened enforcement position.[83] With its authority to dictate the terms of trade and harry contraband commerce substantially restrained, the company faced no further revolts.

79. D. Martin de Meinege a la Provincia de Guipuzcoana, Azcoytia, April 10, 1757, AGI, Caracas, 930; Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas, en su junta particular, Madrid, May 14, 1759, AGI, Caracas, 930.

80. Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas, *Real Cédula* , 140–145; Rico Linage, *Las reales compañías*, 27; Estornés Lasa, *La Real Compañía Guipuzcoana*, 22; Hussey, *The Caracas Company*, 152; Aizpurua, *Curazao y la costa de Caracas*, 180; Morales Padrón, *Rebelión contra la Compañía de Caracas*, 138–139. On anxieties about shipping cacao to Mexico, see Arcila Farias, *Economía colonial*, 190–205; and Ferry, *The Colonial Elite*, 165, 179–190.

81. Cardozo Uzcátegui, *Los mantuanos*, 170.

82. Informe de Agustín Moreno Enríquez, remitido al Ministerio de Indias, José de Gálvez, Amsterdam, February 11, 1778. Document reproduced in Aizpurua, *Curazao y la costa de Caracas*, 391.

83. Luis González F. estimates that 20,000 fanegas of cacao left Venezuela illegally in 1761. Luis Enrique González F., *La Guayra, conquista y colonia* (Caracas: Editorial Grafarte, 1982), 118; Joseph Luis de Cisneros, *Descripción exacta de la provincia de Venezuela* (Caracas: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 1981 [1764]), 131–164; Arcila Farias, *Economía colonial*, 259; Vivas Pineda, *La aventura naval*, 212.

It was not rebellion but trade liberalization that broke the Caracas Company's back. The *comercio libre* (free trade) decrees, put forth in 1765 and greatly expanded in 1778, signified a monumental shift in imperial commercial thought. For the first time, a range of Spanish American ports as well as peninsular ones outside of Cádiz and Seville could trade legally with one another without needing to obtain special permission. Comercio libre would not come to the province until 1789 due to the lingering presence of the Caracas Company. Indeed, key Bourbon reformers involved in the creation of these laws, such as Pedro Rodríguez de Campomanes and José de Gálvez, would single out the Caracas Company as a symbol of commercial backwardness. From the time of his appointment in 1777, José de Ábalos, the first intendant of Venezuela, argued that demolishing the company would unleash Venezuela's economic potential.[84] On the heels of the 1778 comercio libre decrees, the crown retracted the company's monopoly over Venezuela's cacao trade in 1781; the company dissolved in 1784.

Ideologies of the Insurgents

The petitions and correspondence of the León rebels demonstrated cohesive moral, commercial, and communal belief structures. In his study of peasant unrest in colonial Mexican villages, William Taylor noted, "In unstable circumstances many social elements that are taken for granted in everyday life, such as ideologies and social values, rise to the surface of consciousness and are documented in written records."[85] Unlike many insurgents, León and his forces had the time and space to express, in many cases through their own words, what their protest meant to them. The petitions of sympathetic Caracas cabildo members and elite Caraqueño supporters added a wider dimension of provincial resistance to these primarily Isleño voices. Their combined writings and actions reflected at least four political ideologies and revealed the transformative impact that contraband trade had on Venezuela.

First, the volume and constant presence of smuggling in Venezuela produced a distinctive brand of economic thought that was both reactionary and

84. For information on Gálvez and Campomanes's opposition to the Caracas Company, see María Teresa Zubiri Marín, "Etapa final y caída de la Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas (1777–1785)," *Pedralbes: Revista D'Historia Moderna* 11 (1991): 158–161; Vivas Pineda, *La aventura naval*, 36; and Hussey, *The Caracas Company*, 277; For Ábalos's objections, see Manuel Lucena Giraldo, introduction to *Premoniciones de la independencia de Iberoamérica: las reflexiones de José de Ábalos y el Conde de Aranda sobre la situación de la América española a finales del siglo XVIII*, Manuel Lucena Giraldo, ed. (Madrid: Fundación Mapfre Tavera, 2003), 26; and María Teresa Zubiri Marín, "*José de Ábalos, primer intendente de Venezuela (1777–1783)*," *Boletin Americanista* 30:38 (1988): 297.

85. William Taylor, *Drinking, Homicide, and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), 9.

forward-thinking. On one hand, subject petitions both before and during the rebellion called for a return to the days of limited metropolitan commercial involvement in the region, before the "despotism and absolute dominance" of the company took hold. Under the Habsburgs, smuggling in the Province of Venezuela had represented almost an informal *fuero* (legal dispensation). Despite an appalling lack of legal trade in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, few subjects complained of the way things had been before the rise of the Basque venture. Rather, a 1750 Caracas cabildo petition called for the return of register ships as the only trade from Spain.[86] It was the unstated assumption of the cabildo's request that the reappearance of register ship system of procurement without a dramatic increase in the quantity of register ships would lead to an economy dependent on smuggling.

At the same time that illicit trade's hold on the province produced a certain intransigence toward change, it also, paradoxically, prefigured the liberalization of trade to come in most of the Atlantic. Juan Francisco de León's own designs for an ideal trade system harbored many of the principles of free trade. He believed that Venezuelan-produced cacao should find its way to market by the most expedient means. In return, goods should come to Venezuela from many separate places but with no obligation for colonial subjects to buy any of them.[87] Others colonists decried the company monopoly by reminding royal officials that "commerce does not consist in the singularity of just one merchant . . . but rather in the plurality of many."[88] These tendencies toward unrestricted commerce were not lost on Governor Arriaga, who noted, "Untold numbers of Canary Islanders are vendors and petty merchants. They are, in my eyes, the contrabandists of the coast and it is liberty that they love. As the majority of them are not married, nor in possession of haciendas, they foment revolt with little risk."[89]

It is worth noting that though Venezuelans' commercial modus operandi involved trade with foreigners, they maintained fidelity to the monarchy and the conventions of the Spanish legal system. The rebels did not see their protest as treasonous. Like the Quito, Tupac Amaru, and Comunero rebels to come, the León insurgents appealed to an earlier principle that legitimized limited self-government and the right to rise up when entities

86. The quote is from El Cabildo, Justicia, y Regimiento de la Ciudad de Caracas al Rey. Caracas. January 14, 1750. AGI, Caracas, 419. On the return of register ships, see also Extrato de las quejas que ha havido de Caracas de el establecimiento de la Comp. Guipuzcoana, Madrid, September 2, 1749, AGI, Caracas, 419.

87. Representación de León, undated, AGNV, Insurrección del Capitán Juan Francisco de León, Tomo 1, fols. 119–126, in *Documentos relativos*, 72–74.

88. Extracto de las quejas que ha havido de Caracas de el establecimiento de la Comp. Guipuzcoana, Madrid, September 2, 1749, AGI, Caracas, 419.

89. Arriaga to Sr. Don Joseph Banfi, Caracas, February 25, 1750, AGI, Caracas, 418.

outside the monarchy challenged community rights.[90] The Caracas Company's burdensome presence in the province was all the more onerous because the organization existed outside of the legitimacy of the monarchical pact. Cutting out this cancer would reaffirm Venezuelans' proper role in the Hispanic world and demonstrate their affinity for it. Hence, León, in the very act of surrounding the governor's palace, pledged that for the king "we sacrifice and will continue to sacrifice our throats." [91]

The insurgents obsessed over the notarization and legal representation of a nearly bloodless uprising. They called together committees (*juntas*) of Caracas's most elite subjects to confirm the legitimacy of their protests. Juan Francisco de León even sent one of his lieutenants, Miguel de Fuentes y Abreu, on a voyage to Spain to deliver petitions directly to the king. Ironically, the governor of Cuba captured Fuentes y Abreu's papers, which proclaimed the loyalty of the supposed insurrectionists to the crown, en route across the Caribbean and prevented them from reaching Madrid.[92] Though they shouldered weapons, the insurgents clearly believed that the nature of their actions differed little from sending a complaint letter to the king. As scholarship on late eighteenth-century South American rebellions has articulated, juridical maneuvers and popular uprisings were not mutually exclusive.[93]

Second, the León rebels justified the decision to take up arms by claiming that they were bound by conscience to protect the province's material well-being by any means necessary. E. P. Thompson notes, "It is possible to detect in almost every eighteenth-century crowd action some legitimizing notion."[94] What made justifying the León Rebellion so difficult was that the basis of its legitimization was a customary act that was also illegitimate. Petitions to royal officials or the king could not directly advocate unrestricted commerce with foreigners—this kind of appeal would brand the petitioners as lawbreakers. Yet León's insurgents, both before and during the rebellion, spoke of smuggling as a necessary means of sustenance for the impoverished. Descriptions of the province painted its residents as desperate. The Caracas cabildo pleaded for the delivery of "the most moderate and limited clothing and necessary and

90. Thomson, *We Alone Will Rule*, 12; Phelan, *The People and the King*, xviii; McFarlane, "Rebellions," 319, 323, 330; Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World*, 349–350.

91. Copies of letters from Juan Francisco de León to Sr. Gefe de Esquadra, Sr. Fray Julián de Arriaga, November 29, 1749, AGI, Caracas, 418.

92. Junta, Caracas, April 22, 1749, AGI, Caracas, 937; Francisco Caxigal de la Vega, Governor of Cuba, to Marqués de la Ensenada, Havana, July 23, 1749, AGI, Caracas, 423.

93. Stavig, *The World of Túpac Amaru*, xxvi; Serulnikov, *Subverting Colonial Authority*, 138.

94. Thompson, "The Moral Economy," 78.

indispensable foodstuffs like bread, wine, and olive oil."[95] León noted that prices for cacao had dropped so far before the uprising that some Isleños were selling off their devalued haciendas to the company at fire-sale prices.[96]

Such accounts displayed a powerful sentiment that the stranglehold on licit and illicit trade had transgressed commonly agreed-upon thresholds of economic justice. Though he viewed the uprising with horror, interim Governor Julián de Arriaga seconded León's views on the detrimental consequences of low cacao prices. The magistrate asked company merchants whether ruined *hacendados* could now afford even "a hat for themselves or a shirt for their sons."[97] One parish priest explained the rebellion through scripture: the Israelites asked for relief from oppressive taxes imposed by Solomon's son Rehoboam and rebelled when their demands were not met. "The people ask for justice," wrote the priest. "Allowing oppression to breathe will incline them to rebellion."[98] Abrogation of a commercial sense of fairness justified smuggling and popular protest and thus challenged the perceived immorality of both offenses.

The study of smuggling points to a more capacious definition of the moral economy. Critics of the concept emphasize that it is too focused on local markets and the idea that the informal agreements of economic fairness necessarily conflicted with freer markets.[99] Yet, in the case of eighteenth-century coastal Venezuela, protestors advocated for deregulated exchange to maintain themselves. Certainly, they wished to end the mutually profitable relationship between the Spanish crown and the Caracas Company. But they also wanted to preserve a status quo of imperial neglect that would allow them access to efficient commercial relationships with a range of foreigners. The León partisans were not hidebound to local exchange. Rather, they resorted to the moral economy in order to conduct transimperial trade.

Evidence of rebel dependence on foreigners demonstrates a third ideological strain: that of commercial autonomy. Anxieties about the participation of forces

95. Acta de la Asamblea que celebraron los Notables de Caracas en la Sala del Ayuntamiento, April 22, 1749, AGNV, Insurrección del Capitán Juan Francisco de León, Tomo 1, fols. 19–29, in *Documentos relativos*, 32–33.

96. Interrogatorio de Juan Francisco de León, undated, AGI, Caracas, 418.

97. Don Julián de Arriaga y Rivera to don Juan Manuel de Goyzueta and don Mathiais Urroz, factors of the Compañía Guipuzcoana, Caracas, March 29, 1750, AGI, Caracas, 418.

98. Doctor Don Manuel de Sossa y Betancurt to Governor Castellanos, Caracas, July 25, 1749, in *Juan Francisco de León: Diario*, 96–97.

99. Adrian Randall and Andrew Charlesworth argue that "Edward Thompson's methodology of placing accounts of protest in a context of 'thick description' needs to be taken forward towards attempting a 'total history' of riotous, and non-riotous, communities, a history which will take account of the changing social, economic and political context from which protest emanated and of the rich variety of forms which protest took." Adrian Randall and Andrew Charlesworth, "The Moral Economy: Riot, Markets and Social Conflict," in *Moral Economy and Popular Protest: Crowds, Conflict and Authority*, Randall and Charlesworth , eds. (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 2000), 12–13.

from Curaçao peppered royal correspondence on the León Rebellion. Illicit commerce in the province relied on multi-imperial groups of sailors and traders crewing nominally "Dutch" ships from this port.[100] With this fact in mind, it would be a stretch to describe the merchant crews aiding the insurgents as a Dutch imperial project, but Spanish officials did not observe the distinction. Smugglers out of the Dutch islands ferried arms, supplies, and food to the rebels via the Tuy River in exchange for cacao.[101] They assaulted Caracas Company ships and broke up blockades at the mouth of the river.[102] In 1751 during the height of the manhunt for Juan Francisco de León, Dutch smugglers joined with their English counterparts to rout and capture several Spanish coast-guard patrols closing in on León. The rebel chief even escaped to safety aboard one of the Dutch-owned vessels.[103]

Venezuelan governors and company officials alike blamed the Dutch for agitating the rebellion and sent spies to Bonaire and Curaçao to gather intelligence.[104] Even if Spanish authorities could not verify these claims, their worries were not misplaced. The insurgents' reliance on their non-Spanish Caribbean neighbors as arms dealers and naval muscle demonstrates the symbiotic relationship that Venezuelan coastal inhabitants shared with foreign traders and their independence from legally sanctioned modes of trade. By the time of the León Rebellion, the Curaçao trade had supplanted Spanish mercantile orientation in the lives of many Venezuelan traders and producers. Spanish attempts to rein in this commercial self-rule risked betraying coastal subjects' faith in Spanish political legitimacy.

Fourth, the León Rebellion highlights smuggling's importance in the gradual evolution of a place-bound provincial identity. As Venezuelan subjects began openly to protest the Caracas Company's involvement, the accompanying unrest forced them to define more clearly who they were and what they stood for. They identified the company, and Basques as a whole, as outsiders to their community. Isleños countered characterizations of themselves as petty criminals by demonizing the Basques. Public pronouncements and correspondence of the León rebels spoke of the Basques as a generally immoral, arrogant and violent lot. Accounts outlined moral crimes committed by Basques and their

100. Rupert, *Creolization and Contraband*, 136–164; Cohen, "Cultural and Commercial Intermediaries," 111–120.

101. Governor Don Phelipe Ricardos to the Marqués de la Ensenada, Caracas, September 11, 1751, AGI, Caracas, 421; Declaración de don Liendo Manuel de Agreda, Caracas, September 3, 1751, AGI, Caracas, 420.

102. Testimonio de Phelipe Niman, residente de Capaya, August 24, 1751, AGNV, Insurrección de Juan Francisco de León, Tomo 1, fols. 368–369, in *Documentos relativos*, 107.

103. Morales Padrón, *Rebelión contra la Compañía de Caracas*, 114.

104. D. Phelipe Ricardos to the Marqués de la Ensenada, Caracas, September 11, 1751, AGI, Caracas, 421; Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas, *Manifiesto,* JCB, 2f.

dependents against ordinary colonial subjects, including rape, the poisoning of Venezuelan sailors working aboard company ships with rotten food, and the torture of prisoners. León went so far as to place blame for the 1730 rebellion of Andresote squarely on the shoulders of the Basques. According to him, the uprising was in part revenge for an incident in which a group of Viscayans broke into Andresote's house, beat him, tied him up, and then raped his wife and daughter.[105] "Long live the king and death to the *Viscainos*" became a frequent refrain of the León insurgents.[106] What started as Isleño rhetoric morphed into a province-wide critique of imperial economic imposition.

The inter-ethnic pejoratives of Isleño protests were a part of defining a state of belonging in Venezuela. Furthermore, they exposed the fault lines in white ethnogenesis in the province. James Sidbury and Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra postulate that European ethnogenesis in the Americas involved the exclusion of Africans and indigenous peoples, but also that durable ethnic associations from the Old World complicated the formation of creolized whiteness.[107] Basque-Isleño rivalry in coastal Venezuela challenged the coherence of a white, pan-Spanish consciousness. Both Basques and Canary Islanders engaged in stereotyping and ethnocentrism designed to define their rivals as morally deficient, unworthy subjects. According to the discourse of contemporary documents, Basques were duplicitous and self-serving mercantile enforcers while Canary Islanders were disloyal smugglers. Ethnicity in this context evolved from a shorthand for geographic origins into a descriptor of occupational identity, lawfulness, and legitimacy. The León rebels, whose bedrock constituency was Isleños, used all of these categories to paint the company and its Basque retinue as interlopers. The insurgents blamed their commercial improprieties on the poverty produced by Basque greed. In doing so, they simultaneously reiterated their connection to Venezuelan soil and to rightful subjecthood.

By attempting to expel the outsiders and reaffirming Isleño identity, the revolt's core participants gained a clearer sense of communal self that would spread to

105. Interrogatorio, undated, AGI, Caracas, 418; Juan Francisco de León to the Governor and Captain General Don Phelipe Ricardos, December 16, 1751, AGI, Caracas, 421.

106. Certificación de Manuel de Salas, Tesorero, y Lorenzo Rosel de Lugo, Contador de la Real Hacienda, Caracas, April 22, 1749, AGI, Caracas, 937. This rallying cry treaded on the well-worn turf of "Long live the king and death to bad government" slogans of the past.

107. In Spanish America, Sidbury and Cañizares-Esguerra note a "precocious pan-Spanish ethnicity" that "surfaced much earlier in Spanish America than in Spain." Basque-Isleño tension in the context of the León Rebellion indicates an awareness of Spanishness rooted in proper subjecthood, but also the desire to exclude other Europeans from that subjecthood. James Sidbury and Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, "Mapping Ethnogenesis in the Early Modern Atlantic," *William and Mary Quarterly* 68:2 (April 2011): 199–203, quote on 203.

other non-Canarian groups.[108] Nicolás León, Juan Francisco's son, wrote, "We are obliged to defend our homeland (*nuestra patria*) because if we do not, we will be made the slaves of all others." Rhetorically, the rebels freely employed the term "*patria*" to denote shared rights and privileges (among them commercial liberties) that had to be defended.[109]

We must resist the teleological urge to equate their use of this word with the proto-nationalism that it would come to represent during the independence period. Many separate developments over the next 60 years would influence Venezuelan identity irrespective of smuggling or the León Rebellion. Imperial loyalty was not a totalizing consciousness—it could be a buffet from which some elements of an imperial platform were chosen and others rejected. León's rebellion, the largest popular protest in Venezuela before the independence period, nurtured a colonial identity that upheld commercial liberty from the metropole even as it held fast to Hispanic political and cultural traditions.[110]

Conclusion

The uprising of Juan Francisco de León, though short in duration and largely nonviolent, cast a long shadow over Venezuelan commercial and political affairs. While labeling the event itself a failed independence movement or even a precursor to the independence struggle overstates its place in Venezuelan history, the rebellion did represent the distillation of major tensions within the province. Smuggling informed homegrown constructions of moral economy, independent trade, and autonomous local identity that in turn inspired Venezuelan subjects to rise up against the Caracas Company and the royal government.

Although most Venezuelans would identify themselves as Spanish in the grand scheme of empires, the León Rebellion and its aftermath affirmed a corporate identification bound more to province and ethnicity than to the

108. William Taylor has demonstrated how resisting outsiders provided tightly knit rural villages with a common sense of identity from which rebellion sprung. I extend Taylor's argument to encompass not just individual villages, but entire coastal regions of the Province of Venezuela. Joseph Pérez's work compares the León rebels to the Comuneros of Paraguay and finds that both chose to represent themselves as place-bound corporate entities opposing those who would constrict their economic opportunities. See Taylor, *Drinking, Homicide and Rebellion*, 153; and Pérez, *Los movimientos precursores*, 41–44.

109. Nicolás León to Sr. Cápitan Don Santiago, Caucagua, August 17, 1751, AGNV, Insurrección del Capitán Juan Francisco de León, Tomo 1, fol.188, in *Documentos relativos*, 88; Núñez, *Juan Francisco de León*, 62.

110. Commenting on Nicolás León's statement, John Lynch asserts that, "*Patria*, of course, did not mean nation, but it may have indicated a sense of regional identity, an awareness of Venezuelan interests and a belief that local communities had a right of protest against abuse of power by the Spanish authorities and their colonial officials." Lynch, "Spanish America's Poor Whites," 64.

mother country. Nicolás León, one of Juan Francisco de León's surviving sons, demonstrated this local orientation years after the rebellion. In 1773, Nicolás reappeared in Spanish imperial documents. After 19 years of forced service in the presidio of Oran in Spanish North Africa for his role in his father's revolt, Nicolás requested his freedom to return to Venezuela. He asked for clemency, but never directly apologized for his father's actions and lionized Juan Francisco's role in the foundation of Panaquire. Nícolás continued to emphasize the respectability of the family line, bragging that relatives held prestigious positions as priests and army captains. He most likely mentioned such honorable occupations in an effort to erase any perceived stain to the family legacy caused by the punishments visited upon his father. Nicolás received permission to leave and to regain his family's lost land. In spite of the time that had passed, the connections he had lost, and the opportunity to make a fresh start in Spain, Nicolás de León chose to return to his boyhood home in 1773.[111]

While the Caracas Company that had jailed Nicolás and his father faced no more challenges to its rule from armed masses after the 1749 revolt, grievances over the monopoly lurked just beneath the surface of political discussion. In 1780, José de Ábalos, the first intendant of Venezuela, summarized the anxiety produced by the company's continued disturbance of provincial economic aims and subsistence practices:

> The name of the King, of his ministers and of all Spaniards is heard by the leaders of this country with the greatest disgust, aversion and dislike simply on account of the Company, which seems to them to be the original sin which gives rise to their wrongs. And truly this error seems at times excusable; in a sense it is true that they suffer a kind of slavery, enjoying no benefit from the operations of the Company, and oppressed by the necessity to put through its miserly hands those few products which they are able to cultivate, after seeing lifeless and buried the multitude of other products which ought to flourish in the province of the great gain of the Royal Treasury, the outstanding good of the State and the immense profit of both continents. The woeful and rancorous tone of their laments increases daily, and unless his Majesty grants them the open trade for which they sigh he can no longer count on the fidelity of these vassals, since they will lend their ears and hearts to any hint and help offered them by the Crown's enemies, and it will be impossible or very difficult to cure this ill. This is not an empty prophecy, but the forecast of one who knows the country well.[112]

Ábalos argued for the destruction of the Caracas Company up to its demise in 1784. The intendant understood that unrestricted trade and autonomous

111. Extract from a letter to Nicolás León, San Lorenzo, November 15, 1773, AGI, Caracas, 421; To Don Francisco Núñez Ybañez, July 16, 1774, AGI, Caracas, 421.

112. José de Ábalos to José de Gálvez, September 27, 1780, in Morón, *A History of Venezuela*, 85.

commercial connections had become central to the moral economy of coastal dwellers. Attempts to restrict these features of community life in the province would serve to irritate the populace more than to correct its behavior.

One final anecdote about the León Rebellion underscores the interconnectedness of Venezuelan society, smuggling, and political protest in the Bourbon period of Spanish rule. As mentioned earlier in this article, one of the punitive rituals of crushing León's uprising involved tearing down the leader's house and erecting a plaque on the site to mark his treachery. Almost 60 years later, on September 20, 1811, two articles in the *Gaceta de Caracas* detailed a request from the director of public works for the province to remove the plaque. One of these articles, written only two months after Venezuela's congress had declared independence from Spain, noted that the plaque had been erected many years before with a purpose: "To unjustly stain the memory of Juan Francisco de León. He led those valiant men that tried to throw off the heavy mercantile yoke from which the avarice and despotism of the Spanish kings monopolized the commerce of these provinces. This they did by way of the unscrupulous Compañía Guipuzcoana, under whose exclusive privileges Venezuelans groaned for more than 40 years."[113] More than a half century later, León's rebellion and its significance remained fresh in Venezuelan popular memory.

University of Mississippi
Oxford, Mississippi

JESSE CROMWELL

113. "Decreto," *Gaceta de Caracas*, September 20, 1811, Vol. 3 (Caracas: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 1983); "Demonstración patriotica," *Gaceta de Caracas*, October 15, 1811, in ibid.