

Labor of Enslaved Africans in Spanish & French Colonies

Central America and the West Indies: 1500s—1600s, Three Illustrations



PANAMA (SPANISH)

Gold mining, ca. 1570s

"How the Negro slaves work and look for gold in the mines of the region called Veragua [Panama]," by an unidentified artist. This illustration shows a Spaniard and four Blacks (one or two may be women); the Spaniard appears to be weighing the gold dust brought by one of the Blacks, the other Blacks are washing and mining the ore. The accompanying description notes: "This region is very dangerous. The Negroes live there only a short time The Spaniards do not force nor permit the Indians to work in the mines for fear they should know the value of the gold, for knowing it, they would go to war and chase them out of the country. The Spaniards buy a great number of Negroes from Africa to serve them as slaves and when the Negroes have finished a day's work in a group of eight or ten, there is at the exit of these mines half a barrel filled with water in which they wash the gold." The description continues to briefly relate how the gold is extracted. Otherwise known as the Drake Manuscript, the watercolor drawings in this work were done by two or more persons, perhaps French Huguenots, who traveled with Francis Drake during the course of his expeditions in the Caribbean; the drawings were probably done in the late 1560s or early 1570s, and the descriptions accompanying each drawing were written in French. Most of the 199 drawings are of plants, animals, and Amerindians, but four (including the one shown here) show blacks/Africans, and these are among the earliest eyewitness renditions of Africans and their activities in the New World.

Image and explanatory text in online collection The Atlantic Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Americas: A Visual Record, courtesy of the University of Virginia Library (MA3900f100) at hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/index.php. Image in this collection courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library and Museum, New York, NY, published in *Histoire naturelle des Indes: The Drake Manuscript in the Pierpont Morgan Library* (a full color facsimile edition with English translations), 1996.

National Humanities Center, 2006:
www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/pds/pds.htm.

HISPANIOLA (SPANISH)

Sugar production, late 1500s

"Nigritae exhaustis venis metallicis conficiendo saccharo operam dare debent . . . II," ("The veins of gold ore having been exhausted, the Blacks had to work in sugar"), in Girolamo Benzoni, *Americae pars quinta nobilis & admirabile* . . . , Frankfurt, 1595.

The woodcut depicts human-powered sugar mill and various phases of sugar manufacture at a very early period. Note the cauldron in the left-hand corner for boiling the sugar, and the pots into which the unrefined sugar was placed. This is one of the earliest known illustrations of sugar making in the New World, and is the fanciful depiction of the de Bry brothers, the Flemish engravers (who never visited the New World), based on a brief passage in Benzoni (and, perhaps, other voyagers): "When the natives of this island (Española) began to be extirpated, the Spaniards provided themselves with blacks (Mori) from Guinea . . . and they have brought great numbers thence. When there were mines, they made them work at the gold and silver; but since those came to an end they have increased the sugar-works [Benzoni, fig. 2, at left], and in these and in tending the flocks they are chiefly occupied, besides serving their masters in all else."

Image and explanatory text in online collection The Atlantic Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Americas: A Visual Record (NW0012), courtesy of the University of Virginia Library at hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/index.php.

National Humanities Center, 2006:
www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/pds/pds.htm.



FRENCH WEST INDIES Sugar production, 1658.

"La Figure des Moulins a Sucre" (Description of the Sugar Mills"), in Charles de Rochefort, *Histoire naturelle et morale des îles Antilles de l'Amérique*, 1658 (1681 ed.).

Various phases of sugar-making are identified by letters, e.g.,

A. "La façon de faire marcher les boeufs que font tourner le moulin" (The way of making the cattle walk that turn the mill).

I. "Les planches sur lesquelles les Negres posent les cannes de sucre" (The boards on which the Blacks place the cans of sugar).

L. "Les Negres qui servent le Moulin, et qui poussent les Cannes entre les Rouleaux" (The Blacks who service the mill, and who push the canes between the rollers).

Image and some explanatory text in online collection The Atlantic Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Americas: A Visual Record (rocheffort02), courtesy of the University of Virginia Library at hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/index.php.

National Humanities Center, 2006:
www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/pds/pds.htm.

