



The Spanish Crown and the Defense of the Caribbean, 1535--1585: Precedent, Patrimonialism, and Royal Parsimony

Paul E. Hoffman

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Because of the legendary exploits of Sir Francis Drake, most people have heard of the sixteenth-century conflicts between the English and the Spanish in the New World. Paul Hoffman looks behind the legend to discover the reality of what the Spanish crown was doing to defend its empire against raiders such as Drake.

Using quantitative as well as literary data on the costs, types, and locations of defenses and on the locations and types of corsair incidents, Hoffman documents the evolution of a system of defenses that he believes was adequate for confronting the violence of the French and English in the years before 1586. He suggests that the size of Drake's expedition of 1586 was a response to this system and in turn caused the Spanish to abandon the system in favor of one that concentrated on the defense of the major towns and trade routes.

Besides telling the complex story of how the Spanish built forts, installed garrisons and artillery, and patrolled the Caribbean, Hoffman discusses the ways in which the political system of the empire shaped decisions on defenses. Contrary to what many have believed, Hoffman concludes, Spain exhibited neither military failure nor timidity in its defense of its interest in the New World. Sharing the results of his meticulous research about the Spanish Caribbean, Paul Hoffman examines an important period that legend has obscured.

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