

Search for a New Land:
Imperial Power and Afro-Creole Resistance in the British Leeward Islands
1624-1745

by

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for Ayanna

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Introduction

“Either I’m Nobody, or I’m a Nation”

“Either I’m nobody, or I’m a nation.”¹ These are the last words in the opening stanza of Derek Walcott’s magical poem “The Schooner *Flight*,” which details the emotions, dreams, and dynamic imagination of a sailor who plies the trading routes of the eastern Caribbean. The storyteller is Shabine, an experienced mariner born of Dutch, English, and African heritage who has a “rusty head” and “sea-green eyes.” As he sails the ship *Flight* from Trinidad to the Bahamas, Shabine’s crisscrossing between the islands becomes a portrait about identity and belonging in an archipelago where the contradictions of modernity clash with the legacies of empire, colonialism, and the slave trade. The *Flight* darts between the islands as Shabine relates his memories of the past and visions of the future. Readers experience the filth and disease of the middle passage as Shabine approaches Barbados. We inhale the smoke-filled memories of Carib extirpation as he stares at the shores of green Dominica. As we do, Shabine’s voyage on the *Flight* becomes a journey of self-discovery, a search for who he is and where he belongs in an archipelago that seems both fragmented and connected at the same time.

Shabine tells us that in an archipelago, each island has its own history and character—qualities that shape the collective imagination and influence personal identity.

¹ Derek Walcott, ed. *Derek Walcott: Collected Poems, 1948-1984* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1998), 346.

Yet just as the “earth is one island in the archipelagos of stars,” together the islands of the Lesser Antilles “are one,” part of a larger story fused together by the sea.² As readers, we experience this story firsthand as the *Flight* keeps sailing, moving onward, darting from shore to shore while the rusty-headed sailor reveals his inner thoughts. Through his travels, Shabine considers that he has “only one theme” in his life: a “flight to a target whose aim we’ll never know,” a “vain search for one island that heals with its harbour and a guiltless horizon.”³ Thus his poem ends. The sailor fades into the crystal blue horizon, the mast of the *Flight* piercing the sky. Walcott’s readers are left with the sense of a stanza yet written. Shabine’s search for a new land remains unfinished; he is a figure caught between being nobody and a nation.

I first came across “The Schooner *Flight*” while I was struggling to develop an optic for framing colonial life in the Leeward Islands during the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Having read thousands of pages of manuscript material, Walcott’s poem touched upon an aspect of life in the eastern Caribbean that was proving difficult for me to articulate even though it seemed to call out from the aging sources. Comprised of Montserrat, Nevis, St. Kitts, Antigua, and part of the Virgin Islands, the “British Leewards” was in many respects an imaginary construct, like a constellation in an ocean of stars. Imperial governors and metropolitan officials invented “His Majesty’s Leewards” as a category for framing British control over the islands in the 1670s, even though the most important of the islands—St. Kitts—was divided between England and France and the Virgin Islands were disputed territories. Shabine’s story reminded me that reflexively calling this group of islands the “British Leewards” privileged the British

² Ibid., 361.

³ Ibid.

imperial narrative over local realities of transnational settlement, migration and movement, and common ecology that not only linked the British-controlled islands to each other, but also to non-British-controlled islands like Dominica, Guadeloupe, and St. Thomas.

Furthermore, Shabine's story—especially the phrase “Either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation”—not only encouraged me to question what exactly was “British” about the British Leewards, but also to rethink the ways in which scholars have typically approached issues of slave culture and slave resistance in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Although the history of slavery in the eastern Caribbean looms large in Shabine's imagination as he travels northward toward the Leewards aboard the *Flight*, he is not a slave himself. However, the poem immediately made me think of the hundreds of enslaved men and women whose stories appeared in the archival record. As I continued to page through private letters and government correspondence, a key dynamic about slave life in the Leewards appeared again and again. The labor regime certainly influenced the ways in which slaves understood power relations between them and their white masters, but so did the visual of archipelagic space and the experience of living within it.

Although they were engaged predominately in agricultural labor on tobacco farms and later on sugar plantations, enslaved Leeward Islanders displayed a remarkable degree of regional activity that stretched beyond the shores of a single island, oftentimes in ways that flew in the face of imperial efforts to define their boundaries. Not only were men, women, and children sold between the islands; they also actively traveled between them, sometimes for leisure, but often in search of a better way of life on a different island or

even in a different empire. Slaves could observe islands on the horizon and imagine what life might be like on a colony where their master's competitor might welcome their arrival. They could contemplate how to stowaway as they watched smoothly sailing ships head for the Virgins, Jamaica, North America, Dominica, and the French territories. Even if hiding aboard a merchant ship was not an option, men and women could steal canoes and row between islands as far apart as Antigua and Guadeloupe. Inspired by these acts, I came to envision "Search for a New Land" as a hybrid work of social and intellectual history, focused primarily but not exclusively on what the British Leeward Islands meant for enslaved folk, poor white settlers, and aspiring plantation owners who lived in region. The accounts of white and black colonists crisscrossing the Leewards informed me that the archipelagic arrangement of the islands encouraged alternative ideas about what it meant to be an islander and colonial subject, ideas that sometimes ran counter to elite efforts to impose imperial hegemony over the region.

In turn, this study explores two interrelated processes in tandem: how empire makers struggled to turn the Leeward Islands into a distinctively British place against the tide of local political creolization, and how, in the face of these efforts, enslaved folk imagined oppositional or different ways of collective belonging in the archipelago. By exploring the ways empire makers sought to carve the "British Leewards" out of the polyglot Lesser Antilles, "Search for a New Land" situates the making of the Leeward colony within the broader context of the making of the British Atlantic Empire by placing a series of seemingly marginal islands at the center of the discussion. In Montserrat, Nevis, St. Kitts, Antigua, and the surrounding smaller island colonies, interisland movement was a constitutive element of local political culture and identity. Rather than

bounded places, the islands were distinct yet dynamic places linked together by the sea. Their boundaries were fuzzy and islanders' livelihoods (black and white) were interwoven. Although some were marginalized legally, colonists—including enslaved men and women—exploited these regional connections and the imaginary boundaries that imperialists used to manipulate power relations. Regional movement of enslaved folk, poor white colonists, and indebted elites across the islands flew in the face of British imperial efforts to contain local populations. Thus, as a micro-historical focus on the Leewards, “Search for a New Land” reflects back on broad imperial narratives that tend to obscure the forces of social interaction inherent to imperial expansion, since the meaning of “local” for the colonial community was almost impossible to disentangle from regional, transimperial circuits of power.⁴

Understandably, use of the term “creolization” as a key analytic for understanding power relations in the Leewards is potentially obfuscating rather than clarifying, especially since it has been used in so many different disciplines and in so many different ways, both metaphorically and analytically. Not only have many works tended to approach creolization as the intermingling of distinct and reified African, European, and Indian “cultures,” the term’s protean use in so many different disciplines has meant that it has virtually become meaningless.⁵ In short, “creolization” has become an academic buzzword.

⁴ Catherine Hall, *Cultures of Empire: Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 16, 22-23, Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 27-33.

⁵ Stephan Palmié, “Creolization and Its Discontents,” *The Annual Review of Anthropology* 35 (2006): 434-435, Sidney W. Mintz, “Enduring Substances, Trying Theories: The Caribbean Region as Oikoumene,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2, no. 2 (1996), and Richard Price, “The Miracle of Creolization: A Retrospective,” *New West India Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 75 (2001). The concept of creolization has informed scholars in cultural and literary studies, history, anthropology, archaeology, and especially linguistics, wherein St. Kitts creole figures prominently. Chris Corcoran, “Creoles and the

Notably, the word “creolization” is derived from the Spanish word *criollo*, which early modern imperial administrators and travel writers used to classify colonists of European descent who “turned out like natives even though they are not mixed with them.”⁶ Wrapped up in ideas about the role of the environment on human nature, Spanish chroniclers not only cast criollos as morally deprived and socially deformed, they also used the term to discuss the political aspects of an empire comprised of settlers who were never exposed to life in the metropole. Thus, in one of the earliest documented uses of the expression “criollo,” we find a Spanish royal official in New Spain explaining to his home government in 1560 that controlling the local population was difficult because criollos never knew “the king nor hoped to know him, and are quick to listen to and believe those who are malintentioned.”⁷ It was not until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century American national independence movements that use of the term “criollo” shifted from a negative aspersion to a positive self-identification, a process that

Creation Myth: A Report on Some Problems with the Linguistic Use of 'Creole,'" *Papers from the Regional Meetings, Chicago Linguistic Society* 36, no. 2 (2000), Bettina Migge, “Communicating Gender in the Eastern Maroon Creole of Suriname,” in *Gender across the Languages: The Linguistic Representation of Women and Men*, ed. Marlis Hellinger and Hadumod Bussmann (2001), 85-104, Kamau Brathwaite, Verene Shepherd, and Glen Richards, eds., *Questioning Creole: Creolisation Discourses in Caribbean Culture* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2002), Douglas V. Armstrong, *Creole Transformation from Slavery to Freedom: Historical Archaeology of the East End Community, St. John, Virgin Islands* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), Verene Shepherd, “Unity and Disunity, Creolization and Marronage in the Atlantic World: Conceptualizing Atlantic Studies,” *Atlantic Studies* 1 (2004), Doris Lorraine Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), Ralph Bauer and José Antonio Mazzotti, *Creole Subjects in the Colonial Americas: Empires, Texts, Identities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2009).

⁶ Lope García de Castro, quoted in Bernard Lavallé, *Las Promesas Ambiguas: Ensayos Sobre El Criollismo Colonial En Los Andes* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Instituto Riva-Agüero, 1993), 16-25, cited in Bauer and Mazzotti, *Creole Subjects in the Colonial Americas: Empires, Texts, Identities*, 4.

⁷ Juan López de Velasco, *Geografía Y Descripción Universal de Las Indias Recopiladas Por El Cosmógrafo-Cronista Juan López de Velasco Desde El Año de 1571 Al de 1574* (Madrid: Establecimiento Tipográfico de Fortanet, Impresor de la Real Academia de la Historia, 1894), 37-38, reprinted and translated in Bauer and Mazzotti, *Creole Subjects in the Colonial Americas: Empires, Texts, Identities*, 4.

Benedict Anderson linked to the rise of “creole nationalism.”⁸ In turn, it is important to note that despite early associations of creoleness with depravity, theoreticians, particularly anthropologists and linguists, have generally come to use the term “creolization” to signify the process of “hybridity,” whereby diverse cultural forms come together to produce something new.⁹ Although scholars have not necessarily appropriated the positivist tone of nineteenth century Latin-American nationalists, it remains crucial to consider that theories about creolization as hybridity in some ways echo early nationalist rhetoric about post-colonial unity through collective diversity. For post-colonial writers like Edward Kamau Brathwaite, for example, creolization theory offered a way to discuss a unified Jamaica in the wake of independence through the lens of a long history of “Creole society,” a key political project in an era when Jamaicans were struggling for national unity in the face of the geopolitical pressures of the Cold War.¹⁰

Use of creolization as a framework for explaining the ways diverse colonists in the Leeward Islands interacted to both challenge and affirm imperial power is also problematic because of the racial and political uses of the expression “Creole” in the British Atlantic. As Stephan Palmié and Joyce Chaplin have pointed out, exploring cultural change and identity formation in British America through the framework of creolization is particularly jolting since white colonists rarely identified themselves as

⁸ Benedict R. O’G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 47-65.

⁹ Stephan Palmié, “The “C-Word” Again: From Colonial to Post-Colonial Semantics,” in *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, ed. Charles Stewart (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2007), 68-69, Palmié, “Creolization and Its Discontents,” 435.

¹⁰ Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

Creoles in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹¹ In fact, as in sixteenth-century New Spain, it was far more common for the most educated and wealthy of colonists to cast Creoles (usually capitalized in English sources) as lowly social Others who possessed “degenerate” traits influenced by life in the New World. In his 1689 sermon *The Way to Prosperity*, Boston-born Cotton Mather famously warned about the “Criolian degeneracy” attending the indisciplined children of “Europeans” who were “transplanted in America.”¹² Although the theme of moral decay likewise informed Caribbean discourses about Creole subjectivity, they often took on a slightly different tone. Island colonists, partly in an effort to make themselves seem more authentically European to their metropolitan counterparts, not only cast Creoles as morally deprived—they sometimes implied island-born whites were in fact descendents of mixed-race unions. Johan Carstens, who was born in diverse St. Thomas to an island-born mother, wrote about the Virgin Island after he retired to Europe in 1742. In his manuscript, Carstens described white Creoles as “arrogant,” “unbecomingly proud,” “ill-tempered,” “loud,” “nasty,” and “lazy.” Despite the fact that he was technically a Creole, the slaveowner consistently refers to Creoles as “them,” and ironically asserts that “all Cheriols” on Danish St. Thomas descended from unions between pirates and enslaved black women.¹³

¹¹ Joyce E. Chaplin, “Creoles in British America: From Denial to Acceptance,” in *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, ed. Charles Stewart (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2007), and Palmié, “The ‘C-Word,’” 66-68. Throughout this work, I will use the term “Creole” to refer to groups of people born in the islands and the term “creole” to refer to language or patterns of social interaction that bore a particularly Leeward character. Benedict Anderson’s study of nationalism is perhaps the most influential work citing the “Creole” dimensions of post-colonial America, Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

¹² Cotton Mather, *The Way to Prosperity. A Sermon Preached to the Honourable Convention of the Governour, Council, and Representatives of the Massachusetts-Colony in New-England on May 23, 1689* (Boston: Printed by R. Pierce for Joseph Brunning, Obadiah Gill, and James Woode, 1690), 34, John Canup, “Cotton Mather and Criolian Degeneracy,” *Early American Literature* 24, no. 1 (1989).

¹³ Johan L. Carstens, *St. Thomas in Early Danish Times: A General Description of All the Danish, American, or West Indian Islands*, trans. Arnold R. Highfield (St. Croix: Virgin Islands Humanities Council, First English Printing 1997), 10-11, 54-55.

White colonists in the nearby British Leewards likewise preferred to deny their island heritage and certainly avoided public conversations about black kin at all costs. In fact, Leewardians writing home to the metropole usually reserved accusations about degeneracy, questionable mixed-race status, and Creolian habits when they discussed the Spanish islands, especially nearby Puerto Rico. From Antigua, Nathaniel Johnson described settlers at San Juan as a “degenerated,” “dastardly and mongrel herd of mulattos, mustees and other spurious mixtures” whose seizures of English slaving vessels underscored for him that they were “the very scum of mankind.”¹⁴ Few if any of the early eighteenth-century Leeward Anglophone sources I encountered for this study ever clearly refer to island-born white colonists in the British Leewards as Creoles: settlers were simply “White” or more specifically “English,” “Irish,” or “French.” Even in island census statistics gathered between the early 1700s and 1730s, governors only listed “Whites” (sometimes categorized as “Christians”) and “Negroes” (or synonymously “Blacks” or “Slaves”).¹⁵ In contrast to the Danish case, letters written by island-born elites like Christopher Codrington and William Mathew almost exclusively reserved the term “Creole” to refer to enslaved men and women of African descent who were born in the islands.

Admittedly, early eighteenth-century Anglophone denial about white Creole subjectivity thus makes a conversation about creolization in the Leeward Islands an awkward task, since such an approach involves choices about what practices were and were not particularly Leewardian in character. However, as I hope to demonstrate in this

¹⁴ Nathaniel Johnson to the Lords of Trade, Antigua, April 20, 1689, CO 152/37/5.

¹⁵ For example, see “A List of All the Inhabitants, Christians and Slaves, in the island of Nevis,” May 28, 1730, CO 152/18/T58, “An Account of all and Singular White Men, Women, and Children at Present Residing and Inhabiting in this Her Majesty’s Island, As also of all the Slaves, Men, Women, and Children belonging unto the said Inhabitants,” St. Kitts, March 13, 1708, CO 152/7/L58.

work, there was a way in which the Leeward archipelago shaped how colonists—white and black—were able to negotiate geopolitical and regional power relationships on a local scale by manipulating the interlocking but imperially divided island environment to their advantage. Without a doubt, the relatively small Leeward Islands offered a new terrain wherein poor Irish indentured servants, enslaved Africans and black Creoles, and even slaveowning elites could pit competing interests against each other by using archipelagic and island space in an effort to buttress their individual and collective clout. Thus, while conscious of the potential discursive problems associated with applying the metaphor of creolization to a region where white colonists more often than not denied being Creole, either culturally or in the “indigenous” sense, I have elected to use the expression “political creolization” to highlight the multivalent, often contradictory ways in which colonists developed and reimagined new ways of negotiating power in the islands that do not fit neatly into imperial, top-down narratives of conquest. The use of the modifier “political” in front of “creolization” is meant to draw attention to the ways colonists from diverse backgrounds formed new alliances in the Leewards in an effort to vie for power and influence in ways that sometimes did not erode Old World identities. Although the term “political” includes official governmental and imperial channels, it also extends to everyday power relations and encounters that occurred outside of the courthouse and meetings of the island councils and assemblies. In turn, my use of the idiom “creolization” is less concerned with developing a pseudo-scientific model of cultural fusion (although it is possible to argue that the quest for power in the islands did anticipate the development of specific island post-colonial “nationalisms”). Instead, I use the term “creolization” to emphasize the ways the *local* archipelagic environment shaped

power relations, struggles for authority, and fluid ideas about group belonging in ways that strained imperial power.

It is important to note that the relationship between creolization and power has informed the work of historians interested in slave resistance for decades. In fact, among Anglophone historians, scholars of slavery in the 1960s and 1970s anticipated the late twentieth-century works by historians interested in the “Creole” character of elite North Americans like Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin. While early works on slavery, such as U.B. Phillips’s *American Negro Slavery*, approached slave history through the optic of labor and the plantation and cast objectified “slaves” as passive social actors, historians influenced by Marxian ideas about power began to challenge the portrayal of passive enslaved folk in the 1960s and 1970s through the lens of the “master-slave dialectic” and the idea of the “slave community.”¹⁶

Influenced by Melville Herskovits’s arguments about African “cultural areas” and Mintz and Price’s influential 1973 essay later titled *The Birth of African-American Culture*, scholars built upon these earlier studies that treated African “acculturation” and “accommodation” to slavery as a problem of labor power by seeking out the ways African ethnic associations or “nations” informed slave resistance.¹⁷ Historians such as

¹⁶ Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (New York: Peter Smith, 1952), Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, First Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development, and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1969), John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), Herbert George Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976). Note also, Orlando Patterson, “Slavery, Acculturation, and Social Change: The Jamaican Case,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 17, no. 2 (1966). See Price’s comments, Price, “The Miracle of Creolization: A Retrospective,” 36-37.

¹⁷ Melville J. Herskovits, *Acculturation: A Study of Culture Contact* (New York: Augustin, 1938), Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past: With a New Introduction by Sidney W. Mintz* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

Michael Craton and Michael Mullin, for example, argued that African-born slaves possessed memories of their former homeland and way of life while Creoles knew racial plantation slavery as normative and were thus more accommodative to the labor regime.¹⁸ In turn, they cast “African” practices as intrinsically resistive acts because they denied the destructive “social death” implied by commodification, whereas black Creole culture was inherently accommodative because island-born enslaved folk were raised as commodities from birth.¹⁹ More recent works, while less focused on the issue of resistance, have also emphasized African cultural continuity and the social role that African ethnicities played under slavery. Importantly, these studies raised the important issue of how newly arrived enslaved folk adjusted to the violence of the slave regime with little previous experience of plantation labor or racial subjugation. At the same time however, works like Michael Gomez’s *Exchanging our Country Marks* and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall’s *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas* have tended to treat “African” practices in the New World as static or uniform while overstating the degree of social distance between island-born and African-born enslaved folk. Although these histories did much to shed light on the presence of African identities in the Americas, they effectively reified the tropes of “Creole” and “African” by suggesting that they were essential identities rather than

¹⁸ David Barry Gaspar, *Bondmen & Rebels: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua, with Implications for Colonial British America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 246, Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 122-124, Michael Mullin, *Africa in America: Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and the British Caribbean, 1736-1831* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 62-64, 211-212.

¹⁹ Vincent Brown, “Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery,” *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 5 (2009): 1243-1244.

ideologically informed categories that actually exhibited a degree of flexibility in everyday practice.²⁰

With these debates freshly in my mind as I read “The Schooner *Flight*,” Shabine’s statement, “either I’m nobody, or I’m a nation,” struck me as capturing the tensions that informed the ways people of African descent negotiated both the archipelagic terrain of the Leewards as well as the diversity of interests that shaped slave community in the region. As a system of labor exploitation premised on the belief that “White” people could not be slaves but “Negroes” (and earlier, Caribs) could, slavery in the islands made a diverse array of men and women who were labeled as collective racial others part of the same social class. In a general sense, then, the use of racial ideology to support the labor regime created the social category of being black, but it did not determine the ways in which enslaved people formed alliances and kin networks in the face of “social death” and commodification. Thus, keeping in mind that historians need to “deconstruct” the category of “The Folk,” I have elected to use the term “enslaved person” or “enslaved folk” instead of slave or slaves for this very reason.²¹ For me, the term “folk” is synonymous with human beings, but it also evokes the structural and cultural dynamics that elites and poor whites in the islands used to demarcate people of African descent as a

²⁰ In the eighteenth century, slaves and slaveowners used the word “nation” as ethnic identifiers that not only differentiated African-slaves from Creoles, but also Africans from each other. Stephan Palmié, “Is There a Model in the Muddle? “Creolization” In African Americanist History and Anthropology,” in *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, ed. Charles Stewart (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2007), 191, Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), John K. Thornton, “The Coromantees: An African Cultural Group in Colonial North America and the Caribbean,” *Journal of Caribbean History* 32 (1998), Michael Angelo Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Links* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

²¹ Robin D. G. Kelley, “Notes on Deconstructing “The Folk”,” *The American Historical Review* 97, no. 5 (1992).

distinct, exploitable class. Moreover, instead of relying on the contemporary terms “Negro” and “Nègre,” the term “black” is frequently used as synonym for “Afro-Creole.”²² In “Search for a New Land,” “black” and “Afro-Creole” are used as discursive tools to account for the diversity that existed in the face of the structural continuities created by the slave regime as it spread across the Leewards.

Everyday interactions between slaves of different backgrounds and between enslaved folk and white colonists informed how enslaved people understood the relationships between skin color, cultural difference, and power in the islands. In the Leewards, Creoles and slaves who aligned themselves with African “nations” lived side by side on the same plantation, within the same island, and interacted with each other on a daily basis, all the while conscious of the fact that they were labeled as “Negro slaves.” In turn, people of African descent laboring in the Leeward Islands wrestled with several “diasporic horizons” that influenced the ways they created new social bonds which helped them invent local ideas of belonging in a society structured most profoundly by the regional, transimperial practice of white power.²³

On one front, there was the visual archipelagic landscape and the memories that it evoked: forced separation from loved ones, capture and dispersal across island boundaries by wealthy owners and imperial agents, and coming and going of enslaved neighbors from the surrounding region. On another front, enslaved folk laboring in the islands incorporated new members into the island community according to the collective recollection of African pasts. Not only did enslaved folk identify with each other on the

²² I have borrowed the expression “Afro-Creole” from Richard D.E. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

²³ Paul C. Johnson, *Diaspora Conversions: Black Carib Religion and the Recovery of Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 7-14.

basis of their experience in the different islands, but also according to personal connections to specific African states, regions, or language groups. In some cases, these connections were the result of direct migration from places like the Gold Coast or Senegambia, but in others, enslaved folk may have identified with the African diasporic horizon by way of kin connections and local oral histories. Collectively, these arts of tradition-making helped forge alliances that had both a local, internal meaning as well as a regional value: both discursively and practically, a man or woman could be Creole, Coromantee, or Kongo whether he or she lived in Nevis, had recently moved to Antigua, or had been sent to labor in New York. By forging these identities out of the cultural practices brought to the islands from abroad, enslaved folk in the Leewards—and the British Empire more broadly—created cultural grammars that could be deployed both internally across plantation boundaries as well as across islands and colonies.

Lastly, enslaved folk in the Leewards also generated local ideas of belonging around the lived experience of racial dominance. As noted above, by the late seventeenth century, “slave” was essentially synonymous with “Negro” in the British Leewards and throughout the region. Whether one labored in Tortola, Antigua, or Guadeloupe, whether one was an island-born Creole or African-born, blackness signified otherness and enslavement. For enslaved men and women, racial oppression was a local reality and seemingly universal fact. Regional movement, whether forced or voluntary, thus facilitated a belief for enslaved men and women that despite perceived differences, African-born and American-born slaves shared the common experience of being black or “Afro-Creole.”

In short, the primary focus of “Search for a New Land” is not identity *formation*, but rather, the ways power operated in a socially heterogeneous environment comprised of individual islands linked together by space and time. Hence, this study emphasizes the ways the environment shaped both everyday life and broader power struggles in the region. Each island offered the potential for a different set of social relationships to emerge—for Antiguan and Nevisians to imagine themselves as different from each other—but at the same time, all of the islands were collectively subject to common economic, political, and ecological factors that linked them together and subsequently influenced their internal character. Perceptions of race, notions of religious affiliation and practice, ideas about imperial allegiance and monarchial fealty, and early-modern perceptions of being “Negro,” “English,” “Irish,” or “French” mutually informed the ways colonists hatched alliances in the region, both within each island as well as across them. Thus, instead of using the image of the archipelago as a metaphor for “modernity” and “creolité,” “Search for a New Land” explores the Leeward archipelago as a lived reality wherein local power dynamics influenced individual and collective behavior.²⁴

To best highlight these two interrelated processes—how part of the Leewards came to be defined as British and how enslaved folk developed alternatives to this imaginary construct—this study is divided into two parts, each comprised of three chapters. Whereas the first part—“Inventing Empire in an Archipelago”—focuses on the practices and discourses that empire-makers in the Leewards used to carve the region into imperial domains in the face of local alliance making, the second part—“Inventing an Afro-Archipelago”—centers on the ways people of African descent forged new ideas of

²⁴ Palmié, “Creolization and Its Discontents,” 435-438, Mintz, “Enduring Substances, Trying Theories: The Caribbean Region as Oikoumene.”

belonging and association in the face of dislocation, imperial conflict, and white efforts to contain black mobility in the region. Although the work is organized chronologically, it is important to note that the turning point between Part One and Part Two does not only reflect a change in subject matter from colonizer to colonized, but also the social transformation of the islands as well. Racial slavery in the Leewards accelerated dramatically at the end of the seventeenth century, precisely at the same moment that British control over the Leewards intensified and imperial boundaries in the region hardened. As Part One concludes, readers will hopefully be able to imagine the Leewards as a place utterly transformed from a frontier society dominated by tobacco farming and indentured labor in the 1640s and 1650s into a region where enslaved Afro-Creoles were the vast majority of the colonists on the islands by 1700.

Part One—"Inventing Empire in an Archipelago"—examines the ways French and English empire-makers struggled to turn the Leewards into an imperially divided space against the tide of white political creolization. Chapter I builds upon frontier and borderlands historiography to argue that a local ambivalence to empire in the Leewards can be traced to the early, transnational efforts to colonize St. Kitts. Chapter II examines the problems this culture of imperial ambivalence posed as metropolitans worked to more firmly integrate the islands in the 1660s and thus deals more exclusively with the issue of British hegemony in the Leewards. The second chapter argues that by promoting the liberty of slaveholding and defending white power through the management of these institutions, elites fostered a sense among white colonists that they had a stake in both local governance and the emerging British Empire. Chapter III, the final chapter in Part One, explores two interrelated phenomena that moved through the Leewards between

1680s and 1714. The growth of plantation slavery in the region after the 1680s occurred at the same time that the British Empire itself was in the midst of significant transition and the definition of liberty was up in the air. For this reason, Chapter III investigates the relationship between the changing culture of liberty in the islands, efforts to consolidate British hegemony over the Leewards, and the rise of new forms of slave resistance that moved in tandem with these changes. Readers will note that the final chapter of Part One serves a bridge to Part Two of this study, which deals more directly with the varieties of black struggle in the Leeward Islands. Hence, what begins with a rather top-down approach to the history of the islands concludes with a bottom-up analysis.

Part Two—“Inventing an Afro-Archipelago”—focuses on the relationship between slave labor, movement, and power in the Leewards to illustrate how enslaved folk living on plantations engaged in a larger, proto-modern, cosmopolitan world that informed their understanding of power and authority. My effort is thus to explore the ways black cosmopolitan experiences shaped slave political thought locally instead of through broad concepts of “diaspora” and the “Atlantic,” while at the same time attending to the ways geopolitical pressures shaped power relations in the Leeward Islands.²⁵ Part

²⁵ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002). My thinking in regards to the intellectual history of the enslaved has been particularly inspired by the work of Julius Scott, Laurent Dubois, and David Barry Gaspar. Julius S. Scott, “The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Duke University, 1986), Julius S. Scott, “Afro-American Sailors and the International Communication Network: The Case of Newport Bowers,” in *Jack Tar in History: Essays in the History of Maritime Life and Labour*, ed. Colin D. Howell and Richard J. Twomey (Fredericton, N.B.: Acadiensis Press, 1991), Julius S. Scott, “Crisscrossing Empires: Ships, Sailors, and Resistance in the Lesser Antilles in the Eighteenth Century,” in *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion*, ed. Robert L. Paquette and Stanley L. Engerman (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), David Barry Gaspar, “A Dangerous Spirit of Liberty: Slave Rebellion in the West Indies During the 1730’s,” in *Origins of the Black Atlantic*, ed. Laurent Dubois and Julius S. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1981), Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1789-1802* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New*

Two therefore focuses more explicitly on the ways people of African descent encountered empire in the archipelago and forged new ideas about kinship, community, and belonging. Although the promotion of white power and slave owning helped island elites buttress imperial allegiance in the Leewards, it also created a contradiction. The violence of the slave trade and slavery in the region provided the context for enslaved folk from a vast array of African backgrounds to consider what it meant to be black in an archipelago where skin color overwhelmingly determined social status. The anthropological processes of becoming local in an environment where far-ranging geopolitical and ecological forces shaped everyday life are thus at the forefront of the final three chapters.

Chapter IV places black movement and knowledge of the island environment front and center while exploring the ways in which plantation slaves negotiated black diversity. The divided archipelago not only created a context wherein enslaved sailors like Olaudah Equiano became laboring cosmopolitans, but also a location where laboring town folk *and* agricultural producers were deeply engaged in a cosmopolitan environment where multiple languages, religions, and identities flourished. The small size of the islands exposed plantation laborers from all backgrounds to the visual landscape of neighboring islands, as did their work, for while sugar work centered on the plantation, enslaved folk were also forced to work an array of tasks that introduced them to the circuits of power that linked enslaved people together across the islands. Chapter IV examines movement through the lens of “local diaspora-making,” and illustrates how some enslaved folk seized upon their knowledge of the world beyond the plantation to

World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004). Note also, W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), Vincent Carretta, *Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005).

escape the Leeward Islands completely. In the Leewards, slaves' experience with the culture of the archipelago spurred their imagination about the radical possibilities of life beyond the grasp of racial violence at the same time that it encouraged slaves to think about slave status as a category that included both Creoles and multiple African "nations."

Chapters V and VI use two different frames of reference to explore the relationship between internal and regional power struggles in the islands and the ways enslaved people wrestled with the meaning of being a "Negro slave" in the Leeward archipelago in the 1730s. Whereas Chapter V discusses the slave revolt in Danish St. John as a regional problem that possibly signaled a regional "Black Awakening," Chapter VI focuses on Antigua alone to explore specific practices that enslaved folk used to bind men and women together across plantation and perceived ethnic divides. Instead of arguing that these events were connected by some kind of common political ideology or conspiracy, the final two chapters situate black resistance in the St. John Revolt and the Antigua Conspiracy of 1736 as a problem related to common economic dislocation coupled with the impacts of regional ecological catastrophes. During the 1730s, the islands stretching from Guadeloupe to the Virgin Islands experienced a dramatic cycle of hurricanes, droughts, and rumors of a pending imperial war. In turn, some enslaved folk seized the moment to cultivate what might best be described as a collective "imaginary counterpower."²⁶ In sum, this study argues that early black "freedom dreams" in the Leeward Islands were influenced significantly by the culture that emerged from life in the archipelago.

²⁶ David Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004), 24-37.

By interrogating the Leewards as a space that strained imperial power and promoted alternative perceptions of belonging that often times ran counter to colonial policies of authority and control, we can use this group of small islands as a constellation to explore macro problems of empire, race, and power in a comparatively microenvironment. And like any constellation, they cannot be viewed without seeing them against a larger ocean of stars. The Leewards are islands defined by the movement of people and goods and the connections they made with other places. In the seventeenth century, they provided the launching ground for French and British colonization of the Antilles. Their influence stretched across the Atlantic into the halls of Parliament, Hampton Court, The Hague, and Versailles as they collectively came to produce more sugar than both Barbados and Jamaica in the 1720s. They bore a particular import in North America, where merchants and absentee plantation owners in Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and Rhode Island profited from their wealth and imported Afro-Creoles from the islands to serve as domestics, message carriers, and coopers. They united shipmasters and sailors who plied between Barbados and Jamaica and helped connect West Africa to the New World. Yet historians have generally overlooked the dynamism of the Leeward Islands, choosing instead to situate their history in terms of their productive value or electing to concentrate mostly on the internal culture of the small white minority on the independent colonies.²⁷ “Search for a New Land” seeks to remedy this problem at the same time that it attempts to rethink how we understand the interplay

²⁷ Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 148-207, Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (New York: Norton, 1972), 117-149, Natalie Zacek, *Settler Society in the English Leeward Islands, 1670-1776* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Donald H. Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World: Montserrat, 1630-1730* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997).

between environment, space, and imperial power in a region that came to be defined by the common practice of plantation slavery.

PART ONE
INVENTING EMPIRE IN AN ARCHIPELAGO

Chapter I

Fountain of Empire

In 1667, a group of gentlemen planters who had made their fortunes from the rich soil of one of the most important colonies in the Caribbean wrote to Charles II for help. Over a year earlier, the tiny island of St. Christopher erupted into chaos after settlers, fearing pan-Atlantic war between England and a new Franco-Dutch alliance, decided to strike against each other preemptively. The conflict resulted in the death of the English governor William Watts, the capture of thousands of enslaved folk, and the temporary French takeover of the island for four years. The episode marked the first time since St. Christopher was jointly colonized in the 1620s that imperial conflict transformed into violence on the island. For over forty years, colonists from France and England shared the colony. But now, after the war, the possibility of a peaceful transnational settlement looked bleak.

In the petition to their king, the English planters concocted a remarkable narrative that erased the unique imperial history of the colony. They played off of their king's forced exile during Cromwell's rise to power, claiming that they, too, were driven from

their estates by tyrants. They reminded Charles II that St. Christopher was always a “colony so ancient and loyal” to the Crown, even during the Civil War, when “the loyalty of Sir Thomas Warner drew several persons to that island after the usurped powers ruled in England.” The royalist exiles found safety there, or so they claimed, and “maintained the government of the Church of England” so that there was “not to the last losing of the island a factious person, as Independent, Anabaptist, Quaker, or rigid Presbyterian.” Now—with the French firmly in control of their former plantations in 1667—this loyal English island was on the brink of disappearing from its King’s growing list of possessions. The first island in the Caribbean to become an English colony—“the first and the best earth that ever was inhabited by Englishmen amongst the heathen cannibals in America”—was in jeopardy of being lost. Citing this long history of loyalty, the petitioners asked that Charles II make sure that the island did not “lie in the hands of another nation,” reminding him that St. Christopher was the “fountain from whence” his emerging empire was “watered with planters.”¹

In their effort to trumpet the royal allegiance of St. Christopher, the petitioners silenced the transnational settlement of the small island. They conflated English government with English allegiance and culture. They glossed over the frontier decades, when French, English, and Dutch merchants and planters relied on each other for trade,

¹ Petition of Clement Everard, Theodore Lovering, William Freeman, Roger Erington, Gilbert Loxley, Philip Payne, William Rice, John Allen, Alexander Overy, William Willes, and Samuel Payne, in behalf of several thousand distressed people, some time the inhabitants of the island of St. Christopher's to the King, November 13, 1667, CO 1/21/145 and extracted in CSPCO 5/1629/517-518. The document is extracted in the Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series: North America and the West Indies, hereafter CSPCO Volume/Item/Page. For the sake of uniformity, all citations from documents available at the National Archives at Kew will be represented in the following format: Series (here CO) Division Number/Volume/folio (or, if no number given, page)/page (if a printed number on the document is available). Some documents have multiple numbers written on the pages, so I have tried to give descriptions of the page numbers cited, i.e., “Red 7i” refers to the page where “7i” is written in red ink. Often, the backsides of pages are not numbered. In this case, I have elected to use “b” to represent the cited page.

mutual support, and protection. They ignored the presence of Irish laborers who had fostered regional alliances that traversed both imperial and island boundaries. The petitioners pretended like St. Christopher had always been an imperial colony, that it had always been an English place. Indeed—St. Christopher, also known as St. Kitts or Saint-Christophe to the French—was indeed the “fountain” of empire in the Caribbean, but not only for the English. It was a proving ground where a diverse array of colonists from Europe forged new alliances in the face of Spanish and Carib power, a kiln wherein a new culture of creolization and imperial ambivalence was forged. Digging into this transnational history not only reframes the history of the British and French empires in the Caribbean by removing them from linear, nationally-focused narratives offered by men like the petitioners, but also helps to shed light on how the “British Leeward Islands” became an invented geopolitical category in the years following the petitioner’s appeal to Charles II. After all, prior to the 1670s, neither metropolitans nor colonists thought of St. Kitts and the surrounding islands as a constellation called the “Leeward Islands.”

A Non-Imperial View: An Environmental Cartography

Before discussing the ways that the joint settlement of St. Kitts helped to shape the regional culture in the Lesser Antilles, it is important to situate the island within its broader environment. Doing so helps explain why in the 1620s colonists from France, the United Provinces, and England decided to work together to seize the island, and why, for nearly one-hundred years, neither the French or English crowns refused to give up their claim to such a small plot of land.

It is notable that St. Kitts was both literally and figuratively central to the imperial imagination about boundary making in the Caribbean. Several years before the

petitioners from St. Kitts appealed to their king for support, a former resident of the French part of the island described the image of the archipelago in his *Histoire Naturelle & Morale des Îles Antilles de L’Amerique*. The author (probably the Huguenot Charles de Rochefort) painted an image of the islands as a borderland caught between two conflicting worlds:

Between the continent of that part of America which lies southward and the eastern quarter of the island of Saint-Juan de Porto Rico, there are certain islands making up together a figure of a bow, and so disposed they cross the ocean as it were by an oblique line... They are by some called the *Antilles of America*, probably upon this account that they make a kind of bar before the greater Islands, which are called the Islands of America: If so, the word should be *Ant-Îles* as being composed of the Greek word Αντ , which signifies opposite... There are also those who call them *Caraibes* or *Cannibals*, from the name of the people who formerly possessed all of them.²

Stretching a distance of nearly six hundred miles, or roughly the distance between New York City and Savannah, Georgia, the Lesser Antilles are in fact two chains of islands created by tectonic activity. The outer arc, which consists of Barbuda, Antigua, the eastern half of Guadeloupe, and Barbados, is comprised of relatively flat islands that sit deeper in the Atlantic Ocean. By contrast, the islands of the internal arc are more closely spaced and are defined by steep, sloping interiors that descend into the sea. St. Kitts,

² See *The History of the Caribby-Islands, Viz. Barbados, St Christophers, Nevis, St Vincents, Antego, Martinico, Monserrat, & C. In All XXVIII*, trans. John Davies (London: Printed for John Starkey and Thomas Daring Junior, 1666), 2-3. *Histoire Naturelle & Morale Des Îles Antilles de L’amerique, Enrichie de Plusieurs Belles Figures Des Raretez Les Plus Considerables Qui Y Font D’écrites. Avec Un Vocabulaire Caraipe*, (Rotterdam: Arnould Leers, 1658), 1-2. The authorship of this work is usually attributed to Charles Cesar de Rochefort, a Huguenot patron of the French Governor of St. Kitts, Philippe Longvillier de Poincey, who ruled the island from 1639 to 1660. John Davies translated the work into English in 1666, just prior to France joining the United Provinces in league against the Crown of England in the Second Anglo-Dutch War. Davies added the sentence “the English commonly call them the Caribby-Islands and the Caribbies” just before the statement about the “ancient possessors,” and implied that the English terminology was not derived from the term “cannibals.” For different interpretations of the authorship of the work, see Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean*, 59-61, and Keith Albert Sandiford, *The Cultural Politics of Sugar: Caribbean Slavery and Narratives of Colonialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 41-44.

which is marked by sharp mountain range stretching across its center, is part of the inner arc of volcanic islands.

Prior to the arrival of colonists in the 1620s, St. Kitts was probably the northernmost of the islands in the Lesser Antilles to be inhabited by Caribs in the seventeenth century.³ Bryan Edwards claimed that Carib settlers called the island Liamuiga, meaning “fertile island.”⁴ The local community used the rich volcanic soils to raise hot peppers, manioc, cassava, and sweet potatoes, which were cultivated by women and used in rituals as well as daily meals.⁵ Instead of an individual, self-contained colony, Caribs viewed Liamuiga as part of the larger chain of islands that provided them with sustenance. Caribs were skilled seamen, capable of rowing their tree-trunk periaguas upwards of eighty miles in the open water.⁶ Canoes enabled Caribs to turn the island chain into a sustenance network. By planting food crops and cotton on multiple islands, canoemen were able to rely upon numerous islands for access to crops as they traveled up and down the archipelago.⁷ Although a sizeable Carib community resided on the small island, it was not viewed as a mythical homeland or birthplace, but rather part of a larger place sewn together by the sea.

³ Philip P. Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters: Europeans and Island Caribs, 1492-1763* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), 33.

⁴ Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, 2 vols. (London: Printed for John Stockdale, 1793), 1:454.

⁵ Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters: Europeans and Island Caribs, 1492-1763*, 35-36.

⁶ A Letter from a French Gentleman to William Stapleton, Guadeloupe, July 27, 1681, CO 1/47/41, CSPCO 11/190/97; Sir William Stapleton to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Nevis, June 15, 1683, CO 153/3/98-99, CSPCO 11/1126/447-448. Some colonists fitted periaguas with masts, sails, and even armaments. James Oglethorpe relied on a heavily armed periagua to defend Frederica in Georgia. In a letter to the trustees of the new settlement, he wrote that the “colony periagua is fitted out with 4 guns, rows with 20 men and carries 20 more, so that having 40 men she is able to engage a Spanish launch.” James Oglethorpe for Trustees in Georgia, Frederica, December 29, 1729, CSPCO 45/536/267-268.

⁷ *History of the Caribby-Islands*, 320, Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters: Europeans and Island Caribs, 1492-1763*, 36.

While for the Caribs in St. Kitts the island was one of a series of islands connected by the north-south currents, for Europeans, the island marked a crucial borderland between Spanish power in the Caribbean and the open waters of the Atlantic. By circumstance, St. Kitts and the other Leewards rest at a key convergence point of the Atlantic currents that shape both weather and sailing routes in the region. Just as the “bow” described by de Rochefort forms a physical boundary between the Atlantic and Caribbean seas, the constellation of islands also sits in the middle of two intertwined isobaric pressure systems. Both the North Atlantic and South Atlantic currents cycle in a clockwise pattern, causing them to flow against each other between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. Over the Atlantic, the convergence of these two pressure systems creates a climate band that scientists call the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ), also known as “hurricane alley.” When it is summer in the northern hemisphere, the band shifts northward, and the trade winds pushing from Europe cease to flow over Barbados, St. Vincent, and other islands close to the South American coast. As a result, fewer hurricanes hit Trinidad and Barbados, whereas storms befall St. Kitts, Antigua, and the other islands to the north more consistently from year to year.⁸ The two clashing pressure systems that converge off the Leewards not only shape weather patterns, but also trade routes. Since St. Kitts sits just north of the doldrums, ships heading from Madeira or the Cape Verde Islands could reach St. Kitts and the surrounding islands more quickly than

⁸ David Watts, *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture, and Environmental Change since 1492*, Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1987), 20-22. The ITCZ is not only responsible for directing hurricanes toward the archipelago, but also for creating the cyclical experience of wet and dry seasons that directly shaped the agricultural lives of colonists living as far apart as Antigua and Barbados. Heavy downfalls tend to begin in May or June and taper as November approaches. The dry season in the archipelago lasts roughly from January through April, although showers still appear in the later afternoon as the sun begins to set. The movement of the ITCZ northward also means that the islands near Barbados also experience a more intense division between the dry and rainy seasons, although yearly rainfalls are roughly equal throughout the archipelago.

they could Trinidad or Barbados.⁹ Moreover, crews leaving St. Kitts for Europe could also catch the strong South Atlantic currents to push their ships northeast.

The two different currents influencing life in the archipelago make for confusing terminology. The term windward means upwind; the term leeward downwind. Colonists and sailors used these terms to describe space in the archipelago in two different ways since there were two different currents that influenced how they understood archipelagic space. Internally, colonists spoke and wrote that each island had a windward side (the side facing the trade winds) and a leeward side (the side facing the Caribbean basin). In some cases, such as when colonists in Antigua wrote about St. Kitts, Nevis, or the Virgin Islands, they would refer to these islands resting to their “leeward,” since they sat downwind from the easterlies. However, colonists and sailors also used the term to refer to north-south relationships. Referring to the fact that most ships sailed the powerful south-north currents, it was not uncommon for sailors and governors in Barbados to refer to Guadeloupe (French) and Antigua (English) as “the leeward islands.”

South-north currents shaped interisland connections and influenced the time it took for sailors to sail between and around the islands in the archipelago. The currents between Barbados and Antigua made the journey much faster for crews headed north, but slowed the journey in the opposite direction. In 1631, the ship *Alexander* made the journey from Barbados to Dominica (slightly more than two hundred miles) in less than two days. Four decades later, the Governor-General of the English Caribees informed the council that news or “advice” could be sent from Barbados to Antigua on an “express” in three days, a rate of about a hundred miles per day. Tacking against the

⁹ North of Martinique, the wind patterns are rather consistent throughout the year, and thus sailors do not have to worry about getting caught in the low-pressure doldrums that can severely slow a journey. Ibid., 17-20.

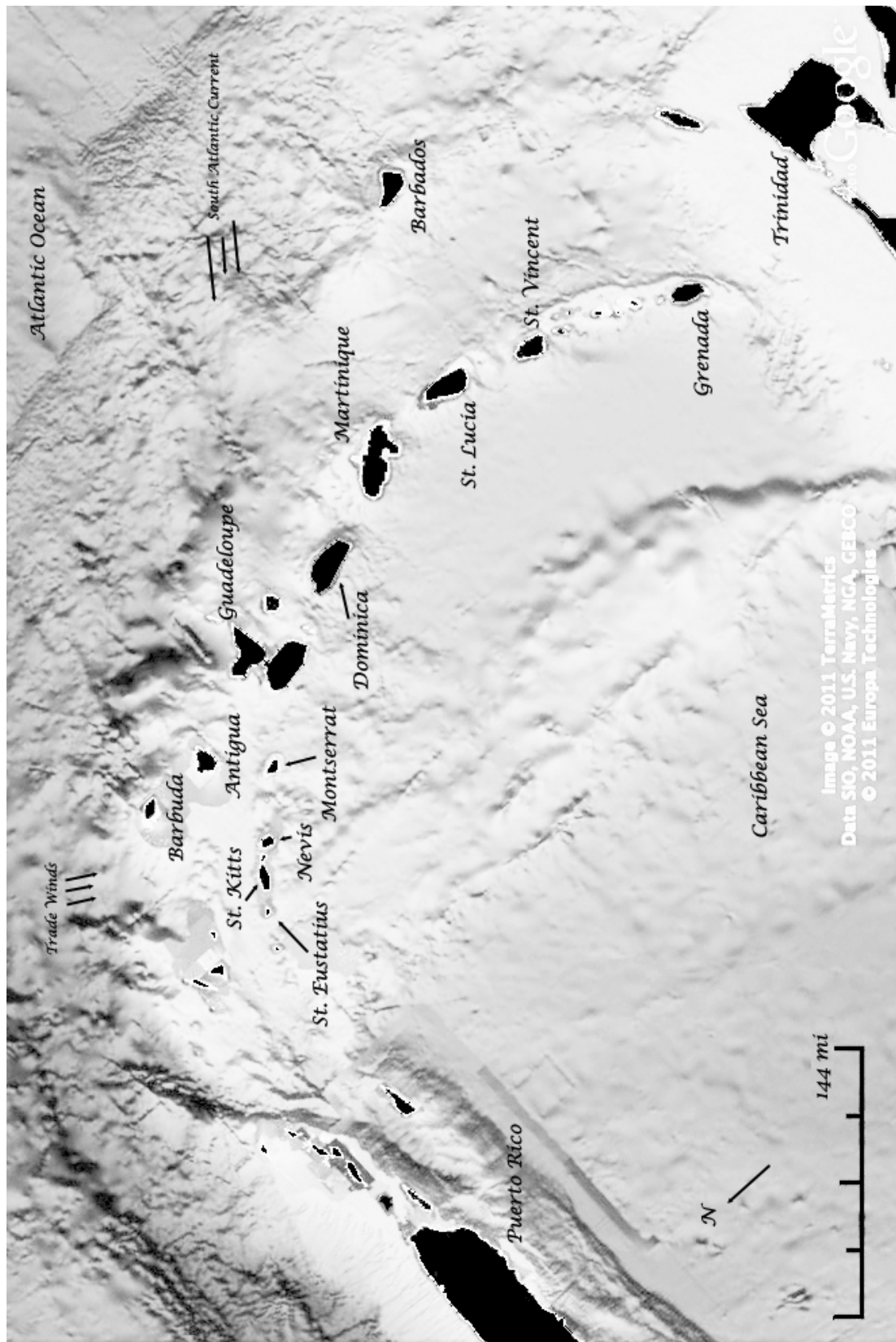


Figure 1:
Satellite Image of the Lesser Antilles, Source: Google Earth

winds in the opposite direction more than doubled the time it took messengers to get letters to Bridgetown, Barbados from St. John, Antigua. Assuming an undisturbed route, crews faced a six to seven day journey when they headed south toward Barbados from the St. Kitts.¹⁰

North of Guadeloupe, sailing times between islands were diminished by the physical reality that the islands were much closer together. In fact, using Barbados a baseline to compare interisland sailing routes misrepresents the time it took vessels to island hop throughout the archipelago. As part of the outer arc of islands, Barbados sits much farther out in the Atlantic than any of the other islands in the Lesser Antilles. Whereas the sea acted as a protective buffer between Barbados and its closest neighbors, in the Leewards, the sea was a roadway that linked the islands together in a more coherent social space. Sailors leaving Bridgetown had to travel more than 130 miles to reach the closest French settlement at Martinique. If a crew leaving Basseterre, Guadeloupe sailed the same distance in a similar northward course, the ship would pass English controlled Montserrat, Redonda, Nevis, and St. Kitts before reaching Dutch St. Eustatius. Governor John Hart reported that a French squadron could easily descend on Antigua six hours after raising anchor at Basseterre, Guadeloupe in the 1720s.¹¹ A century earlier, such regional geopolitics were unthinkable, for the closest settled colony was nearly 200 miles to the northeast. If Spanish vessels wanted to attack an attempted

¹⁰ For the *Alexander*, see Henry Colt, “The Voyage of Sir Henry Colt Knight to Ye Ilands of Ye Antilleas in Ye Shipp Called Ye Alexander Whereof William Burch Was Captayne & Robert Shapton Master Accompanied Wth Divers Captaynes & Gentlemen of Note,” in *Colonising Expeditions to the West Indies and Guiana, 1623-1667*, ed. Vincent T. Harlow (London: Hakluyt Society, 1925), 76-78. Answer of Lord Willoughby the petition of the planters and merchants of the Leeward Islands with their reasons for desiring that a general be commissioned over them not subordinate to the government of Barbadoes, addressed to his Majesty’s Council for Foreign Plantations, Delivered and Read in Council, October 29, 1670, CO 389/5/10-11.

¹¹ Letter from Col. Hart dated 26 Jan. 1722/3 about the Capitulation of St. Lucia, Antigua, January 26, 1723, CO 152/14/R51/176b.

settlement in the Lesser Antilles from San Juan, they would have to sail against the currents. For hopeful English and French planters looking to stake a claim to land in the islands, St. Kitts was a good choice. Not only was the island windward of Puerto Rico, but it also sat right in the path of strong currents that could push a ship back to Europe without having to cross Spanish outposts.¹²

Dividing a Shared Island

Thomas Warner is often attributed with being the first Englishman to attempt to settle St. Kitts. A soldier with ties to the Virginia Company, Warner may have learned about the island while in Guiana. It is possible that he had heard that Spanish sailors stopped at the tiny island for “refreshment” on their way back to Europe, and that sometimes they even left “their sick there to be look'd to by the Caribbians.”¹³ In 1624, Warner successfully contracted with merchant Ralph Merrifield and ship owner John Jeafferson to arrange a settlement expedition to the island.¹⁴ Warner, familiar with the frontier life in the Americas, apparently relied heavily on the local Carib community to survive his first months on the island. John Smith, famous for his exploits in Virginia, commented that Thomas Warner and his crew lived with the indigenous community after they arrived at the island, helping the English captain and his men with provisions while they worked on creating their first permanent camp.¹⁵ The relative peace was short-lived, however.

¹² Ian Kenneth Steele, *The English Atlantic, 1675-1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 22, 26.

¹³ *History of the Caribby-Islands*, 159-160.

¹⁴ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 119.

¹⁵ John Smith, *The True Travels, Adventures and Observations of Captaine John Smith, in Europe, Asia, Africke, and America: Beginning About the Yeere 1593, and Continued to This Present 1629. From the London Edition of 1629*, 1819 ed., 2 vols. (Richmond Franklin Press by William W. Gray, 1819), II: 900-901.

French settlement of the island was the result of an accident. In 1625, Warner departed St. Kitts to inform his backers and his king that St. Kitts was “not under the government of any Christian prince or state” and “inhabited only by savages.”¹⁶ The same year, a French brigantine commanded by Pierre Bélain d'Esnameuc arrived to the shores of St. Kitts after being damaged by a Spanish ship near the Cayman Islands.¹⁷ French missionary writers claimed Bélain found “twenty-five or thirty Frenchmen, who had taken refuge there at different times and for different reasons, maintaining themselves in peace with the Savages and living off the provisions that they very generously gave them.”¹⁸ After repairing his ship and returning to France, Bélain appealed to Cardinal Richelieu to organize a company to settle the island. On October 30, 1626, Richelieu commissioned the first French charter company for the West Indies, the Compagnie de Saint-Christophe, to establish a tobacco enterprise at the island. Three ships captained by Bélain and Urbain du Roissey anchored off the north shore of St. Kitts in the spring of 1627, by which time Warner had returned.¹⁹ The event marked the beginning of the island’s long history of joint settlement and the birth of French and English colonization in the Lesser Antilles.

¹⁶ Commission, reciting the discovery of St. Christopher, as Merwar's Hope, Nevis, Barbadoes, and Montserrat, by Thomas Warner, September 12, 1625, CO 1/3/44, extracted in CSPCO 1/75.

¹⁷ Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale Des Isles Des S. Christophe, de La Guadeloupe, de La Martinique, et Autres Dans L'Amerique* (Paris: Jacques L'Anglois, Iprimeur Ordinaire du Roy et Emmanuel L'Anglois, dans la grand Salle du Palais, 1654), 4.

¹⁸ According to the Dominican missionary Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre's rather romantic account of the event, the French noble's accidental arrival gave the group he encountered “much consolation,” such that they began “loving him like a father and honoring him as their chief.” Ibid., 5-6.

¹⁹ Ibid., 8. See also, Stewart Lea Mims, *Colbert's West India Policy* (New Haven: Yale, 1912), 16-17. Alan Cuthbert Burns, *History of the British West Indies* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1965), 187-191, Carl Bridenbaugh and Roberta Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line: The English in the Caribbean, 1624-1690* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 10-11. Vere Langford Oliver, *The History of the Island of Antigua, One of the Leeward Caribbees in the West Indies: From the First Settlement in 1635 to the Present Time*, 3 vols. (London: Mitchell and Hughes, 1894), I:viii-ix.

Rather than stake a claim to the island and defend it as an English possession, Warner, calculating his odds in the fragile frontier, decided that it was best to sign a treaty with the French captains. Warner's decision was probably at odds with his commission as "governor for life" of the island.²⁰ It is important to note that the same year the French ships arrived, Charles I officially granted St. Kitts and Barbados to the Earl of Carlisle, who was declared "absolute Proprietor and Lord of the said region keeping still the allegiance due to his Majesty." The basis for providing Carlisle the patent to the island was the theory of *res nullius*, which stipulated that any territory not claimed by another European monarch could be claimed by as royal property.²¹ Whether or not Warner was already commissioned by Carlisle by the time Bélain and du Roissey arrived is unclear. As Carlisle's go-between, Thomas Warner was technically deemed governor over all islands in the Earl's vast "Cariola" province—which on paper, included virtually every island in the Lesser Antilles.²² Accordingly, Warner should have protested French claims to St. Kitts, since he had arrived at the island first.

²⁰ Commission from James Hay, Earl of Carlisle, to Sir Thomas Warner, September 29, 1629, CO 29/1/13-16, extracted in CSPCO 1/101

²¹ See John Huxtable Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 30-31.

²² Patent holders like Carlisle had an implicit reason to claim as many islands as they could on paper, even if settlements at these islands were not established or even English. Carlisle's family maintained that the grant included "St. Christopher, Granada, St. Vincents, St. Lucia, Barbados, Martinique, Metelanea, Dominico, Marygalanata, Defeado, Todosantos, Guardaloup, Antigua, Montserrat, Redondo, Barbuda, Nevis, Eustatia, St. Bartholomei, St. Martins, Anguilla, Lembrera, and Anegada" as well as "other Islands found at his great cost and charges...to be inhabited by a large and copious Colony of English." Some writers referred to Carlisle's claim in the Caribbean as if it were a single colony, calling it "Cariola." The region seemingly had no defined limits, leading Bryan Edwards to claim in his 1793 *History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* that the Carlisle obtained "all of the Charrabee Islands." *Some Memoirs of the First Settlement of Barbados and Other the Carrabee Islands with the Succession of the Governours and Commanders in Chief of Barbados to the Year 1741*, (Barbados: Printed by William Beeby, 1741), 3-4. Edwards likely used the above 1741 source for his description of the Carlisle grant in his 1793 history of the "British West Indies," see Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, 328-332, quote from page 330. Carlisle's patent was frequently disputed in English court, and became a major reason why the Civil War in England spilled into the Caribbean in the 1640s. For a discussion of disputes over who lawfully possessed the

Warner, Bélain, and du Roissey agreed to stage a surprise attack on their Carib neighbors, many of whom had helped the men survive their initial arrivals at St. Kitts. Acting together, the men attacked a group of Carib warriors in their hammocks while they slept and turned their new captives into slaves.²³ The episode of racial violence suggests the extent to which the English and French men on the island viewed themselves as more similar to each other and collectively different from the island's "savages." Stories of the atrocity have since become a matter of legend on the island. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the highest peak on the island was called Mt. Misery, a symbol of its bloody origins as a colony. In 1983, when the island achieved independence from England, Kittsians decided to rename the mountain Mt. Liamuiga.

Murdering Carib Indians and driving them out of Liamuiga marked the first step of a complicated transnational project aimed at turning St. Kitts into a European colony. Warner, Du Roissey, and Bélain agreed to divide the island into English and French territories, using trees, streams, mountains, and settler residences as boundary signatures. The volcanic peaks that stretch across the middle of the island divided it naturally into two parts, which the men called Capisterre (upper lands) on the northside and Basseterre (lower lands) on the south, but instead of dividing the island equally along the mountain range down the middle, the men divided it into thirds.²⁴ The articles stipulated that the French company men governed the tips of the island and Warner the middle section.

proprietorship, see Carla Gardina Pestana, "A West Indian Colonial Governor's Advice: Henry Ashton's 1646 Letter to the Earl of Carlisle," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (2003).

²³ According to Du Tertre, the captains acted in self-defense. He writes in his history of St. Kitts that the men were warned of a pending attack by a friendly "savage" and that they decided to act preemptively, see Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale Des Isles Des S. Christophe*, 6-7.

²⁴ The language is confusing because Basseterre and Capisterre also came to signify the French occupied tips of the island. In the original agreement, however, Capisterre represented the Atlantic side of the island whereas Basseterre referred to the Caribbean side. Sometimes Capisterre is spelled Capesterre in colonial documents.

Warner's commission established him as the governor of the land from the westside of the river at "Christopher's town" to "la Case du Pistolet," as well as the land from the river that was "half-way" between Monsieur Shambaut's "plantation" westward to Sandy Point. The French captains possessed the land "from the east side of the river at Christopher's towne to the salt ponds" and from Pistolet's hut to Sandy Point. On the southern half of the mountain range, Bélain and Du Roissey received the land east of the river to the salt ponds.²⁵ Until 1713, these markers served as boundaries between the "English" and "French" lands, which residents often called quarters.

Despite borders, Warner and Bélain understood that their security depended on mutual cooperation against Carib retaliation and Spanish efforts to dislodge them from the Lesser Antilles. The 1627 treaty drafted between the captains not only distinguished local imperial boundaries, but also underscored the idea that the colonists should share mutual defense. This policy, hatched in the frontier setting of an under-populated colony, guided Anglo-French relations on the island for the next forty years. It assured that Warner and Bélain would support each other with men and arms for the purposes of defending the island against Spanish ships, privateers, and Carib reprisals. The "partage" governed internal discipline as well. If disputes arose between their English and French laborers, the matter was to be brought before French and English leaders *jointly*, and no captain was allowed to discipline someone from the other camp. The treaty also governed trade. The three men consented that they would notify each other if any merchant vessel arrived at the island, and that access to newly arrived commodities

²⁵ Partage made (between ye governours Captain Warner, Captain D'Esnambuc, and Captain Du Roissey) of ye Island of St. Christopher in ye name of their Kings by ye vertue of their Commissions, dated April 28, 1627, British Library, Egerton Manuscripts, 2395 (hereafter Egerton 2395). The agreement is also reprinted with some mistakes in Oliver, *History of the Island of Antigua*, I:ix-x. Also see *History of the Caribby-Islands*, 161-162.

would be *shared*. The captains retained the right to set the prices of the goods that arrived on ships from their homeland. By the time they signed the agreement, Warner, Bélain, and Du Roissey were familiar with the growing Dutch trade in the region, for the men also agreed that if any Flemish ship arrived at the island, the governors agreed to set the price together.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the treaty pertained to maintaining the peace between the French and English camps if war erupted in Europe. The captains concurred that if one of them received an official declaration of war from Europe, the first governor to be notified was to send word to the others. In turn, the men promised that they would not wage war on the opposing camps unless they received direct orders from England and France to do so.²⁶ Variations of the original 1627 agreement were redrafted and amended at least ten times between 1627 and 1663, during which the conflict between the two sides remained negligible.²⁷ Similar treaties were rehashed after the Anglo-Dutch War of 1667, during which the two sides experienced the first large scale disintegration of mutual peace, and again in 1697, after the Glorious Revolution in England erupted in an Atlantic-wide crisis that led French Saint-Christophe to its final years of existence. The treaty was so important that it eventually shaped metropolitan policy. In 1686, English agents of James II used the treaty to model a neutrality agreement with France.²⁸

²⁶ Articles made between ye Gentlemen Governours Captaine Warner, Captaine D'Esnambuc, & Captain Du Roissey, for ye maintaining of their Commissions received from ye King of England & ye King of France, Anno 1627, Egerton 2395. Also reprinted in Oliver, I:ix.

²⁷ Egerton 2395/10-13, 30, 34, 37, 62-65, 342, and 385. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 119.

²⁸ *Treaty of Peace, Good Correspondence, & Neutrality in America, between the Most Serene and Mighty Prince James II. By the Grace of God, King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &C. And the Most Serene and Mighty Prince Lewis XIV the Most Christian King: Concluded the 16th Day of November, 1686*, (London: Printed by Thomas Newcomb, One of His Majesty's Printers, 1686).

From the outset, the soldier-settlers Warner and Bélain believed that containing the laboring population was essential to the success of their new colony. The captains wanted to keep their men apart as best they could in order to maintain internal discipline, but they were also aware that they needed each other for mutual support. As part of their agreement, the governors agreed they would return any runaway “men or slaves” to the respective party and moreover, that they would not “entertain” members of the opposing camp unless they notified the other governor.²⁹

Colonists did not reside in isolation from each other. As part of the agreement to divide the island into three, the governors also stipulated that the woods, roads, seas, and mines (if discovered) would be shared in common.³⁰ The salt ponds, too, were designated as commons for French and English settlers alike. Sharing these common spaces required common roads. In order to get the salt from the “cul-de-sac” at the southern tip of the island, colonists from the English sector had to travel through the French territory. Such crossings through common territory brought colonists from diverse backgrounds into greater contact as tobacco cultivation increased, woods diminished, and settlers required greater access to fishing grounds and salt deposits. While it might be easy to draw distinct lines dividing French and English territory on a map of St. Kitts, in the earliest days of colonization, these boundaries were porous places where woodcutters and water fetchers encountered one another in daily work.

²⁹ See Bernard Moitt, *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles, 1635-1848*, Blacks in the Diaspora (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 3-4. The first known arrival of Africans at St. Kitts occurred in 1626. By “slaves,” the agreement most likely meant people of African descent as well as the recently enslaved Caribs.

³⁰ Articles made between ye Gentlemen Governours Captaine Warner, Captaine D’Esnambuc, & Captain Du Roissey, for ye maintaining of their Commissions received from ye King of England & ye King of France, Anno 1627, Egerton 2395.

While the division of the island permitted military elites in the English and French quarters to buttress their power over land and labor, anxiety about Spanish invasions increased the tendency of the governors to rely on each other for mutual protection. Fear of reprisals for colonizing lands claimed by the Spanish Crown encouraged cooperation between the English and French captains in the first decade of settlement and continued to shape the ordering of the frontier colony in the 1630s. One seventeenth-century historian of the French and English settlement noted that the governors made a “Defensive League for the mutual relief of each other, if occasion should require, against the attempts of the common Enemy, or any other who should enjoy the peace and quiet which they hoped to enjoy together.”³¹ A Spanish attack aimed at driving the French and English out of the islands tested the limits of the defensive league in 1629. Philip IV of Spain ordered Admiral Toledo of the Armada de Barlovento to sack St. Kitts as it entered the Caribbean. Toledo’s ships bombarded the southeastern “French” side of St. Kitts, driving the Francophone colonists through the English quarter, where some men hid in the mountain ridges as Spanish sailors set fire to the crops and dwellings. More than 700 settlers, including colonists from fledgling Nevis, were captured and sent back to Europe on Spanish ships.³²

³¹ *History of the Caribby-Islands*, 162.

³² Mims, *Colbert*, 18-19, Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 119-120, *History of the Caribby-Islands*, 165-168. See also John C. Appleby, “English Settlement in the Lesser Antilles During War and Peace, 1603-1660,” in *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion*, ed. Stanley L. Engerman and Robert L. Paquette (Gainesville: University of Florida 1996), 90-92. During the attack, Bélain and du Roissey argued about whether to abandon the new colony completely. According to the Dominican missionary Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre’s romantic account of the invasion, the French captains made their way through the English sector to Sandy Point, where they bickered about evacuating the island. There, du Roissey threatened to have Bélain stabbed when he refused to flee and resettle his men at Antigua. Eventually, both left the island in two separate ships filled with their co-colonists. Du Roissey fled the region entirely, sailing back to France where he was subsequently imprisoned for his actions by Richelieu. Bélain sailed his ship to Antigua, where he found sailors who had deserted François de Rotondy’s fleet. The Spanish Barlovento fleet had left the region in the interim, completely withdrawing from St. Kitts and Nevis. After convincing the deserters to help him return to St. Kitts, Bélain sailed back to Basseterre with some 350 settlers. Despite

Rise of a Transnational Tobacco Colony

Although the attack by the Barlovento fleet would leave a lasting fear in St. Kitts of Spanish reprisals, it did not reverse the course of settlement on the island. In fact, the attack stimulated resettlement and accelerated commercial interest in the island's rich soil, which was said to produce the wonderful sweet-scented Orinoco tobacco. As early as 1628, some thirty "English, French, and Dutch ships" were said to be anchoring regularly at St. Kitts.³³ By the 1630s, servants in the English and French quarters labored in notably well-cleared tobacco fields, and visitors returned to Europe to tell of the great "multitudes" that inhabited the island. When both the French and English settlements are taken into consideration, St. Kitts may have been the most densely populated in eastern Caribbean prior to 1640, even overshadowing Barbados, where sugar was just beginning to take hold.³⁴ Estimates place the number of white residents living in St. Kitts in 1640 at more than 3,500 in the English quarter alone, but some accounts suggest that the population reached upwards of 20,000 people by midcentury.³⁵ The anonymous writer of the 1658 edition of the *Histoire Naturelle et Morale des Îles Antilles de L'Amérique* wrote that Warner left twelve to thirteen thousand English colonists behind when he passed away.³⁶

The joint colonization of St. Kitts enabled colonists to establish camps on other islands nearby and spawned dynamic interisland commerce. Using St. Kitts as a way

have their houses, huts, and crops burned, English and French settlers decided to reconstruct what they had lost in St. Kitts. Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale Des Antilles Habitées Par Les François*, 4 vols. (Paris: T. Iolly, 1667-1671), I:28-31. See also, Mims, *Colbert*, 18-19.

³³ Smith, *True Travels*, II: 902-903

³⁴ Carla Gardina Pestana, *The English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution, 1640-1661* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 229, 232, Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line*, 20.

³⁵ Pestana, *The English Atlantic*, 229, 232, Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line*, 20. Watts, *West Indies*, 173.

³⁶ *Histoire Naturelle & Morale Des Îles Antilles de L'amerique*, 290.

station, soldier-settlers from France and England invaded Nevis (1628), Montserrat (c. 1632), Antigua (c. 1633), Guadeloupe (c. 1635), and Martinique (c. 1635). In 1635, the Zeelander Jan Snouck obtained the proprietorship for the tiny island of St. Eustatius.³⁷ The island sits less than nine miles to the northeast of St. Kitts, and served as a major smuggling base for goods and slaves, so much so that colonists called contraband “statia” goods by the end of the seventeenth century.³⁸ St. Eustatius was also a notorious safe-haven for debtors and runaways from St. Kitts.

The fanning out of settlers from St. Kitts sparked new ways of imagining the constellation of islands in the archipelago. In France, company officials referred to their new colonies collectively as the “Îles du Vent,” which translates literally into English as “islands of wind.” By the time St. Eustatius fell under the control of the Dutch West India Company, mapmakers referred to the small island and its close neighbor, Saba, as the *Bovenwindse Eilanden*, or the Dutch Windwards. Some imperial writers cast St. Kitts, Nevis, Antigua, Montserrat, and Barbados as part of a grand constellation called “Cariola,” after the proprietor Earl of Carlisle. By the 1660s, however, mapmakers and empire makers in the metropole usually called the collective the “English Caribbees.”³⁹

³⁷ Johannes Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 195. On Dutch merchants in Montserrat during the 1650s, see Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World*, 66-67. On the Dutch role in French St. Kitts, see Philip P. Boucher, *France and the American Tropics to 1700: Tropics of Discontent?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 91, 178-179.

³⁸ C.S.S. Higham, *The Development of the Leeward Islands under the Restoration, 1660-1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 37.

³⁹ Several seventeenth maps can be viewed online at The John Carter Brown Library *Archive of Early American Images*, (hereafter JCB Archive). See Nicolas Sanson d'Abbeville, “Les Isles Antilles &c. Entre lesquelles sont les Lucayes, et les Caribes,” (Paris: Chez Auteur, 1656), JCB Archive, Cabinet Blathwayt 26, Jean-Baptiste François Nolin, “L’Amerique Septentrionale ou la Partie Septentrionale des Indes Occidentales,” (Paris: Chez I.B. Nolin Geographe Ordinaire du Roy sur le Quay de l’Hrloge du Palais a l’Enseigne de la Place des Victoires a la descente du Pont Neuf, 1704), JCB Archive, Cabinet C689 Co704, Herman Moll, “A Map of the West-Indies or the Islands of America,” (London: Printed by Thomas Bowles in St. Pauls Church Yard and John Bowles at the Black Horse in Cornhill, 1732), JCB Archive, ZM726 1709/1/3-SIZE. http://www.brown.edu/Facilities/John_Carter_Brown_Library/pages/ea_hmpg.html (accessed January 2010).

By the 1630s, a vibrant interisland commerce between the islands linked them together socially and culturally. These new circuits of trade, especially the influx of Dutch capital, helped drive plantation development in St. Kitts, where tobacco production dominated the landscape.⁴⁰ In 1637 and 1638, planters from St. Kitts exported more than 730,000 pounds of tobacco to England. This was twice as much as Barbados at the time, where sugar had yet to become central to the island economy.⁴¹ The ties between Dutch traders and French planters were so strong that many simply set up warehouses in the French quarters. Dutch merchants, perhaps Walloons or “New Christians,” resided permanently in Basseterre, furnishing English and French elites with “excellent wines, aqua-vitae and Beer,” as well as silk and wool.⁴² By 1655, tobacco planters large and small in the Leewards owed at least 279,000 pounds of the smoking leaf to Dutch traders who plied between the islands. This was more than all the tobacco exported from St. Kitts seventeen years earlier.⁴³

Within a decade of the settlement of St. Kitts, tobacco exports fueled the need for more labor and may have encouraged even the poorest Europeans to see opportunity in raising the crop in the islands. Racial slavery was practiced from the outset, but appears to have remained negligible in the English islands during the tobacco era.⁴⁴ Sources on

Strangely, the translation of Goslinga’s *Dutch in the Caribbean* refers to St. Eustatius, Saba, and St. Martin as the Dutch Leewards, and refers to the Dutch Leewards as the “Curaçao Islands.” Whether this was the intent of the author or the translator is unclear. See Cornelis Christian Goslinga and Maria J.L Van Yperen, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guianas, 1680-1791* (Dover, New Hampshire: Van Gorcum, 1985), 127-156. Postma also borrows from the English tradition and refers to St. Eustatius, Saba, and St. Martin as Dutch Leeward Islands, see Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1815*, 195, passim.

⁴⁰ Appleby, “English Settlement,” 95.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² *History of the Caribby-Islands*, 23.

⁴³ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 122-123, Appleby, “English Settlement,” 94-95.

⁴⁴ Maurice Thompson sold sixty people of African descent to St. Kitts when he returned Thomas Warner to the island in 1626, see Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line*, 32, Robin Blackburn,

the origins and numbers of European colonists are scarce, and the number of Africans sold to the islands was probably small in the initial years of settlement. Most historians agree, however, that the first decades of settlement in the English controlled islands of the archipelago were marked by labor flows that were predominately male and disproportionately Irish—mostly landless “native Irish” Roman Catholics from areas surrounding war threatened Munster and Kinsale.⁴⁵ In the French sector of St. Kitts, servants from Dieppe and Nantes probably made up the bulk of the poor white laboring population.⁴⁶

Servants from Ireland, some of them sailing by choice and others by way of jail, arrived in the Lesser Antilles under the supervision of English as well as Dutch captains. Willing colonists tended to know what they were getting into by traveling across the Atlantic, and sometimes could even influence the ship captain to deliver them to specific islands. Thomas Anthony, a merchant captain who learned first hand of Dutch competition for servants in Kinsale, Ireland, delivered fifty-three Irish servants to Warner and other tobacco planters in St. Kitts in 1636 after he realized he could not deliver them to Virginia. Planters in English St. Kitts purchased their indenture contracts in tobacco rolls weighing between 450 and 500 pounds each.⁴⁷

The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800 (New York: Verso, 1997), 225.

⁴⁵ Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line*, 102-103, Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World*, 51-53, Hilary McD Beckles, “A “Riotous and Unruly Lot”: Irish Indentured Servants and Freemen in the English West Indies, 1644-1713,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (1990): 504-406.

⁴⁶ In the French case, Boucher notes that 54 percent of the *engagés* left from Nantes and 43 percent of the servants from Dieppe came from urban areas. Boucher, *Tropics*, 147. Statistics in both the French and English cases are scarce. Debien’s work remains the standard in the French case. Gabriel Debien, *Les Engagés Pour Les Antilles, 1634-1715* (Paris: Société de l'histoire des Colonies Françaises, 1952).

⁴⁷ Letters of Thomas Anthony, High Court Admiralty MSS, Misc., bundle 30/636, National Archives, Kew, cited in Beckles, “A “Riotous and Unruly Lot”: Irish Indentured Servants and Freemen in the English West Indies, 1644-1713,” 506, Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World*, 53.

Masters, of course, exploited these contracts by keeping their servants in debt, which was conveniently paid in tobacco rolls. The habit of exploiting the terms of the contracts was island wide, but servants could point to the habits of the elites of other nations as evidence of un-gentlemanly exploitation. Servants who worked in the woodlands and watering holes of St. Kitts shared stories about their exploitation. Sometimes, they complained to their masters by contrasting their treatment with that of their neighbors. French engagés in Basseterre and Capisterre believed their masters were mimicking the English custom of “flexible” indentures, so much so that Bélain mandated that all servants in the French sectors worked a maximum of three years in the 1630s.⁴⁸ In local parlance, colonists referred to French servants as “trente-six-moins,” or thirty-six month men because of this arrangement.⁴⁹

Many servants who arrived willingly in the islands did so with the intent of using their four to seven year indentures as a path to small landowning, or at the very least, a means to acquire land by renting it from an established planter.⁵⁰ Although poor farmers could grow tobacco on small plots, becoming a planter was difficult for white folk who arrived in the islands as servants.⁵¹ Using the £10 or £12 pounds given to them after their contracts were up, many servants may have tried raising their own tobacco for market. Servants who labored in the French quarters earned between 200 and 400 pounds of the crop at the end of their contract. If the market was right, this was enough to begin tilling

⁴⁸ Boucher, *Tropics*, 147.

⁴⁹ *Histoire Naturelle & Morale Des Îles Antilles de L'amerique*, 320, *History of the Caribby-Islands*, 200.

⁵⁰ Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World*, 54.

⁵¹ Although it is a study of the Chesapeake and Low Country, an informative study of tobacco production in the seventeenth and eighteenth century is Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). Ortiz's study of the culture engendered by production of tobacco and sugar in Cuba, though dated, has elicited much attention for his theory of transculturation. Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet De Onís (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

a small plot of tobacco for themselves, or, if they chose, to return to Europe.⁵² Yet because the military elites like Warner and Bélain controlled access to merchant vessels and negotiated the dues payable to the proprietors, poor white folk that had access to land probably lived a life more akin to sharecroppers than upstart planters. Their power in the colonies resided more in their ability to provide support to elites when political conflict erupted than it did in their ability to acquire land and change their station.

Henry Colt: A View of Ambivalent Allegiances on the Frontier

Only two years after Toledo's attempt to drive the French and English settlements from St. Kitts and Nevis, an English Catholic man named Henry Colt decided to make a go at the booming tobacco trade in St. Kitts. His journal provides historians with one of the only first hand accounts available to scholars interested in the nascent creole frontier that was beginning to emerge in the Leewards in the 1630s.⁵³ When Colt arrived at St. Kitts on the ship *Alexander*, he found vast tracks of land already cleared for tobacco and the liquor soaked, bawdy frontier lifestyle already in full swing. He ordered his servants to clear land on a hillside close to the sea so as to have easy access to traders who might pass by. The tools he brought proved inadequate, and Colt soon decided to purchase a plot of land and house already constructed at Palmetto Point, close to the Bélain's settlement at Basseterre. In the initial months of his arrival, Colt lived in a tent, where he penned letters to his son by candlelight.

⁵² Boucher, *Tropics*, 147.

⁵³ Henry Colt's diary is reprinted in Vincent T. Harlow, *Colonising Expeditions to the West Indies and Guiana, 1623-1667* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1925), 54-102. The original is held at the Cambridge University Library. Citations here refer to the reprinted version that appears in Harlow. Colt sent his diary back to his son sometime in 1631. Spelling has been modernized.

Colt referred to himself as a Catholic. He may not have expressed his religious views openly, but his Catholicism did not cause him to be shunned by other residents in the English sector of St. Kitts. His journal entries suggest a mixture of agony, disgust, and anxiety about the ways imperial power shaped relationships between settlers, a view that may have also been informed by the ongoing continental conflicts in Europe.

“Surely the Devil the spirit of discord has great power in America,” Colt wrote to his son. “Loose he is as well amongst Christians as Infidels,” so much so that “all men are here made subject to the power of this Infernal Spirit.” At times Colt suggested fighting was a necessity, even between “friends,” but the general tenor of his writings suggest that he viewed conflict as a burden that stifled all Europeans’ ability to advance their station in the eastern archipelago.⁵⁴

While Catholic, Colt also identified as English, but this did not determine his social networks in the Leewards nor did his identity cut him off from the trading routes that crisscrossed the archipelago. At times Colt expressed a bit of skepticism about the Francophone inhabitants at Basseterre, but he still viewed them as his “neighbors.” His journal does not suggest, as so many historians have noted, that the Anglo-French relationship in St. Kitts was characterized by deep animus and mutual fear. In August of 1631, when a group of English fishermen were rumored to have been shot at with arrows, Colt chuckled at the possibility that the culprits might have been French settlers who had covered themselves with red dye. Referring to the French settlers as his “neighbors,” Colt joked to his son that the “French is a nation valiant, witty, and politique” and suggested that they had “mixed” themselves among their Indian slaves to “affright the

⁵⁴ Ibid., 73.

English” from the turtle grounds. Comparing the commons of the salt ponds to the sea, Colt suggested that residents in the islands too frequently looked at woods and salt ponds as “confines” and “petty landmarks.” Colt maintained they should be held in common across imperial divides, just as Warner and Bélain had agreed to in the 1627 treaty.⁵⁵

Colt also held ambiguous feelings about the Dutch, or “Hollanders” who plied between St. Kitts and St. Martin to the north. He applauded the correspondence between Warner and the Dutch merchants at St. Martin and hoped that they would help Kittsians defend the island if the Spanish returned to the island. While he viewed the support of the Dutch against the Spanish as positive, he also viewed the commercial presence of the Dutch as a slight competitive challenge for him in St. Kitts. When he first arrived at the island, he had mixed feelings about the offers of Dutch traders to help him sell his tobacco and obtain other commodities for him. Within weeks of his arrival at the island Dutch merchants offered to be his “associates,” but Colt hesitated to partake in their “company” unless “necessity” urged him to rely upon the traders.⁵⁶ His hesitancy gave way and he soon seized the opportunities to trade for the cheapest price in the archipelago. By August, he was advising the captain of the *Alexander* to take some of his men to lade for salt at St. Martin, now settled by a Dutch merchant. Colt also elected to send his tobacco to Holland instead of England because of the twelve pence per pound duty levied in his home country.⁵⁷ When a fleet of thirteen Hollander ships anchored at St. Kitts in the middle of August to obtain water, Colt hosted the Governor of St. Martin,

⁵⁵ Ibid., 98.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 89.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 101.

inviting him to sleep at his house and to accompany him for dinner. Colt described him as “a man of good appearance” and the only “temperate Hollander” he had met.⁵⁸

Like his French and Dutch “neighbors,” Colt had ambivalent feelings toward Spanish sailors. He feared that they would act on behalf of their King again and invade the island under claims that it still belonged to Philip IV. Yet he did not paint them as his mortal enemies. Instead, he tried to make sense of his multiple identities as an Englishman and Catholic in the frontier setting of St. Kitts. When rumors that a new fleet was intending to lay waste to Dutch, English, and French ships at St. Martin and St. Kitts, Colt penned in his diary, “behold the cares, troubles, fears, & dangers the Spaniards have brought us to. It cannot be but the King of Spain being so great, so noble, and so just a prince will out of his royal disposition recompense in some sort these wrongs.” “Are not we Catholics?” he lamented. Despite his religious sentiments, he still felt that he should not “displease the King of England,” even though he hoped the “two Kings league and amity stretched itself beyond the Tropick.”⁵⁹

Colt viewed first hand the willingness of laborers to abandon the burdens of frontier life at the first site of reprieve from passing ships. He also witnessed the harsh retribution exacted by the military leaders who made examples out of those who tried to break their efforts to restrict their movement and keep them trapped on the islands. While Colt expressed ambiguous sentiments toward Spanish sailors and his “valiant, witty, and politique” French neighbors, he was more anxious about the laborers and servants who did the bulk of the work on the island. The end of the indenture contracts of prisoners, dissidents, and willing migrants from Scotland, Ireland, and England had

⁵⁸ Ibid., 94.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 88.

already begun to spawn a landless community in St. Kitts, for the former servants lacked enough funds to secure land. Colt worried that the poor would join with the Spanish or refuse to fight against them, but in comparison to the rhetoric expressed decades later, his attitude towards the poor laborers was free of anti-Papist cant.

Colt viewed the prospect of servant alliances with the Spanish less as a matter of religion and more a factor of their poverty. In his view, the landless poor were a nuisance like “little ants that eat the seed and trouble your provisions.”⁶⁰ Colt understood that the harsh conditions of landlessness and the hunger that followed could drive these “ants” to make choices about who they would labor for on the islands. On Saturday, July 23, Colt mulled over new rumors of a Spanish invasion in his journal, scribbling that “the servants of the planters rather desire the Spaniards might come, that by it they might be freed.” Rumors circulated that servants in nearby Nevis shouted “Liberty, Joyfull Liberty!” as they jumped into the ocean to reach the Spanish ships sailing offshore.⁶¹ Hearing the rumors in St. Kitts, Thomas Warner felt compelled to make an example out of two men accused plotting to desert. The men were publicly tortured and made to ride the “wooden horse,” a pointed saddle that forced the victims to place all their weight on their genitals while heavy weights dangled from their feet. Victimized “one,” Colt noted, “I thought was sufficient for an example.”

The Tobacco Crisis and the Warner-de Poincy Collusion

Camps on the frontier island were organized first and foremost as military endeavors with strict hierarchies based on status, gender, and race. Caribs were outsiders, laborers sat at the bottom, and men with military experience and land were

⁶⁰ Ibid., 91.

⁶¹ Appleby, “English Settlement,” 93.

responsible for leading the small militias. At the top stood the island governors. Yet as these initial frontier camps in the English and French quarters of St. Kitts grew into more stable tobacco farms, the island leaders had to contend internally with the growing population of servants and small landowners who were forced to join the local militias and contribute to the construction of the local forts.⁶² Access to interisland trade by a diverse settler population promoted indifference to imperial and proprietary authority. In the late 1630s and 1640s, this indifference turned into resentment, as an Atlantic-wide depression in tobacco prices coupled with political changes abroad worked together to challenge the hierarchical status quo in St. Kitts. In the face of these insurrections, the French and English governors—Thomas Warner and Philippe Lonvilliers de Poincy—relied upon each other to quash resistance to their authority.⁶³ The history of their collusion offers another counter-narrative to the kinds of nation-centered, imperial stories like the account that opened this chapter.

Addictions in Europe helped fuel the pending chaos in St. Kitts. By 1638, tobacco from the Americas was flooding metropolitan markets. The dried, smoking leaf sold in London at a mere one or two pence per pound, and merchants were complaining that it was “scarce worth the charge in London of carrying tobacco from St. Christopher, Virginia, or the Bermudas.”⁶⁴ The precipitous decline in prices was particularly troublesome for the French Crown, which had a more centralized approach to colonial affairs. Unlike colonists in the English islands who were supposed to pay a percentage of their crop to the rather helpless proprietor of “Cariola,” French colonists had to contend

⁶² Boucher, *Tropics*, 125, *History of the Caribby-Islands*, 20, 21.

⁶³ On “entangled history,” see Eliga H. Gould, “Entangled Histories, Entangled Worlds: The English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Periphery,” *American Historical Review* 112, no. 3 (2007).

⁶⁴ Reprinted in Appleby, “English Settlement,” 95.

with the more tightly organized company regime, which now governed not one but three tobacco-producing colonies in the Lesser Antilles.⁶⁵ As early as 1636, governors of the newly reorganized Compagnie des Îles d'Amérique realized that the price of tobacco in France was not covering the cost of shipping the crop across the Atlantic. In response, company officials ordered that French planters in St. Kitts could not send more than 900 pounds of the crop to market annually. Farmers were also ordered to halt production every other year, and the company even instructed its agent in St. Kitts to “force all the planters in St. Christopher as well as at Martinique to plant a large quantity of cotton.”⁶⁶

In 1639, facing extraordinary debts, French company officials sent Philippe Longvilliers de Poincy to St. Kitts in an effort to keep colonists in check. Not only was he a knight commander of the powerful Order of Malta, but he also served in the siege of the Huguenot stronghold at La Rochelle—a battle that signified his allegiance to his Catholic Crown.⁶⁷ From the perspective of company officials, the skilled veteran of continental warfare seemed like the kind of heavy-handed governor their fledgling colonies needed. His actions against Protestant rebels and his loyalty to the Crown suggested that he was a soldier and gentleman who would honor his oath. Once in St. Kitts, however, de Poincy faced the realities of living in a frontier island settled by “persons shuffled together from divers places.”⁶⁸

Soon after his arrival at the French Kittsian town of Basseterre in 1639, de Poincy began to cultivate trading relationships with Dutch merchants, fund attacks against Carib

⁶⁵ With company backing, Bélain used St. Kitts as a staging ground to invade Martinique and Guadeloupe, where he and his followers were eventually met my stiff Carib resistance. Boucher, *Tropics*, 71-73.

⁶⁶ F₂/19/109, September 3, 1636, *Archives Nationale* (France), reprinted in Mims, *Colbert*, 30.

⁶⁷ Boucher, *Tropics*, 77.

⁶⁸ *History of the Caribby-Islands*, 174.

camps at Guadeloupe and Martinique, and develop a report with the English governor Thomas Warner.⁶⁹ Citing orders from abroad, the two governors joined forces to force farmers to halt production of their tobacco crops until October of 1641.⁷⁰ The governors ordered farmers to uproot existing crops, and if possible, to plant cotton and even indigo. Since both men were officially governors not only of St. Kitts, but also the neighboring islands represented by their respective metropolitan interests, the orders were supposed to extend to Antigua and Martinique as well. Colonists, however, resented the measure. Such radical transformations to the landscape would take years, not months, to achieve. Although cotton was perhaps manageable, indigo required significant capital outlays, not to mention skilled laborers who knew how to process the stinky leaves into dark blue dye.

The results of the ban on tobacco were devastating. Henry Ashton, the governor of the English camps at Antigua, related that Warner's agreement with Poincy caused a “multiplying of debt” that “infected” the residents at St. Kitts with “the love of a long accustomed idleness.” Planters were unable to renew “their stocks of servants whose time in this vacancy had been unprofitably worn out.” In the English sector of St. Kitts, tobacco farmers fell deeper into debt and were unable to pay their taxes to the proprietor. As credit dried up, local interisland commerce slowed. French farmers were “entirely without supplies” since the “Dutch and English traders” who normally furnished them with cloth and foodstuffs stopped trading to the French quarters.⁷¹

The policy eventually triggered a political uprising in the English quarter in December of 1641, just prior to the outbreak of the Civil War in England. The

⁶⁹ Mims, *Colbert*, 40-43, Blackburn, *Making*, 281-283, Dubois, *Colony of Citizens*, 31-32, Boucher, *Tropics*, 75.

⁷⁰ J. H. Bennett, “The English Caribbees in the Period of the Civil War, 1642-1646,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (1967): 360.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

“rebellion,” as Warner and his cronies would later call the challenge to his authority, began when a tobacco planter named John Jesson went from house to house in the English quarter to convince other tobacco growers to form an alliance representing the “country.” Seizing on the metropolitan rhetoric of “freedom” and “liberty,” Jesson and the other petitioners wanted Warner to forgo the debts they were obligated to pay to the governor and the proprietor, which amounted to fifty pounds per poll. They objected to Warner’s insistence that they pay the duty for the year that they were forbidden from raising tobacco. The English governor responded to the challenge by issuing martial law. Jesson and several other leaders of the representative “committees” were subsequently jailed and forced to publicly acknowledge Warner as “God’s Vice Regent” of St. Kitts.⁷²

Although the jailing of Jesson and the other petitioners caused a temporary retreat of the new country lobby, the rebellion was not over. Warner charged one of the leaders of the collective with libel and ordered his execution. In response, 1,500 of the country folk took up arms and threatened Warner with death. Even many of Warner’s supporters turned against him. During the rebellion, residents accused Warner of oppressing colonists who lived in a “free colony.” They wanted the governor to stop passing laws without the “consent of the commons,” and argued that as subjects of the King, they should not be subjected to forced “fealty to the Lord Proprietor.”⁷³

The rebels clearly borrowed from the rhetoric of the coming revolutionary crisis in England when they confronted Warner. However, the group was not rejecting their king or royalism more broadly, but the rules of the proprietorship that obligated the men to pay a proportion of their crop to the resident agent. The country lobby did not agree to

⁷² Excerpts reprinted in *Ibid.*: 360-361.

⁷³ *Ibid.*: 361.

overthrow Warner, which they very well could have done. Instead, they wanted inclusion into the law making process and reforms that reflected their interests. The rebels wanted an assembly and an audience with Parliament. They also opposed Warner's exploitation of the militiamen and asked that for a new minister to be appointed to the Cayon division. The country folk wanted the standing “minister put out, and to have Mr. Palmer again, the new incumbent being a contentious man, and one that hath sowed much discord among his parishioners by his scandalous tongue.”⁷⁴ The group insisted that they would remain armed until Warner consented. The rebels in St. Kitts had started their own colonial civil conflict, anticipating the more consequential actions that were already brewing across the Atlantic in England.

Outnumbered and under threat of violence, Warner conceded by granting the St. Kitts country party the right to form an assembly of elected burgesses. The new assembly insisted that Warner admit that the proprietary rents were never sanctioned by the country folk, and more importantly, legislated that merchants be allowed to conduct trade freely and not have their goods “rated,” or taxed. The group wanted tobacco growers pardoned from paying their debts for six months and insisted that all growers reserve 50 pounds of tobacco per head to pay for servants’ clothes. They also arranged to tax residents to fund a delegation of the new assembly to sail to England to represent their interests to Parliament.⁷⁵ Warner was disgusted by the effort and wrote to the Earl of Carlisle to inform him of the efforts of the country lobby to find an audience in Parliament. “I had rather bee a poore Souldier in the Low Countreyes,” he related, than “to bee a Governor over all those that will not bee obedient to lawfull Command.” The

⁷⁴ Ibid.: 362.

⁷⁵ Ibid.: 364-365.

uprising had to be quashed, for if not, “it will be Such an ensample that all forraigne governments will goe to ruine.”⁷⁶

The country party ambassadors from the new St. Kitts Assembly never made the journey back to England. Outnumbered and outarmed, Warner seems to have enlisted help from de Poincy to quash the rebellion sometime between April and December of 1642. Carlisle’s agent on the island wrote that twenty-four burgesses were “discharged from there meetings, until further order,” and moreover, that several “runaways” were “executed.” Carlisle’s agent related that the joint effort by Warner and Poincy brought the island into “conformity.”⁷⁷ The rebellion, however, spawned concerns that similar uprisings were going to take place in Antigua, Montserrat, and Nevis. Months after the uprising, Warner reported that planters in Nevis had four suspected rebels arrested, chained, and exiled to St. Kitts for punishment.⁷⁸

Three years after he helped his English neighbor keep the lid on the rebellion, de Poincy turned to Warner to return the favor. Unlike Warner, de Poincy faced an uprising from abroad. In 1644, company directors in France moved to replace the French governor with a new director, Noel de Patrocles, Siegneur de Thoisy after efforts to transform the colonies into cotton and indigo producers proved fruitless. When de Thoisy tried to eject him from the islands, de Poincy amassed a militia and (with the help of Warner) drove his replacement back to France in 1646. According to the Dominican historian Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre, Warner amassed 2,000 men to fight alongside de Poincy's force in late January of 1646, when they clashed with a company from

⁷⁶ Cited in *Ibid.*: 365.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*: 367-368.

Martinique. Some 60 impressed fighters died, but the French governor remained in power.⁷⁹

Repulsed from St. Kitts, de Thoisy returned to Guadeloupe in an effort to carry out company commands. After several hundred men surrounded the replacement governor's house, de Thoisy fled to Martinique. By June, both islands were engulfed with riots, and de Thoisy was forced to flee his post completely. As a result, the French company disbanded. Shareholders sold the French lands of St. Kitts to the Knights of Malta for 120,000 livres. The family of Jacques Dyel du Parquet obtained the proprietorship of Guadeloupe and Martinique.⁸⁰ In part because he was backed by Thomas Warner, de Poincy remained governor over the French quarters of St. Kitts until his death in 1660.

The uprisings in St. Kitts marked a crisis in power and leadership for de Poincy as well as Warner. The men who struck for the formation of the St. Kitts assembly may have been motivated in part by their own material interests, informed by news of a resistant Parliament in England, or even driven to take sides according to the tensions of the three kingdoms. Yet when read against the rebellion against de Thoisy, the power struggles in St. Kitts suggest that colonists were not acting because of broader Atlantic ideological causes, but rather according to the immediate realities in the islands.

Metropolitan political ideology simply provided a way to frame claims to property. In both cases, the crisis created by the glut in tobacco prices spurred hostility toward the military leadership who had forced the residents to forgo the planting of tobacco on their own lands. When Jesson and the other "country" folk argued that they lived in a "free

⁷⁹ Although romantically stylized and struck by a negative view of Poincy, Du Tertre's writings are widely sighted as informative. See Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale*, I:123, 166, 290. See also Boucher, *Tropics*, 83-86. Also *Histoire Naturelle & Morale Des Îles Antilles de L'amerique*, 284-291.

⁸⁰ Boucher, *Tropics*, 84-85.

colony,” they did so not in rejection of the monarchy, but in rejection of proprietary dues and the consolidation of power in the hands of Warner. Their desire to trade freely was not because they considered themselves “free born Englishmen”—many of them may not have even considered themselves English—but rather because open trade with passing ships was already established practice and a known necessity. At the same time, colonists in the French quarter as well as in Martinique and Guadeloupe rebelled against imperial controls they believed were excessive.

When read as entangled events, the crises in St. Kitts and the surrounding islands suggest the extent to which settlers were already beginning to imagine themselves as living in a place where local control and culture could trump metropolitan coercion. Though defeated, white settlers in English St. Kitts honored the memory of their struggle. Settlers created a holiday to celebrate the day when Thomas Warner first conceded to the country party demands, an annual celebration that the founder of the English colony did not appreciate.⁸¹

After Warner’s death in 1649, ambivalence in the Leewards toward outside influence on local affairs remained while the desire for internal representation persisted. The allegiances that island governors struck with competing sides during the English Civil War do not suggest the kinds of ideological commitments highlighted by Everard and the other petitioners, but rather of opportunists who weighed competing claims of authority against their needs to maintain local control. In 1649, the English governor of St. Kitts resigned the 1627 treaty with the French at Basseterre, citing his commission from King Charles to underscore his authority. Yet when Lord Francis Willoughby

⁸¹ Pestana, *The English Atlantic*, 167.

sailed to the Leewards in 1650 with the intent to enforce Carlisle's patent claims in the name of King Charles II, landowners in St. Kitts refused to acknowledge that the Lord's power was official, stating that they were going to remain neutral during his ongoing conflict with the Parliamentarians.⁸² In response, Willoughby attempted to install a new governor (Sydenham Poyntz) against their wishes, but the appointee was quickly hurried off the island—an event seemingly forgotten to the petitioners whose appeal opened this chapter.⁸³

Similar patterns of ambivalence toward metropolitan authority occurred in Nevis, Montserrat, and Antigua as well. Even in Antigua, where Warner's longtime adversary Henry Ashton welcomed Willoughby, Antiguans agreed that their governor made a mistake after Parliament imposed an embargo on the island in response to the royalist proprietor's "rebellion."⁸⁴ After naval commander George Ayscue proved Parliamentarians could flex their strength in the region by forcing recalcitrant royalists at Barbados to capitulate in 1652, planters in St. Kitts, Nevis, Montserrat, and Antigua did not put up a fight and accepted Parliamentary authority. Again, an act that petitioners Clement Everard and William Freeman seemed to have forgotten. In fact, it was under Everard's governorship that colonists in St. Kitts made a formal appeal to Parliament for a new pattern of government on the island. The planters in St. Kitts wanted an annual

⁸² It is important to note, in contrast to the Clement Everard and the other petitioner's claims mentioned above, Thomas Warner was not the ideological loyalist they described. He was an opportunist. When Cromwell took over, he accepted Parliament's commission to continue as Lieutenant-Governor of the Caribbees, a title he had been previously accepted from the Earl of Warwick, the pro-Parliament aristocrat who had used his influence to challenge Carlisle's claims to the islands. See Appointment of Sir Thomas Warner, Governor and Lieutenant-General of the Caribbee Islands, November 24, 1643, CO 1/1/8, extracted in CSPCO 1/324. For a discussion of the competing claims, see *Ibid.*, 46-48.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 97, Burns, *History of the British West Indies*, 236-237.

⁸⁴ Burns, *History of the British West Indies*, 233-243, Pestana, *The English Atlantic*, 47, 97, Bennett, "The English Caribbees."

elected assembly, no laws repugnant to those established in England, and no marital law. Ayscue consented, and thereafter, the Governor-Council-Assembly model of government took hold on each of the islands.⁸⁵

From One Colony, the Generation of Another

In a 1646 letter urging the Earl of Carlisle to replace Warner, Antigua's governor Henry Ashton claimed that some of the rebels fled St. Kitts for nearby islands. According to Ashton, Nevis, the tiny island just south of St. Kitts, received the "married and estated people," the rebel "gentleman," the planters of "honesty and piety," and the "better sort." In contrast, poorer supporters of the country party, the debtors and the landless, did not follow the planters to Nevis, but found their "liberty" in St. Croix, an island that de Poincy tried to seize from the Spanish on behalf of the Knights of Malta. These "streams" of migration from St. Kitts, Ashton claimed, were an example how corruption in one island spawned the desire for political and economic liberty elsewhere in the archipelago. "The ruin of St. Christopher," he explained, "does as naturally contribute to the corruption of one thing as to the generation of another."⁸⁶

When Ashton wrote his letter, St. Kitts was, in fact, far from a ruined place. The crowded island was the bright star of the Îles du Vent, the second most important English colony in the Caribbean, and perhaps the single most densely populated colony in the New World. Contemporary reports place the number of people of European descent living in the English sector of St. Kitts at 3,650 in 1640, while in the French quarters, the

⁸⁵ Pestana, *The English Atlantic*, 111-112.

⁸⁶ At least eight hundred "persons" had fled for Nevis, suggesting at least a thirty percent increase of the island's population tiny population. Pestana, "Ashton," 400-401. These two patterns of settlement—of planters taking up lands in Antigua, Nevis, and Montserrat to the south and east of St. Kitts and sailors, freebooters, and woodcutters setting up camps in the Virgin Islands to the west—continued to shape the development of the islands in the region into the eighteenth century (see Chapter V).

number of white colonists probably stood somewhere between two and three thousand. Estimates place the number of white settlers living at Nevis at near 3,000 as well. If these numbers are correct, the total population of St. Kitts and Nevis approached 8,000 residents within the first fifteen years of settlement. This was roughly the size of colonial Virginia at the same time. Even if Nevis is added into the equation (and thus increasing the area sampled), the population density of the two islands, including French settlement and excluding the ever-increasing size of the African population, density reached approximately 33 people per square kilometer as opposed to 22 in Barbados in the 1640s. Montserrat, which sits halfway between Nevis and Guadeloupe, had a settler population close to 2,000, most of whom were Irish laborers.⁸⁷

It was Ashton's Antigua—not St. Kitts—that was the desperate English colony in 1646. Only about 750 colonists lived on the island when the governor wrote his letter to Carlisle. And of this number, only “three hundred and fifty,” (some of them enslaved Caribs and Africans) were “serviceable in the field.” The rest were women and children.⁸⁸ In part, Antigua's slow development was partially related to the environment—unlike Nevis and St. Kitts, the island lacked freshwater. Antiguanians had to build large cisterns to collect rain, and in periods of drought, locals hired ship captains to sail to Nevis and Guadeloupe to import water back to the island.⁸⁹

Whereas Antigua looked bleak in 1645, Nevis's rapid growth in the years following the tobacco depression foreshadowed the entire region's descent into racial

⁸⁷ For English estimates, see Pestana, *The English Atlantic*, 232-233, 327, n.244. Two-thousand French settlers in St. Kitts is a low estimate; Boucher suggests the number may have been closer to 6,000, see Boucher, *Tropics*, 132. Other accounts suggest the French colonists amounted to some 3,000 by 1655, still twice that of Guadeloupe and Martinique; Blackburn, *Making*, 282, Dubois, *Colony of Citizens*, 32.

⁸⁸ Pestana, “Ashton,” 399. It is unclear whether enslaved folk on the island were of African or Carib descent, or both.

⁸⁹ Governor-General John Hart to the Board of Trade, St. Kitts, May 20, 1726, CO 152/15/R166/237b-238.

slavery and sugar production. By the late 1640s, the wealthiest landowners in Nevis began to turn away from raising tobacco and toward sugarcane. In 1652, when the Cavalier Prince Rupert sailed to the Lesser Antilles in an attempt to assert royal power, one of his men related that Nevis had become “valued more than any other of the English plantations.” It was “esteemed the best island for sugar” in the region.⁹⁰ The Huguenot de Rochefort, a patron of de Poincy, wrote that Nevisians lived “handsomely, by the trade they drive in sugar, ginger, and tobacco.” He believed close to three thousand settlers occupied the island.⁹¹ The historian may have underestimated the number. Under the direction of the governor Luke Stokes, upwards of 1,400 men, women, and children from Nevis resettled in Jamaica after Cromwell’s “Western-Design” fleet took the island from the Spanish in 1655.⁹²

The transformation of Nevis from a satellite colony of St. Kitts to an island planted in sugar helped facilitate the construction of forts, storehouses, and churches on the islands by the middle of the seventeenth century. As early as the 1640s, colonists built three modest churches on the island. They lacked the beautiful “sweet-scented-wood” pulpit, seats, and elaborate carpentry found in the single church in Montserrat to the south, but they served their purpose. Colonists in Nevis also built a single fort that secured the public storehouse on the leeward side of the island, later naming the port

⁹⁰ Eliot Warburton, ed. *Memoirs of Prince Rupert, and the Cavaliers. Including Their Private Correspondence, Now First Published from the Original Manuscripts* (London: R. Bentley, 1849). Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, 162.

⁹¹ *History of the Caribby-Islands*, 20.

⁹² Vice Admiral William Goodson to the Admiralty Commissioners, Torrington, Jamaica, June 24, 1656, CO 1/32/63, extracted in CSPCO 9/260/110-11. Many of the Nevis planters appear to have settled at Port Morant, see Cornelius Burough to the Secretary of the Admiralty Commissioners, Jamaica, November 28, 1658, CO 1/33/48, extracted in CSPCO 9/308/125. Also Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, 162, John Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America Containing the History of the Discovery, Settlement, Progress and Present State of All the British Colonies, on the Continent and Islands of America*, 2 vols. (London: printed for John Nicholson, Benjamin Tooke, and Richard Parker and Ralph Smith, 1708), II: 204.

Charles Town. According to the writer of *The History of the Caribby-Islands*, all commodities shipped to the island were delivered to the island's single storehouse where they were in turn "distributed to those private persons" who had "the over-sight" to make deals with solvent buyers. Market times and prices were fixed by order of the governor and council, but this may have changed after the island adopted an assembly. By the 1670s, both public and private storehouses had appeared in Charles Town.⁹³

Although Nevis is so close to the southern tip of St. Kitts that daring swimmers were known to cross between the two in the 1650s, English Nevisians quickly earned a reputation as having a distinct identity connected to their political outlook.⁹⁴ De Rochefort claimed Nevis was "the best governed of any in the Caribbies." He explained that justice on Nevis was "administered with great prudence" and that "swearing, thieving, drunkenness, fornication, and all dissolutions and disorders" were severely punished on the island.⁹⁵ The island's reputation as a sanctuary for English political dissidents attracted dissenters accused of plotting against the Stuart monarchy in the 1680s, when men like James Holloway and Azariah Pinney fled to the island. In 1689, Christopher Codrington described Nevisian colonists as a "most turbulent and ungovernable people."⁹⁶ During the 1720s and 1730s, some of the most prolific writers concerned with Walpolian-era initiatives to restructure sugar duties came from Nevis—most notably, Robert Robertson, an Anglican rector who also despised the Bishop of

⁹³ *History of the Caribby-Islands*, 19-20.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 22. One of the most powerful landed families on the island was the Pym, who traced their heritage to John Pym, leader of the Long Parliament.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁹⁶ Lieutenant-General Codrington to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Antigua, November 11, 1689, CO 152/37/52.

London's appeals that colonists have their slaves baptized.⁹⁷ Another Anglican rector who resided on the island during the 1720s, William Smith, described "Nevisians" as a people who had a "heroic disposition" and were "tenacious of their liberties."⁹⁸ Smith's description does not account for the fact that many of the colonists in Nevis—black and white—had family connections living in St. Kitts and thus shared cultural ties with their neighbors, but his description nonetheless captures an element of island pride that both Kittsians and Nevisians will happily tell you about even today.

While some planters began raising cane fields in Nevis, sugar production in the English-controlled territories was the exception rather than the rule in 1640s and 1650s. Only Barbados showed the signs of becoming consumed by the sweet crop in the middle of the century. Small amounts of sugar may have been grown in Antigua and sold to a few planters with enough capital to keep a mill. Large-scale slave keeping was probably practiced by plantation owners in Montserrat, where governor Anthony Briskett owned a 1,400-acre plantation with works.⁹⁹ By the 1660s, the sugar regime may have begun to accelerate in English St. Kitts as well. In fact, English St. Kitts may have been the only black majority in the English islands (save Barbados) by that time. One source suggests

⁹⁷ Robert Robertson, *A Detection of the State and Situation of the Present Sugar Planters of Barbadoes and the Leeward Islands* (London: printed and sold by J. Wilford, 1732), Robert Robertson, *A Supplement to the Direction of the State and Situation of the Present Sugar Planters of Barbadoes and the Leeward-Islands* (London: Printed for J. Wilford, 1733). On slave baptisms, see Robert Robertson, *A Letter to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of London, from an Inhabitant of His Majesty's Leeward-Caribbee-Islands. Containing Some Considerations on His Lordship's Two Letters of May 19, 1727* (London: printed for J. Wilford, 1730).

⁹⁸ William Smith, *A Natural History of Nevis, and the Rest of the English Leeward Charibee Islands in America. With Many Other Observations on Nature and Art; Particularly, an Introduction to the Art of Decyphering. In Eleven Letters from the Reverend Mr. Smith* (London: printed by J. Bentham, sold by W. Thurlbourn, S. Birt, C. Bathurst, and J. Beecroft, 1745), 224.

⁹⁹ On early sugar works in St. Kitts, Antigua, Montserrat, Martinique, and Guadeloupe in the 1640s, see Pestana, "Ashton," 401, Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World*, 73-74. Also Mims, *Colbert*, 31-35, Boucher, *Tropics*, 91-92.

that 4,000 white men and at least 9,000 “Negroes” labored in the English quarter in 1666, a sure testament to the presence of large-scale sugar manufacture.¹⁰⁰

Although slave ships began arriving at English St. Kitts as early as 1626, French colonists transitioned to sugar and the use of African labor on a large scale much faster than their English neighbors. Planters in English St. Kitts and Nevis may have learned sugar cultivation techniques of the racially organized plantation complex from their French neighbors. In 1638, the same year that Louis XIII appointed de Poincy, the French king authorized French habitants to use African slaves in his colonies.¹⁰¹ French governors eager to learn the “art” of sugar making were aided directly by the influx of 600 Dutch and Portuguese Jewish refugees who fled Pernambuco in 1654; they brought 300 slaves and sugar mill equipment with them to Martinique and Guadeloupe.¹⁰² Soon after French plantation owners established refineries capable of producing fine white sugar, which was sold at much greater rates abroad.¹⁰³ Some of the religious orders in the French islands owned more slaves than most colonists—Jesuits owned the largest sugar plantation in Martinique in 1660, Dominicans also purchased Africans, but Capuchins distanced themselves from the practice.¹⁰⁴ Within seventeen years of the French King’s 1638 proclamation permitting slavery in the French colonies, more than 10,000 people of African descent found themselves enslaved to French owners.¹⁰⁵ Conflicts between the England and the United Provinces helped steer Dutch traders toward the French colonies

¹⁰⁰ The general state of the Leeward Islands, together with the differences between the English and French, delivered to Secretary Lord Arlington by H. Slingsby, April 16, 1672, CO 1/28/42, extracted in CSPCO 7/805/349.

¹⁰¹ Boucher, *Tropics*, 77.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁰³ Blackburn, *Making*, 283.

¹⁰⁴ Boucher, *Tropics*, 158, 245.

¹⁰⁵ Blackburn, *Making*, 282, Dubois, *Colony of Citizens*, 32.

in the 1650s.¹⁰⁶ By 1671, the enslaved black population comprised the majority of the colonists in the French Antilles.¹⁰⁷ Du Tertre believed most Africans arrived to St. Kitts and the surrounding islands via Dutch ships that touched at St. Eustatius.¹⁰⁸

Perhaps no one benefitted more from the legalization of the slave trade to the French islands than de Poincy. Supplied with African labor by his Dutch-speaking neighbors, he was able to command the construction of a gigantic estate near Basseterre, St. Kitts where slaves were said to have lived in brick housing. By the 1650s, slaves worked vigorously to cultivate sugar and indigo, both of which required significant technology and task specialization. By the 1660s, the French governor owned at least 374 men, women, and children. As one scholar has noted, this was more than three times what Thomas Modyford owned by 1650—and he owned more men and women from Africa than any other slaveowner in Barbados.¹⁰⁹

It did not take enslaved folk in the islands long to figure out that the geography of the islands could be twisted to their advantage. Just as poor white laborers used the boundaries in St. Kitts to escape abusive masters and the close proximity of the islands to run away, men and women of African descent searched for ways to make the environment work in their favor. Just as Warner and de Poincy hashed out new creole alliances in the frontier to buttress their power, so, too, did their racial Others. The same year that de Poincy arrived in St. Kitts, more than 60 enslaved men and women fled with

¹⁰⁶ Boucher, *Tropics*, 155.

¹⁰⁷ James S. Pritchard, *In Search of Empire: The French in the Americas, 1670-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 50, 54.

¹⁰⁸ Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale Des Isles Des S. Christophe*, 478-479.

¹⁰⁹ *Histoire Naturelle & Morale Des Îles Antilles de L'amerique*, 54, Boucher, *Tropics*, 156. Du Tertre states in his 1654 history that most of the Africans who labored in St. Kitts were from Cape Verde, some of whom were Muslim, and from Angola, some of whom were baptized. See Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale Des Isles Des S. Christophe*, 474-475.

their children to mountainous terrain between French Point de Sable and the English quarter. These maroons staged pillaging campaigns from their hideout, a move that forced the French governor to retaliate in 1639.¹¹⁰ In Martinique in 1656, Angolan slaves named Pedro and Jean Le Blanc tried to form an alliance with enslaved folk from Cape Verde to start an uprising against their French settlers. Sometimes Africans joined Caribs in their fight against French incursions. During a major French attack of a Carib community at Martinique in 1658, armed African maroons agreed to help beat back the onslaught. Some of the black fighters had been enslaved in Guadeloupe and fled the island for Martinique in hopes of securing their freedom at the Carib stronghold to the south.¹¹¹ These early alliances between Caribs and Africans were not only part of a larger, long-term political and cultural creolization, they also set the stage for a distinct “Black Carib” identity to emerge later in the century. They were acts of resistance that offered enslaved folk and attacked Caribs the image of an alternative future, one that ran counter to the expanding imperial geography that was consuming the islands and turning people into chattel.

Conclusion

By investigating the first decades of English and French settlement in the tiny island of St. Kitts and the ways settlements there spawned new colonies elsewhere, it is possible to begin to think of broader historiographic themes like imperial ideology and identity through local issues of power and governance. The joint effort of the English and French governors of the island to eliminate the Carib community points to the ways that these European “strangers,” as the writer of the *History of the Caribby-Islands* would

¹¹⁰ Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale*, I:153.

¹¹¹ Boucher, *Tropics*, 166.

later call them, thought of each other as linked by common bonds of Europeaness—principally defined by white skin, Christian practice, and the desire for private property, specifically land. Servants in Nevis who jumped in the water to reach the passing Spanish ships in an effort to gain their freedom did so in part because they thought they might be welcomed by the ship captain; Colt hosted the Dutch governor of St. Martin because it was what proper European gentlemen did; French Catholic governors in Basseterre welcomed Dutch merchants because they could provide the luxuries of spirits, beer, and increasingly, African labor. Although colonists like Henry Colt arrived from Europe to the islands with more specific notions of self—ideas of being Catholic, being an English gentleman skilled in war, or even being an Irish servant—these collective identities did not create impermeable social barriers, but rather, provided the social cues that created the context for colonists to engender and promote ideas of racial and cultural belonging that could stretch across both internal island boundaries and the liminal space of the sea.

Yet when Warner and Bélain arrived in St. Kitts, they also divided the island into distinct quarters that linked these local spaces to broader imperial circuits. Over time, colonists would come to call these different spaces the “English” and “French” quarters, although no such language in the original 1627 treaty exists. However, as properties held by proprietors or royally chartered companies, the new settlements in the Lesser Antilles were linked to the political wrangling and policy making of elites in the metropole. Settlers like Warner and de Poincy created internal discipline over their colonies by imposing hierarchical rules that not only buttressed their own power, but also worked to maintain these Atlantic circuits of imperial association. Internal boundary making

created visual borders that marked the power of the individual governors in space. At the same time, proprietary dues and tobacco policies underscored for locals that power from abroad mattered. These sinews of trade, politics, and patronage provided the practical links that helped to keep old world ideas of national belonging and difference intact in a region where frontier conditions facilitated the erosion of national identity and emergence of a nascent white Creole mentality.

Finally, the archipelagic nature of the islands permitted elites to carve out their own spaces apart from each other without losing the benefits of these broader imperial circuits and access to metropolitan markets. Political dissent within the French and English quarters of St. Kitts in the 1630s and 1640s, coupled with the emergence of new ideological impulses from abroad, helped spawn new settlements in Antigua, Nevis, and other nearby islands. The political strife in St. Kitts helped give birth to a newly emerging planter and merchant class in Nevis, where expats from the neighboring island would create government institutions to guard their liberties. In Antigua, Henry Ashton used the distance between St. Kitts and his small settlement to buttress his own power and make a colony where royalist sympathizers might find some solace. Montserrat, not yet discussed in much detail, became an island where Irish laborers could escape their marginalization from elsewhere in the archipelago and find limited opportunities to acquire land and slaves and practice their Catholicism in the open. The islands were becoming mini-nations. In the interim, enslaved folk were already beginning to search for a different way to live, for that greener island that seemed to glow through the saltwater haze on the horizon.

Chapter II

His Majesty's Leeward Caribees

In the summer of 1665, colonists living in the chain of islands stretching from Montserrat to St. Eustatius awoke to a terrifying sight. A large fleet of Dutch ships commanded by Admiral Michiel de Ruyter was offshore firing cannons into the air while his men struggled to seize as many merchant ships as they could. The fleet had already attacked Barbados after sacking English forts along the Gold Coast. By the time the embers cooled and the admiral anchored his fleet at St. Eustatius, English merchants from Nevis and Montserrat had lost at least sixteen ships.¹ French settlers at St. Kitts remained unscathed. De Ruyter, conscious of the neutrality treaty signed between France and the United Provinces, avoided firing on any of the French vessels anchored at Basseterre. To the colonists in the English quarters, the détente raised fears that before long the tiny island of St. Kitts would be engulfed by the larger imperial conflagration that seemed to be on the horizon. The attack signaled that even if islanders preferred amity and peace in the archipelago, metropolitan states had the firepower to drive a wedge between neighbors.

As English colonial governors soon discovered, however, imperial wars did not immediately engender imperial allegiance in the Lesser Antilles. Just as the close spacing of the islands helped to foster local trade and boost the success of the colonial

¹ Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line*, 166-167.

experiments, the same culture that grew out of the constellation-like arrangement of the islands also helped to foster regional alliances which worked against English governors charged with defending the colonies as imperial property. When war between France and England finally arrived in the islands, many of the most ardent defenders of the emerging English imperial regime found themselves surrounded by men who did not really want to fight. Not only were the governors and militia captains outnumbered by colonists who cared more about protecting their land and keeping their property than they did defending the interests of a state and king on the other side of the Atlantic, but they also faced the reality of contending with a resident laboring population comprised mostly of Irish folk who resented their English masters. By 1667, Antigua, Montserrat, and the English quarter of St. Kitts were in French hands. Only Nevis emerged from the war unscathed.

The crisis of the Second “Anglo-Dutch” War in the Leewards highlights how British imperial identity did not grow organically in the islands. Empire was a metropolitan project that had to be imposed locally, from above. To remedy this problem, governors, council members, and assemblymen in the islands relied on a three-pronged effort to consolidate regional power and encourage white settlement in the islands. First, elites in the English islands used the violence of 1666 as a reason to create a new federally organized political structure that linked the islands together in a loose union known as “His Majesty’s Leeward Caribees.”² In doing so, merchants and planters in the islands successfully lobbied to end direct Barbadian influence on local affairs. Along with the formation of the new federation came direct access to the Royal African Company, which set up its local entrepôt within view of the Leeward Governor-General’s

² C.S.S. Higham, “The General Assembly of the Leeward Islands,” *The English Historical Review* 41, no. 162 (1926).

massive estate in Nevis. Access to the Atlantic slave trade through English state-sanctioned channels proved the second prong that helped keep locals loyal to the metropole. Slavery enabled elites to use racism as a way to buttress their power, as it helped accelerate planter access to an “outsider” class at the same time that it provided free and indentured white laborers a reason to maintain their allegiance to the English Crown. By extending a variety of liberties to poorer white folk and giving them a reason to buy into the racial plantation regime, elites hoped to create stable local communities that could protect land claims in the face of invasions from French competition.

Both slavery and the consolidation of local control were dependent on the third strategy and turning the intertwined islands into imperial colonies: the promotion of anti-Carib violence. During peacetime, the Leeward government sanctioned massive “Indian-hunting” expeditions against Carib strongholds in Dominica to the south, a move that infuriated the Barbadian government. By supporting the attack on Indians who were accused of being the French “bloodhounds,” local governors in the Leewards simultaneously trumpeted the glories of (white) English liberty and illustrated that the Leeward governments could act independently of their more powerful Barbadian neighbors. Together, this three-pronged strategy encouraged locals in the English-controlled islands to see the broader imperial project as something to defend and the Leeward alliance in particular as significant and effective. In short, it was in the aftermath of the war that the notion of the British Leeward Islands became a useful way for white colonists living and laboring in the islands to organize themselves and protect their interests.

Neutrality, asunder

Several months after the Dutch fleet descended upon the Leewards, Governor Watts of the English sector of St. Kitts and Governor Charles de Sales of the French quarter hashed out a new treaty of neutrality in January of 1666.³ Modeled on earlier treaties signed on the island, the agreement stipulated how Governor Watts and Governor de Sales were supposed to handle an official declaration of war. The treaty stipulated that if a declaration of war did arrive from Europe, the receiving party was responsible for informing the other side. Governors of the two quarters were expected to keep the peace for three days so that the other side had time to muster their forces. Although “such a policy of neutrality was never even considered in England,” French governors had directives from abroad to treat with their English neighbors in St. Kitts.⁴

Although Watts and de Sales signed the treaty, it remained unclear to French officials whether or not English metropolitans would find the agreement legitimate. Following the restoration of Charles II to the English throne, the King of England appointed Willoughby Governor-General of the “English Caribbees,” a new political apparatus designed to help enforce the Navigation Acts in the colonies.⁵ Instead of

³ Egerton 2395/348, Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale*, III: 275-296, Higham, *Development of the Leeward Islands*, 43.

⁴ Higham, *Development of the Leeward Islands*, 44.

⁵ In 1660, even before his commission was sealed, Willoughby urged Thomas Povey, Treasurer and Receiver-General of the Rents and Revenues for James, Duke of York, to issue commissions to William Watts, James Russell, George Marsh, and Roger Osborne to serve as Lieutenant-Governors in St. Kitts, Nevis, Antigua, and Montserrat, respectively. Watts was outsider, but Marsh, Russell and Osborne had already established considerable wealth in the islands. *Ibid.*, 18-19. Part of the deal also reframed the legal definition of private property. Under the proprietorship, land was officially leased from the proprietor who controlled the Carlisle grant. After the formation of the “English Caribbees,” land titles on the island were reconfirmed under the pretense of the feudal arrangement of common socage, whereby landholders were recognized as permanent leaseholders who were free to buy, sell, or bequeath the leased land as long as they held a contract. The arrangement was only a step away from freehold arrangements and largely a superficial measure; the terms of the “lease” set rent at a single grain of Indian corn. Higham, *Development of the Leeward Islands*, 22-23, Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World*, 81.

proprietary dues, Willoughby was responsible for ensuring that the Crown received the new 4.5% duty on goods exported from the islands to England. In exchange for paying the duty, colonists in Antigua, Nevis, Montserrat, and St. Kitts were allowed to keep their assemblies, but their governors—and thus their military support—became subordinate to the Governor-General at Barbados. French officials were aware that William Watts was Willoughby's handpicked Lieutenant-Governor for the divided island and that any agreement he made with de Sales had to be confirmed by his superior in Bridgetown, some 350 miles to the south. To ensure the agreement was legitimate, the French sent a diplomatic mission to Barbados to meet with the Governor-General. Although Willoughby entertained the envoy upon their arrival, he avoided providing the ambassadors any clear response to their requests. The governor may have been following orders. A year earlier, Willoughby had already been instructed from Whitehall to prepare for war, and if need be, to command his fleet at Bridgetown to drive the French from St. Kitts.⁶

The effort to keep the peace in St. Kitts proved fruitless. Violence between the English and French quarters erupted before the official declaration of war arrived in Bridgetown. The events that triggered the conflict are unclear, but the French forces captured the English quarter of St. Kitts in a single day. Du Tertre claimed that 8,000 white colonists fled St. Kitts; an English governor maintained the number was closer to 5,000.⁷ More than 1,500 tobacco farmers and sugar growers fled to Nevis, but others

⁶ Higham, *Development of the Leeward Islands*, 43-44.

⁷ Another source puts the number closer to 6,500, see *Reasons why the Planters and Merchants of the Leeward Isles desire the Planters or Surinam to be directed to St. Christophers*, October 10, 1670, CO 389/5/6-7, extracted in CSPCO 7/292/112; For estimate of 5,000, see *Report of Two Conferences of the Council of Trade and Plantations with Sir Charles Wheeler*, December 7 and 10, 1672, CO 1/29/53,

abandoned the island completely for Jamaica, Virginia, and New England, bringing enslaved men, women, and children with them to labor in new conditions.⁸ So many colonists had been driven out of St. Kitts that one group of merchants who had profited from the tiny island's growth asked the Council of Trade to force plantation owners from Surinam to migrate to the island. The petitioners wanted "the English and their Negroes" to be sent "to St. Christopher's to plant."⁹

The preemptive conflict in St. Kitts soon turned into a wider conflagration that engulfed the neighboring islands. From Martinique, a fleet comprised of French colonists, flibustiers (the French term for buccaneers), and Carib warriors sacked Montserrat and Antigua, burning down the houses, tobacco fields, and the sugar mills of the colonists who refused to submit to the Crown of France.¹⁰ While the French fleet did not sack Nevis, the island was overwhelmed with refugees from the surrounding islands and who brought diseases with them. One estimate placed losses in the three captured islands at £400,000, including at least 150 sugar works.¹¹ Enslaved folk were caught in the crossfire. The number of slaves captured in the conflict probably reached about 1,700—French colonists and flibustiers removed some 400 from St. Kitts, 649 in Montserrat, and upwards of 700 from Antigua.¹² In 1667, by agreements hashed out at

extracted in CSPCO 7/977/440-441, Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale*, IV:62, Higham, *Development of the Leeward Islands*, 46.

⁸ Francis Sampson to his brother John Sampson, Nevis, June 6, 1666, CO 1/20/97, Higham, *Development of the Leeward Islands*, 46.

⁹ Petition of divers planters and merchants trading to the Leeward Isles to the Council for Foreign Plantations, September 22, 1670, CO 153/1/1-3, extracted in CSPCO 7/268/97-98. Barbadians opposed the proposition.

¹⁰ The best account of the conflict in Higham, *Development*, Chapter 2. See also Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 124.

¹¹ The State of the Case of the Sugar Plantations in America, May, 1671, CO 1/26/57.

¹² Petition of Lieutenant Governor Stapleton and the Council and Assembly of Montserrat to the Council of Trade and Plantations, Montserrat, June 19, 1672, CO 1/28/66, Report of Dr. Benjamin Worsley, Secretary, to the Council of Trade and Plantations, February 18, 1673, CO 31/3/62-70, extracted in CSPCO

Breda, Louis XIV returned Montserrat and Antigua to the Charles II but France refused to return the middle sector of St. Kitts. From April of 1666 to 1671, St. Kitts was officially a French colony.¹³

Reluctant Imperialists

It is unclear what ultimately sparked the conflict in St. Kitts in April of 1666. Only after captives were shipped to Nevis did rumors begin to circulate about how Governor Watts and other landowners rapidly capitulated to the French, leaving only the 250 privateers from recently captured St. Eustatius to defend the English lands with the help of a small force from Nevis. After the smoke faded away, metropolitans quickly learned that colonists in the Leewards cared more about their own self-preservation than they did their Stuart king's new empire.

Letters sent to England after the battles concluded suggest that island elites had willingly conceded to French authority in St. Kitts and Montserrat in order to protect their property. Governor-General Willoughby wrote to the Privy Council in May that he heard from his deputy governor Russell at Nevis that "1,200 or 1,500 men well armed" simply gave up to Governor de Sales at St. Kitts.¹⁴ While in Nevis, Francis Sampson heard the loss of the English quarter happened because Watts refused to fight. Apparently a fight between the English governor and the captain of the privateer force from St. Eustatius broke out when Watts did not retaliate when the French began burning plantations near

7/1033/466-467, Sir Charles Wheler to Secretary Lord Arlington, St. Kitts, December 19, 1671, CO 1/27/51.

¹³ Boucher, *Tropics*, 182-184.

¹⁴ Governor Lord Willoughby to the King, Barbados, May 12, 1666, CO 1/20/92.

Cayon Division. Sampson heard that the English governor refused to fight until Captain Morgan placed his pistol on Watt's chest and called him a "traitor and a coward."¹⁵

Another account written after the French already had control of the island also painted Watts as indifferent to the fact that houses were being burned and men, women, and children were fleeing to the mountains for safety. John Brown wrote to his associate that Captain Morgan arrived at Governor Watt's house only to find him in his "gown and slippers." After the confrontation, Watts reportedly amassed two or three hundred armed men and marched them to Sandy Point, where Morgan had his men stationed. Instead of aiming at the French, however, rumors suggested that Watts ordered his men to fire on both "French and English," thereby killing "40 or 50 English." Both Watts and Morgan were killed in the skirmish. With Morgan out of the picture, Watts's men capitulated. One of his captains supposedly urged his men to surrender by fabricating a story that a French force of 2,000 men was ready to march on them from Basseterre.¹⁶

Governor Watts's wife wrote to Whitehall soon after the affair and blamed the loss of her estate and the death of her husband on the "treacherous officers" who "cowardly surrendered to the French." She claimed that Colonel Reymes "with 400 men stood to windward and saw the English destroyed and their houses burnt, but did not assist" and instead "commanded his men to stand still, telling them he would make as honourable terms with the French as ever they had with the English." Margaret Watts claimed that Reymes wrote to the French commander "craving submission to the French King," stating in his letter that any resistance his men showed was because of Governor Watt's orders. Residents were given the option to take the oath of allegiance or to leave

¹⁵ Francis Sampson to his brother John Sampson, Nevis, June 6, 1666, CO 1/20/97.

¹⁶ Joseph Browne to Williamson, June 24, 1666, CO 1/20/103.

the island, but according to Margaret Watts, “most of the rich ones valued their money above their God and stayed there with Reymes,” helping him to raise the French flag over Sandy Point.¹⁷ Although the truth behind the loss of English St. Kitts is shrouded in rumor and innuendo, most of the correspondence agrees that many of the landowners accepted the French articles of surrender, which stipulated that English colonists could remain as “peaceable possessors of their goods” as long as they acknowledged Louis as their sovereign. Residents who remained under French occupation were extended “liberty of their conscience,” but could not “have temples or make any assemblies whatsoever” and were forbidden from committing any “act whereby the Catholics may be scandalized.”¹⁸

While landed colonists accepted the French terms of the takeover, the conflicts in the islands were also infused with elements of religious violence. Flibustiers and slaves burned churches and pillaged for them for their valuable woodwork when they invaded the English quarter of St. Kitts as well as Montserrat and Antigua. All six churches in English St. Kitts were burnt or disassembled, their timber taken to the French quarter where locals used the wood to rebuild.¹⁹ Several of the letters noted that two priests marched into the English quarter with the French captains, and that Irish colonists joined in the battles against their English masters. In St. Kitts, Irish men and their priests were rumored to have charged into the battle with the “French General,” encouraging him to move on and attack the church at St. Nicholas Town. One letter cast the fight at the church as an example of English valor. Joseph Brown wrote that Lieutenant Hoskins,

¹⁷ Margaret Watts to Sir William Darcy, Whitehall, Barbados, May 13, 1666, CO 1/20/95.

¹⁸ Articles betwixt the English and French on St. Christopher’s, upon the invasion of the French and surrender of the English, St. Kitts, CO 1/20/52 and 53(English).

¹⁹ Sir Charles Wheler to the Secretary of the Council for Plantations, September 2, 1675, CO 1/35/14.

perceiving a “Negro ready to set fire to St. Nicholas Church,” shot him to save the building. Hoskins men then hid in the thicket near the church and launched “one volley” that killed the general and the “two Religious.”²⁰ Francis Sampson not only blamed the loss of the English quarter on Watts’s collusion with the French governor at Basseterre, but also on the “Irish” who he claimed were “always a bloody and perfidious people to the English Protestant interest.” He told his brother how when the privateer force was caught in their final skirmish near Sandy Point, armed Irish men “fired volleys into the front and killed more” Englishmen than “the enemy of our own forces.”²¹

Accusations against poor Irish colonists were in part opportunistic petitions worded to appeal to the sentiments of metropolitan officials charged with figuring out what to do with the ravaged islands. It is impossible to know exactly why some Irish colonists decided to side with the French in the “English” islands during the war, but the evidence certainly suggest that identity (whether religious, national, or combination of the two) did not *determine* imperial allegiance during the conflict. Claims that the “perfidious Irish” were at the root of the losses in property were an easy way for English gentlemen to refocus imperial attention away from their failures. However, Irish participation during the French invasions should not be treated simply as a trope created as an outlet for English angst about the severe loss of property. Poor Irish colonists did forge a regional identity in the islands that undermined the English imperial project—and there were very real connections that linked Irish colonists to French authorities in St. Kitts and Martinique. Perhaps the most important was the fact that French governors in St. Kitts welcomed Catholic missionaries to the islands and encouraged them to serve

²⁰ Joseph Browne to Williamson, June 24, 1666, CO 1/20/103.

²¹ Francis Sampson to his brother John Sampson, Nevis, June 6, 1666, CO 1/20/97.

Irish settlers in the colonies regardless of where they resided. In the English islands, where oaths to defend the Crown also meant allegiance to the Church of England, Irish Catholics had to practice their faith underground.²²

At least two Irish Catholic Jesuit missionaries relied upon French support at St. Kitts and Martinique to serve the surrounding islands in the 1650s and 1660s. Father John Destrache (sometimes “Stritch”) and Father John Grace used the support of French governors of the Îles du Vent to permit them a local base from which they could sail between the islands and preach to the local Catholic diaspora. Although their objectives may have been to spread the faith and serve the poor, the very presence of Irish missionaries in the Leewards was inseparable from the contest for power and influence in the region. When missionaries like Grace and Stritch crossed imperial boundaries to preach to the men and women who made up the bulk of the poor and disenfranchised in the islands, they were encouraging the kinds of social bonds that elites in an imperially crowded archipelago feared most: ties of affinity that linked servants or dependents to sources of power that fell outside of their control.

The impact of these regional associations were further complicated by the disinterest toward religious practice that colonial officials displayed in the English islands. In the realm of religious services, the English Leewards were considerably deficient. In the frontier setting of the seventeenth-century Leewards, colonists had very little access to the basic sacraments that informed both Established Church and Catholic cosmologies about life and death. As Wheeler noted when he arrived in 1671, colonists in all four islands were only served by “one drunken orthodox priest, one drunken secretary

²² Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World*, 122-136, Riva Berleant-Schiller, “Free Labor and the Economy in Seventeenth-Century Montserrat,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (1989).

priest, and one drunken parson,” all of whom lacked orders.²³ Baptism and marriage services performed by itinerant Irish Catholic Jesuits (even if they were not acknowledged by Protestant office holders) provided comfort to people who lived in a world where disease made intimate relationships short and painful. In addition to the spiritual and psychological function of religious service, hidden mass also reinforced the view among some of the laboring poor that they could find a degree of solace or even protection from French authorities who allowed missionaries more freedom to tend to their flock. Missionary activity helped affirm for Irish colonists that they were part of a wider imagined community in the islands, one that stretched across island and imperial boundaries.

Although Stritch and Grace may not have preached a subversive message, the movement of Irish colonists and missionaries across these borders complicated the efforts of English imperial elites to contain and control their colonists in the name of the Crown in the 1650s and 1660s. Stritch lived in Paris as an Irish expatriate before he left for the New World. He arrived to the divided island of St. Kitts in 1650 as a guest of Philippe Longvillier de Poincy, the powerful governor of the French colonies in the eastern Antilles. When Stritch arrived, Governor de Poincy was still reeling from his bitter power struggle for control of the islands. During de Poincy’s conflict with de Thoisy, the recalcitrant French governor exiled the influential Capuchin friars from St. Kitts for their support of the company officials who tried to unseat him. Father Stritch filled the void, and signaled that Poincy, who was firmly backed by the Knights of Malta, was perfectly

²³ Answer of Sir Charles Wheler, Governor of the Leeward Islands, to the inquiries of the Council for Foreign Plantations, St. Kitts, December 9, 1671, CO 1/27/52, extracted in CSPCO 7/680/289.

capable of amassing both financial backing and religious support for St. Kitts with or without the help of the Crown.²⁴

Why did de Poincy invite an Irish Jesuit to St. Kitts, and not a native Frenchman? The French governor was conscious of the balance of power in St. Kitts. As discussed in first chapter, when a group of company men raided the island in an effort to unseat de Poincy in January of 1646, Warner amassed a militia to help fight them off. The Dominican missionary Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre claimed that the force consisted of 2,000 fighting men—a force that certainly included Irish laborers. De Poincy was well aware in 1650 that he would need Irish assistance if he faced another challenge to his power in St. Kitts, which he essentially ruled like a private fiefdom until his death a decade later.²⁵ Whether or not the English elite in St. Kitts knew about Stritch’s borderland church is unclear.

De Poincy’s strategic decision to bring an Irish missionary to serve in French St. Kitts appears even more striking when one considers where Father Stritch decided to settle. The missionary did not raise a new church in Basseterre, the most populous port in the entire island, but at Sandy Point, right across the border from the English quarter on the leeward side of St. Kitts. There, Stritch served his congregation from his small borderland church for the next decade. According to Pierre Pelleprat, a Jesuit who met with Stritch, it was not a coincidence that Irish father established his church near a part of the English territory that was predominately Irish. By establishing a mission in the

²⁴ On Stritch, see Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale*, III:300, Aubrey Gwynn, “Documents Relating to the Irish in the West Indies,” *Analecta Hibernica* 3 (1932): 195-196, 208-214, Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World*, 44-45. On the conflict between Poincy and his Compagnie appointed replacements, see Mims, *Colbert*, 40-43, Boucher, *Tropics*, 81-87.

²⁵ Citing Du Tertre’s 1654 history of Saint-Christophe, Boucher notes that one reason Poincy ejected the Capuchins from St. Kitts was because they insisted baptized slaves should be freed, and Poincy, who was said to have the largest plantation on the island, viewed this argument as a threat. Boucher, *Tropics*, 85.

French sector close to the imaginary border, Irish colonists were able to sneak across to French St. Kitts to receive communion, give confession, and have their children baptized. Stritch also performed sacred marriage rites for the Irish laborers who snuck across the border. After they completed their ceremonies, the newlyweds could then return back to the English quarter, where Catholic marriage ceremonies and baptisms were publicly shunned.²⁶

The Father did not limit himself to church activities in St. Kitts. Stritch missioned to the growing Irish diaspora in other English-controlled islands as well. To serve colonists in Montserrat, he disguised himself as a woodcutter and set up a makeshift church in the woods, where he performed the Mass, baptisms, marriages.²⁷ John Grace also used French St. Kitts as a base from whence he sailed to Martinique, Montserrat, Antigua, St. Eustatius, and St. Barts to provide the Sacraments to willing colonists after the violence of the war subsided.²⁸ Again, how English governors responded to the missionary work is unclear, but it is notable that neither Stritch nor Grace missioned in Nevis despite the island's close proximity to St. Kitts.²⁹ Perhaps the Puritan gentry at Nevis were more resistant to allowing priests to publically perform the Mass on the island than the governors in Antigua and Montserrat.

²⁶ Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre, a Dominican missionary, and Pierre Pelleprat, a Jesuit, both detailed Stritch's mission to the Irish in the islands. Excerpts from Pelleprat's hard to find *Relation des Missions des PP. de la Compagnie de Jésus dans les Îsles, et dans la terre ferme de L'Amérique Meridionale: avec une introduction a la langue des Galibis Sauvages de la terre ferme de L'Amérique* (Paris, 1655) are reprinted in Gwynn, "Documents Relating to the Irish in the West Indies," 208-214. The text is also reprinted in Societe of Jesuits, *Mission de Cayenne et de La Guyane Française avec Une Carte Géographique* (Paris: Julien, Lanier, Cosnard, 1857).

²⁷ Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale*, III:300, Jesuits, *Mission de Cayenne (Pelleprat Reprint)*, 36, Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World*, 44.

²⁸ The letters of John Grace are reprinted in Gwynn, "Documents Relating to the Irish in the West Indies," 252-259. Thanks to Sheree Brown for her translations of the letters.

²⁹ The governor of Nevis at the time was Luke Stokes, an ally of Cromwell and faithfully attached to the Puritan aims of the Commonwealth. Stokes led more than a thousand colonists from Nevis to take Jamaica from the Spanish during Penn's expedition.

Stritch's disguise implies that he believed he needed to perform his masses in secret when he traveled to English colonies, but evidence suggests that Governor Roger Osborne of Montserrat knew about visiting Catholic priests from St. Kitts during his tenure in the 1650s. During a report commissioned against Osborne for murder in 1654, several deponents testified that the governor knew a priest named John visited the island. A servant who testified against Osborne claimed that the governor gave Stricht permission to stay in Montserrat as long as he wished, but the bondsman also admitted that he never saw a "publique mass in the said island" himself.³⁰ In Montserrat at least, it seems that governors like Osborne established a tradition of allowing Catholics to practice as long as it was hidden from public view. Providing sacraments in the woods was fine, but raising a Catholic place of worship was inconceivable.³¹

The missionary efforts from the French islands helped to create ties of affinity that helped lead to French victories during the war. But poor Irish colonists were not the only residents in the English territories accused of aiding the French. Montserrat was ruled by a small group of Irish elites from "New English" and "Old English" families, some of whom (like Osborne) held ambivalent feelings toward the Established Church. To serve as militia captains, justices of the peace, or in the local council, elites had to profess that they were Protestant, but evidence suggests that members of the gentry were rather willing to profess an outward Anglicanism without abandoning Catholic sentiments.³² Officially Protestant but practically Catholic, the ability of island elites like David Gallway to mask their faith helped them reinforce their authority over the laboring

³⁰ Deposition of Henry Wheeler, reprinted in Gwynn, "Documents Relating to the Irish in the West Indies," 227.

³¹ Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World*, 45.

³² *Ibid.*, 75-76.

majority, many of whom were “native Irish” Catholics driven to the islands by way of poverty and religious conflict.³³ The imperial crisis posed by the Anglo-French conflict rendered this practice problematic.

French forces and flibustiers ransacked Montserrat in February of 1667. Du Tertre, who was not present to witness the chaos, wrote that Irish residents who had been previously pressed into the militia ranks by Governor Osborne elected to side with the French admiral when he arrived at the island. According to the Dominican missionary, French Admiral Lefebvre de la Barre anchored his fleet at the island and requested an audience with Montserrat’s governor. Osborne reassured de la Barre that Montserrattians were followers of Charles II and were not “traitors to their homeland.” However, after the meeting ended, an Irishman paid a secret visit to de la Barre and assured him “that the enemies were but nine hundred men.” The Irish visitor informed the French admiral that “his nation” would not struggle against de la Barre and his force, which included a cadre of several hundred Caribs. Du Tertre claimed that some 500 men and 1,500 women and children took Louis XIV as their king. De la Barre left a small force of his men to “accommodate Irish affairs” and imprisoned those who did not concede to French control.³⁴

Other sources suggest that Du Tertre's claims about Irish support for the French admiral were accurate.³⁵ When an English force eventually arrived at the island, Captain Berry found the island “almost wholly possessed by Irish.” Many had pilfered the estates of the gentry who had long ignored their needs. After Berry's arrival, a skirmish erupted,

³³ “Old English” families claimed Norman lineage, predominately royalist, and Catholic. “New English” families claimed they had descended from Protestants who settled in Ireland in the 1580s and moved to colonize Ireland with greater frequency in the seventeenth century. See *Ibid.*, 16-17.

³⁴ Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale*, IV:199.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, IV:203.

and several men were caught and hanged as traitors. Others fled to the woods. The rest, “about 400,” swore to be loyal to Charles II after they witnessed the violent executions.³⁶

Poor Irish Catholics were not the only residents accused of siding with the French. Colonists also blamed the loss of Montserrat on Anthony Briskett, son of the first governor of the island and member of an elite Galloway, Protestant family. Briskett admitted to taking a French commission from the Governor of Martinique, but tried to explain away his actions by telling the Governor of Barbados that he was begged to do so by his “poor subjects” who feared attacks from the “barbarous bloody Indians” and French buccaneers.³⁷ Ironically, only months before he admitted his actions, Briskett signed a petition that blamed the loss of the island on a group “rebellious Irish” who had almost wholly “consumed” the island with their wrath.³⁸ Briskett stood idly by as English officers hunted these “rebels” down after the French departed the island under the conditions of his new commission. Compared to the landless poor, Briskett was lucky. He lost his plantation, but representatives of the Crown summarily hanged the Irish rebels who hid in the woods of Montserrat and Antigua after the French departed the islands.³⁹

Forging Internal Alliances: Making the Leeward Caribees “British”

The conflicts in the Leewards in 1666 ultimately led to the disintegration of the “English Caribees” political project, which had rendered the Leeward governments

³⁶ Governor Lord William Willoughby to the King, Barbados, February 11, 1668, CO 1/22/34.

³⁷ “To the Kings Most Excellent Majesty, The Humble Petition of Anthony Briskett,” reprinted in Gwynn, “Documents Relating to the Irish in the West Indies,” 263.

³⁸ Remonstrance, Declaration, and Petition of the inhabitants of Montserrat to William Lord Willoughby, Governor of Barbados, January, 1668, CO 1/22/17, extracted in CSPCO 5/1676/540.

³⁹ Governor William Lord Willoughby to the King, February 11, 1668, CO 1/22/34, extracted in CSPCO 5/1692/547.

subordinate to Barbadian power. Elites who had their wealth tied to the islands used the war to turn the Leeward Islands into a separate political union, a move that helped engender imperial sympathies among the colonists in the fragile islands of St. Kitts, Nevis, Montserrat, and Antigua after the war.

Plantation owners and merchants tied to the Leewards maintained that their losses resulted Willoughby's indifference to their security. Barbadians, they maintained, had a virtual lock on the English sugar trade now that the Leeward planters were ruined. Leewardians believed this was Willoughby's plan all along. In part, they were right. Instead of sending reinforcements to the islands when he received news from England that he should prepare for an invasion of St. Kitts in 1665, Willoughby held back until after he received word of the French takeover of the island. It took the Governor-General three weeks to organize his fleet, which required impressed seamen, victuals for the ships, and arms. Nearly three months passed before the fleet was finally ready. Willoughby and the party of poor and reluctant fighters left Bridgetown for St. Kitts on July 18, 1666, just as the hurricane season was beginning to intensify. As a result, the fleet got caught in a storm as it rounded Guadeloupe and Francis Willoughby died.⁴⁰

The death of the Governor-General gave colonists in the war-torn islands to the north a reason to break away from Barbadian control. Nevisians—now the richest of all English planters in the Leewards—led the effort, but planters and merchants from St. Kitts, Montserrat, and Antigua soon joined them.⁴¹ The language of their appeals points to the growing sense among islanders in the Leewards that they identified with their property and plantations. Walter Symonds, Samuel Winthrop, and fourteen other

⁴⁰ Higham, *Development of the Leeward Islands*, 47-48.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 72-76.

petitioners maintained that the “Barbadians” believed it was “no matter if the Leeward Islands were sunk.”⁴² In another petition, elites noted that the islands should be united because they were “in sight of each other” and were thus “able to give speedy aid and assistance to each other upon all occasions.” The group also pointed out the Barbados government feared competition in the growing sugar trade. “The Council and Assembly of Your Majesty’s Lieutenant in Barbados *being Barbadians*,” the petitioners argued, meant that “their interest is that these islands be no more settled; for now these islands are lost, one pound of their sugar will be as much worth as two were before.”⁴³

The Privy Council decided that petitioners were right. The Crown revoked the Willoughby patent in 1670, and in 1671, the new colony, “His Majesty’s Leeward Caribees,” was born. The new Governor-General’s commission empowered him to oversee the local assemblies and councils and authorized him to serve as Vice-Admiral in the Court of Admiralty held at Nevis. Perhaps most importantly, the commission defined a new English imperial domain in the Lesser Antilles. The Governor-General of the Leewards was charged with overseeing military and trade policy in “St. Christopher, Nevis, Montserrat, Antigua, Barbudo, Anguilla, and all the other leeward islands, which his Majesty has thought fit to separate from the Government of Barbados.”⁴⁴ Later commissions echoed the vague boundaries of the original Carlisle grant as well, but placed the borders of “His Majesty’s Leewards” at French Guadeloupe in the south and Puerto Rico to the west. In the early eighteenth century, Governor-Generals signed

⁴² Petition of divers Merchants, Inhabitants, and Planters relating to the island of St. Christopher’s to the King, August 16, 1670, CO 1/25/54.

⁴³ October, 1667, Egerton 2395/455, reprinted in Higham, *Development of the Leeward Islands*, 72. Emphasis added.

⁴⁴ Commission to Sir Charles Wheeler, Baronet, January 25, 1671, CO 1/26/7, extracted in CSPCO 7/393/157-158.

diplomatic correspondence with their official title, “Captain General and Governour in Chief in and over all His Majesty’s Leeward Charibbee Islands in America Lying to the Leeward from Guardaloupe to the Island of St. Johns De Porto Rico.”⁴⁵ Although vaguely defined, one thing was clear—merchants and planters in the Leewards believed that they had different interests than the “Barbadians” who lived several days away, some 350 miles to the south.

Leeward Governor-Generals in the 1670s faced the difficult task of trying to rein in colonists who had ambiguous sentiments about imperial allegiance and the growing autarkic trade policies of the Stuart Crown. The first Governor-General of the Leewards, Charles Wheler, was well aware of the ambivalence many colonists expressed toward the empire that he represented. During the formal ceremony of repossession of the English quarter of St. Kitts in July of 1671, Wheler was convinced that the “turn-coat English” who were living alongside the French on the island were spying on him and “marching over the mountains and rocks” to the French quarters to report his activities to officials at Basseterre.⁴⁶ Wheler lasted less than a year at his post. He fled the islands in disgrace, outmaneuvered by the French Governor of Martinique over matters involving the restitution of slaves who were seized by (or fled to) the French during the war. Ironically, rumors circulated that he actually made his way back to England via French colleagues in St. Kitts, who helped him to Martinique and then onto France.⁴⁷

In Wheler’s place, Charles II commissioned William Stapleton, a continental war veteran who had been directly involved in the attempt to recapture St. Kitts from the

⁴⁵ For example, see Copy of a Letter to the Late Governor of St. Thomas for His Majesty the King of Denmark From John Hart, Governor of the Leeward Islands, St. Kitts, May 1, 1724, CO 152/14/R98/310.

⁴⁶ Reprinted in Higham, *Development of the Leeward Islands*, 80.

⁴⁷ See Stapleton’s letter reprinted in *Ibid.*, 90.

French during the 1666-1667 conflict. In exchange for his loyal service to the Crown, Stapleton received Anthony Briskett's massive 573-acre Waterwork plantation in Montserrat. He was appointed Deputy-Governor of the island when it still fell under Barbadian rule.⁴⁸ Following Wheler's departure, the Council of Plantations felt it imperative that a man capable of reading and writing in French take the post of Governor-General of the Leewards, as the issue of resettlement and restitution of St. Kitts had yet to be resolved. Stapleton's Irish heritage was also an asset in an archipelagic colony where many of the landless laborers were people from his homeland.⁴⁹ In 1678, Stapleton commissioned a massive, fifty-page census on the islands under his federal government, which reveals that more than thirty percent of the white population claimed Irish heritage. In Montserrat, Irish colonists (many of whom were either free wage laborers or servants nearing the end of their indentures) comprised 70% of the white population. Irish folk accounted for nearly 30% of the white population in Nevis, St. Kitts, and Antigua.⁵⁰

As a native of Ireland, a royalist, and (according to Wheler) a Papist, William Stapleton was well equipped to manage the problem of imperial indifference to the English empire in the Leewards.⁵¹ Even before he was appointed to replace Wheler, Stapleton had launched a campaign of reigning in the fractious parties in Montserrat by

⁴⁸ J.R.V. Johnston, "The Stapleton Sugar Plantations in the Leeward Islands," *Bulletin of John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 48 (1965): 176-177.

⁴⁹ Higham, *Development of the Leeward Islands*, 88, Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World*, 3-86.

⁵⁰ By the 1720s racist ideology had long served as a unifying force for whites from the "three nations" of Great Britain. Sufficed to say, the census was in large part war document intended to outline the ethnic contours of a colony where French and Dutch power were consistently challenging the Stuart regime's autarkic imperial policies. For different interpretations and breakdowns of the census, see Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 127-129, Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World*, 104-119, Natalie Zacek, "Dangerous Tenants: Conflict and Community in a Colonial British American World, 1670-1763" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 2000), Chapter 1.

⁵¹ Higham, *Development of the Leeward Islands*, 213, Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World*, 103.

trying to promote a sense of imperial identity on the island and commitment to the Stuart monarchy. In 1668, he encouraged the Montserrat Assembly and Council to pass legislation modeled on a Barbadian law passed at the dawn of the Civil War. The first section of the act was geared toward protecting the “good Government of Administrators of Justice” from “scandalous, ruinous, and opprobrious Speeches.” Anyone who was caught criticizing a councilman (either in writing or in public) was fined five thousand pounds of sugar or the value “thereof in Tobacco, Cotton, Wool, or Indigo.” Fines were less when an assemblyman or any other public officer was involved; they were set at five hundred pounds. Those who could not pay the fine were subject to public corporal punishment.

The second part of the act focused explicitly on “Murders, Riots, Routs, Assaults, Batteries, and unlawful Assemblies” that resulted from the common use of “Terms of Distinction.” Anyone, “stranger or inhabitant” of “what Quality or Degree soever” who spoke such terms were deemed “Violators and Breakers of his Majesty’s Peace in this Island” and were subject to “fines” as well as “Penal or Corporal Punishments.” What did the Montserrat Assembly mean by “Terms of Distinction?”

Whereas also there are several Persons of his Majesty’s Subjects of his Three Nations, that is to say, *England, Scotland, and Ireland*, residing in this Island, and oftentimes, as well in Drink as sober, certain Words of Distinction do arise between his Majesty’s Subjects of the Said Three Nations, as *English Dog, Scott’s Dog, Tory, Irish Dog, Cavalier, and Roundhead*, and many other opprobrious, scandalous, and disgraceful Terms, to the Breach of his Majesty’s Peace, etc, and by certain Quarrels that may arise by reason of such ill Language by the several Natives of the said Three Nations.⁵²

⁵² “An Act against Opprobrious Language,” no. 11, 1668, in *Acts of the Assembly Passed in the Island of Montserrat, from 1668 to 1740, Inclusive*, (London: Printed, by Order of the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, by John Baskett, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1740), 11-13.

Left out was the line from the Barbadian law that stipulated “whosoever nam’d the word, Roundhead or Cavalier, should give to all those that heard him, a Shot and a Turkey.”⁵³

By legislating against ethnic slurs, Stapleton and the Montserrat Assembly were attempting to promote a local sense of unity among white discontents without the rhetoric of quasi-*British* imperial identity at their disposal. As David Armitage and Linda Colley have argued elsewhere, the idea of a singular British identity uniting willing participants of the imperial regime would not fully crystallize until the Georgian era.⁵⁴ Pressures in the islands, however, moved the local Leeward governments to promote a similar ideology much earlier. The Montserrat government’s efforts under Stapleton illustrate that they believed white labor from any national or religious background was necessary to recreate the colony in the late 1660s and 1670s. White laborers, free and bond, worked as coopers, masons, woodcutters, and in other forms of construction that were necessary for landed elites who wanted to rebuild the plantations that had been burnt during the French invasion.⁵⁵ Instead of driving them off the land and replacing them with enslaved African labor, imperial plantation owners in the islands faced the difficulty in the 1670s of trying to keep white colonists in the Leewards committed to the evolving Stuart doctrine of empire and remain on the war-torn islands.

The same year Stapleton took the deputy-governorship of Montserrat, the island government also passed “An Act for the Raising a Maintenance for a Preaching

⁵³ Richard Ligon, *A True & Exact History of the Island of Barbados Illustrated with a Mapp of the Island, as Also the Principall Trees and Plants There, Set Forth in Their Due Proportions and Shapes, Drawne out by Their Severall and Respective Scales: Together with the Ingenio That Makes the Sugar, with the Plots of the Severall Houses, Roomes, and Other Places That Are Used in the Whole Processe of Sugar-Making* (London: Printed for Humphrey Moseley, 1657), 57.

⁵⁴ David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 170-173.

⁵⁵ For an excellent discussion of the material life of wage laborers in Montserrat see Berleant-Schiller, “Free Labor and the Economy in Seventeenth-Century Montserrat.”

Minister.” The law established a levy to provide a new minister with 14,000 pounds of sugar or the equivalent value thereof in tobacco, cotton, wool, or indigo. In return, the minister was expected to perform public services and administer the sacraments according to the canons of the Church of England. Lawmakers embedded an interesting proviso about the sacraments in the law. In exchange for his salary in marketable crops, the minister could “not deny baptizing of any infant born of any of the inhabitants” of the island by demanding payment. Moreover, ministers could only charge one hundred pounds of sugar or the value thereof in tobacco, cotton, wool, or indigo for the “joining together of any of the inhabitants.” Ministers were also forbidden from denying burials to any of the colonists who approached him for funeral rights.⁵⁶

The legislation meant little if the island was not able to secure ministers, but the construction of the law testifies to the efforts of Stapleton and other elites in Montserrat to appeal to some of the basic religious needs of the poorer colonists on the island, possibly even Irish crypto-Catholics. Instead of being concerned about official church doctrine, illiterate colonists with a history of folk Christianity were more probably more interested in receiving sacred rites like baptism and burials, which would guarantee their newborn child or loved one the chance to enter heaven. At the very least, the law represented what one scholar described as the “flexible and equivocal” attitude Irish landowners on the island had toward religious orthodoxy.⁵⁷ The law was a means to reach out to poorer white colonists who were needed to rebuild the island, perhaps even laborers who had in years previous only found religious guidance from Catholic priests from the French islands.

⁵⁶ “An Act for the Raising a Maintenance for a Preaching Minister,” no. 6, 1668, *Laws of Montserrat*, 6, clause two. Emphasis added.

⁵⁷ Reprinted in Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World*, 46.

Stapleton and his fellow elites in the Montserrat government worked in other ways to promote allegiance to the empire and colonial state. One way of empowering middling white colonists was to oblige servants and slaves to assist them in their state-run rebuilding projects. Planters on the island reached out to poorer white folk in an effort to keep wage laborers from fleeing the islands by setting price controls on commodities and guaranteeing their wages.⁵⁸ The same year that the law against opprobrious language was passed, the Montserrat Assembly and Council ordered that several rebuilding projects be put underway, including building a new town in Briskett Bay, raising a courthouse, and building a new jail. One law organized colonists throughout the island to contribute time, energy, and labor to the construction of a new courthouse as well as several watchtowers throughout the island. The towers, which doubled as beacons, were designed to help colonists put themselves in a “martial and warlike posture” upon an invasion of “enemies” from the sea—especially the French fleets and Carib pirogues.

The construction of the courthouse involved a massive, island-wide contribution. Robert Blyther, John Gardner, Patrick Hogge, and Robert Boyd, all carpenters, were paid to lead the construction of the “good, substantial, and firm Cratched-house.” They were supplied by all the “unarmed men and all men-Negroes inhabiting in or appertaining to the Division from the Church Gut.” The men ordered the biracial labor force to cut down the necessary timber and drag it to the site of the new court. After the men raised the

⁵⁸ “An Act Impowering Justices of the Peace to order Labourer’s Wages; and Restraining Persons going on board Ship or other Vessels,” Montserrat, 1668, *Laws of Montserrat*, no.24, 31. “An Act Enabling Artificers, Labourers, and Servants to recover their Wages from their Masters,” October 28, 1684, *Acts of the Assembly Passed in the Charibee Leeward Islands, from 1690 to 1730*, (London: Printed, by Order of the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, by John Baskett, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1734), no. 70, 73. Nevis did not pass a similar law until 1703—“An Act for Speedy Payment of Labourers Hire,” Nevis, October 22, 1703, *Acts of the Assembly Passed in the Island of Nevis, from 1664 to 1739, Inclusive*, (London: Printed, by Order of the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, by John Baskett, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1740), no. 31, 25-26. On wage labor in 1680s Montserrat, see Berleant-Schiller, “Free Labor and the Economy in Seventeenth-Century Montserrat.”

initial structure, “unarmed Christians and Men-Negroes” from the North Division were obligated to thatch, wattle, and daub the courthouse while leaders of the militia supervised them for the “better and speedier carrying on” of the construction.⁵⁹ The entire process had the twin purpose of reaffirming the power of the English Crown while serving as a symbol of colonial unity. Critical to the entire process was the empowering of middling men to command the slave labor necessary to complete the endeavor for the good of the island colony.

Legislating White Power

Although local elites passed a few measures aimed at keeping white laboring folk in the islands by offering them some juridical protections, efforts to restrict the liberties of servants and slaves occupied each of the island’s governments after the war. The island governments passed numerous containment laws in each of the islands. Many of these laws aimed to draw a wedge between poorer white folk and people of color. Unlike Nevis and Antigua, where legislators drafted few laws directed specifically at people of African descent in the 1660s and 1670s, Montserrat legislators passed a handful while Stapleton was still Deputy-Governor of the island. Some laws had already been drafted before the war with France, but these had to be reconfirmed after the land was repatented in 1668 when the island was returned to the Crown of England. Among them was a law that targeted the “licentious liberties” of “servants, especially Negroes,” who left their master’s plantation on the Lord’s Day. Noting that slaves “ranged to and fro” on the island on Sundays and other “days of liberty” and acted with “unsufferable boldness,” the

⁵⁹ “An Act for the Speedy Erecting and Building of a Place for the Court of Judicature, now or hereafter to be erected in this Island, to be kept in; and for the Speedy Erecting of Beacons in the several Parts of this Island,” no. 7, 1668, *Laws of Montserrat*, 7-8.

law stated that any “Negro or Negroes whatsoever” who were found without a license were to be whipped and returned to their master or owner. The law also touched on the issue of runaways. Any slave proven to be a runaway or providing aid to a runaway was to be whipped sixty times “upon their bare shoulders.” The law also stipulated that all runaways who were presently on the island had sixteen days to return to their plantations and spared of any retribution. Those who did not return were deemed outlaws and could be executed.⁶⁰

In 1670 the Montserrat Council and Assembly passed “An Act for restraining the Liberty of Negroes, and to prevent the running away of Christian Servants.”⁶¹ Crafted in the wake of war, the law stipulated the *de facto* idea that “Negroes” were neither Christian nor “freemen.” The law was not focused on elements of slave culture, but rather aspects of movement and travel. “There is a general complaint in this island of the Liberty that Negroes do assume unto themselves,” the law began, “in going from one plantation to another on the Sabbath-day, and on other days and nights, by means whereof many of the inhabitants are much prejudiced.” Liberty, in this sense, was something that people of color could “assume” and something that had to be denied. The legislators argued that slaveowners and overseers were not policing the comings and goings of “strange Negroes” who moved across plantation boundaries, and ordered that slaves found loitering on plantations where they did not belong were to be punished and

⁶⁰ Ibid., no. 9, 30. Another law, “An Act against Negroes and Slaves that presume to go from their Master’s Plantation without Licence under their Hands,” was also reissued in 1668. It seems to have been issued after the act concerning runaways, and also uses the rhetoric about “licentious liberties” to characterize the behavior of “Negroes and other slaves.” *Laws of Montserrat*, no. 10, 30-31. In 1679, the Montserrat Assembly had to pass another act “against Negroes wandering and the concealors thereof,” *Laws of Montserrat*, no. 30., Another act, drafted in 1680, was aimed at “making restitution for cattle stolen by Negroes.” *Laws of Montserrat*, no. 33, 37-38.

⁶¹ *Laws of Montserrat*, no. 17, 20-21.

sent “home unto the owners thereof.” Masters or overseers of any “Negro, or Negroes, or Slaves” caught concealing, harboring, entertaining, relieving, or securing any such loiterer was obligated by the law to take the “concealer” before the Justice of the Peace and whip him or her forty times with a lash. Owners or overseers who failed to whip the accused in public were penalized 500 pounds of muscavado sugar.⁶² The Montserrat Council and Assembly believed that a major problem on the island was that “Freeman and Christian Servants are accustomed to combine with Negroes in running away.” In order to drive a wedge between the alliances of white and black laborers, the law penalized freemen who joined any slave in running away with a fine of 1,000 pounds of muscavado sugar—a fine that would have been difficult for poorer farmers who did not raise sugar or landless colonists to pay. If the free person could not pay the fine, they had their liberty taken from them for twelve months. “Christian servants” who combined with people of color to run away had their indentures doubled.⁶³

Laws unique to the Leewards also targeted poor white laborers, debtors, and enslaved folk who stole boats and canoes to flee the islands. In 1668, the Montserrat Assembly and Council passed an act that required masters of any ship, boat, or vessels that anchored off the island to notify the secretary within 24 hours of the ship’s arrival. Sailors intending to trade with island colonists had to obtain a license to do so. No one was allowed to leave the island with a sailing crew unless they obtained a “license from the office under the Governor’s hand.”⁶⁴ Antigua passed similar legislation aimed at curbing runaways the same year. There, traders were obligated to apply for a license,

⁶² Ibid., 21.

⁶³ Ibid., no. 17, 21.

⁶⁴ Ibid., no. 6, 28.

also called a ticket, to trade with local inhabitants. The law was in part passed to prevent debtors from making bad trades, but it also was aimed at keeping slaves and servants from fleeing the island. Articles five and six of the law punished owners of boats, canoes, periaguas, or vessels of any kind that were used to flee Antigua. Owners were obligated to keep oars, rudders, sails, and masts at their home and to secure any boat onshore with a lock and chain. If a free debtor used an unsecured boat to leave the island, the owner of the boat had to pay the debt to the creditors and “make good what damage soever shall be sustained by any inhabitants of this island by reason of the said escape.” However, if “the person or persons be servants or slaves, then the owner or master shall make good double damages to the owner of such servants or slaves so escaping or running off the which damages are to be recovered in the Courts Judicatory.”⁶⁵

The St. Kitts Problem

In Montserrat, Stapleton and other elites on the island faced the problem of trying to buttress imperial support without encouraging white flight. By legitimizing violence against people of color, rewarding white folk who captured runaways, and legislating against white and black collusion, merchants and planters in Montserrat offered poorer colonists a reason to align themselves with the fledgling colonial state. In St. Kitts, the problem was more complicated. White settlers and enslaved folk had already fled the English sector by the thousands. When France finally returned the English quarter to the Crown of England in 1671, the new Governor-Generals of the Leewards had to figure out how to manage a diverse land-owning population that had accepted French authority during the war.

⁶⁵ *Laws of the Leeward Islands*, no 17, 43.

One of the most fascinating elements of the French invasion is that English landowners actually sold their property to the French during the invasion. Some claimed that they were so “mad to be gone” from the island they sold their land for the “twentieth part of the value” and that the “French and Dutch paid them in canvas and shoes and trumpery, paid their debts and gave them passage by sea hither and dither.” Others argued that they signed contracts they did not understand “in ignorance of the French language.” Some English landowners in the English sector sold their land out of fear of “being made prisoners.”⁶⁶

The sale of English territory to French landowners made repopulating the island with former inhabitants difficult. According to the eighth article of the Treaty of Breda, English colonists who sold their estates to French residents during the conflict had to return their payment if they wanted to resettle on St. Kitts. French settlers argued that they were owed £20,000 from English planters who sold their land during the conflict. Proving these claims was a difficult if not impossible task, for English land records were burnt during the war.⁶⁷ Many former residents simply resisted returning. Facing the prospect of having a colony without colonists, Governor-General Stapleton offered *all* landed white families in the English sector protection under the Crown of England. The French (and some Dutch) on English lands could opt to take the oath of fealty to Charles II if they agreed to be “friends to his friends and enemies to his enemies.” By acknowledging “no other sovereign but his Majesty of England,” French and Dutch

⁶⁶ Sir Charles Wheler, Governor of the Leeward Islands, to Secretary Lord Arlington, St. Kitts, December 9/19, 1671, CO 1/27/51, extracted in CSPCO 7/678/285-287.

⁶⁷ Answer of William Stapleton, Governor of the Leeward Islands, by advice of his Council, to the particulars required by the Council for Plantations, Nevis, March 20, 1673, CO 1/31/4i.

colonists who had invaded the English sector of St. Kitts became members of the English empire and subjects of the new Leeward government.⁶⁸

In 1673, Stapleton sent a letter to the newly reformed Council of Trade and Plantations concerning the repopulation of the English sector of St. Kitts. Almost five years after the agreement at Breda, families identified by the Governor as “French” owned 4,108 acres of land in the English quarter. A small number of the residents actually lived on their new lands and had begun to “improve” it by planting indigo and sugar cane, while others were simply planting provisions or leaving the land as untilled pasture. French landowners owned a disproportionate number of the sugar plantations in the English quarter. Among the property listed as owned by “the French” on the island were 44 dwelling houses, 126 mills, 87 coppers, 24 boiling houses, 47 indigo works, and some 676 slaves. French proprietors leased nearly 600 acres of land to other planters. Furthermore, some of the French landowners actually lived in French Basseterre but managed their lands in the English sector as absentee landlords. Not surprisingly, these men refused to take the oath of allegiance and continued to be a major thorn in Stapleton’s side as he tried to revive what had been the most important English colony in the Leewards prior to the war.

French speaking residents in the English quarter were not particularly troubled to have an Irish-born man who knew French as their governor. They freely offered to have their servants listed for assessment for the poll tax, and better yet, they paid for their own clerk and interpreter. When the commissioners in charge of figuring out the land claims arrived at the island, the French inhabitants of the English sector paid for all of the food,

⁶⁸ The Oath of Allegiance to be taken by the French retaining estates in the English part of St. Christopher’s, sent via Nevis, enclosed in Governor Stapleton to the Council of Trade and Plantations, January 9, 1674, CO 1/31/4ii.

drink, and housing the men required while in staying in St. Kitts. In 1672, almost half the white men living in the English quarter were Francophone, and more than sixty percent of the enslaved population labored on French owned estates. A year later, 140 French proprietors lived on land in the middle of the island, and men living in the French quarter still had overseers working 45 estates.⁶⁹

The religion of these inhabitants is unclear. Some were certainly Catholic, as one of the commissioners appointed to represent the French interests on the island was Father Philippe de Nogle, who established a lasting presence in Cayon in the windward side of the English quarter where he lived as a hermit.⁷⁰ French Huguenots were also courted as settlers in the English quarter. In 1671, Charles Wheler wrote to ecclesiastical authorities at Windsor Castle in hopes to secure a Francophone minister for residents at St. Kitts. “Many French Protestants who have purchased estates there,” related Wheler, “applied to France for a minister of our religion whom they will liberally reward.” Wheler supported their efforts on the condition that the “liturgy of the Church of England be used.” The petitioners agreed, but noted that they were “wholly unacquainted with any of their nation who know the English liturgy” and that they desired Wheler to “recommend one.” Once secured, the residents agreed that they would pay the Francophone minister £100 per year and build a church.⁷¹ In 1673, a group of “French Protestants” from the French quarter of St. Kitts wrote to Governor-General Stapleton via Montserrat to appeal for a parcel of

⁶⁹ Answer of William Stapleton, Governor of the Leeward Islands, by advice of his Council, to the particulars required by the Council for Plantations, bearing date 20th March 1672-3,” Nevis, enclosed in Governor Stapleton to the Council of Trade and Plantations, January 9, 1674, CO 1/31/4i.

⁷⁰ Sir Charles Wheler, Governor of the Leeward Islands, to Secretary Lord Arlington, St. Kitts, December 9/19, 1671, CO 1/27/51, extracted in CSPCO 7/678/285-287, Minutes of Council of St. Kitts, February 21, 1673, CO 1/28/69, extracted in CSPCO 7/1036/468.

⁷¹ Governor Sir Charles Wheler to Dr. Durel, Canon of Windsor, at Windsor Castle, St. Kitts, July 20, 1671, CO 1/27/10, extracted in CSPCO 7/591/242.

land to build a church. Stapleton and the Assemblymen at St. Kitts believed the idea was a good one, and “resolved, consented, and granted that petitioners” to “have liberty to do what they desire, provided they give notice beforehand to the Governor where they intend to build and that their meetings tend not to any disturbance of the peace.”⁷²

While Huguenots were welcomed as new English subjects in St. Kitts, not all protestants were welcomed in the Leewards after the war. Elites working to promote the expansion of slavery and allegiance to the English empire by way of militia service viewed Quakers as a threat to island security. Samuel Winthrop, son of the famous Puritan John Winthrop, found an “optimistic fatalism” in the peaceable word of the Society of Friends when tensions in Europe threatened to turn into warfare in the Leewards.⁷³ Winthrop was one of the first plantation owners to focus on raising capital and slaves for sugar production in Antigua. He had lived in St. Kitts as a child. Briefly losing faith when the Governor de Clodore invaded Antigua with a force from Martinique, Winthrop quickly turned to the message of peace in order to protect his property. He encouraged the “scattered people lurking in the way” to lay down their arms and agreed to an “oath of fealty” to the King of France.⁷⁴ As a result, Winthrop prevented his house from being set afire and saved his coppers and sugar works. Governor de Clodore departed with twenty-four of Winthrop’s slaves. The Puritan-turned-Quaker was left with all but twelve. The “rest escaped,” either to other islands or

⁷² Minutes of the Council of St. Kitts, March 3, 1673, CO 1/28/69, extracted in CSPCO 7/1036/470.

⁷³ Larry D. Gragg, “A Puritan in the West Indies: The Career of Samuel Winthrop,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (1993): 781.

⁷⁴ Reprinted in *Ibid.*: 783.

to the Shekerley Mountains, which was quickly proving to be a haven for Africans seeking a new life away from the plantation regime.⁷⁵

Winthrop helped Quaker missionaries visit the Leewards during peacetime. After stopping in Barbados, William Edmundson and Thomas Briggs elected to sail to Antigua to visit him at his plantation. Yet by the time they arrived at the island a backlash against him and his fellow Quakers had already begun. Winthrop was pushed out of the Council and stepped down from his post as Lieutenant-Governor just before the arrival of his fellow Friends.⁷⁶ Despite Winthrop's removal from office, Edmundson continued to have "great Meetings" in Antigua. "Many" colonists "were convinced and turned to the Lord."⁷⁷ But the missionary already sensed resentment. The news of the meetings "soon went abroad and alarmed the other islands."⁷⁸ The group decided to set sail for Nevis, and on the way, stopped to rest at Winthrop's estate on Barbuda, a small island granted to him and three other families by the Crown in return for their service during the French invasion in 1666.⁷⁹ As they approached Nevis, Edmundson "was under great Exercise of Spirit" and "found something working against us."⁸⁰

When the ship anchored offshore, Edmundson asked Winthrop and Colonel Morris (another convert) to change their clothes. He wanted them to be "taken notice of

⁷⁵ Reprinted in *Ibid.*: 784.

⁷⁶ Account of the Present State of the Leeward Islands delivered to the Committee of the Council for Plantations by Sir Charles Wheeler, December 14, 1672, CO 1/29/62, *Ibid.*: 783.

⁷⁷ William Edmundson and John Stoddart, *A Journal of the Life, Travels, Sufferings and Labour of Love in the Work of the Ministry, of That Worthy Elder, and Faithful Servant of Jesus Christ, William Edmundson, Who Departed This Life, the Thirty First of the Sixth Month 1712* (London: Printed and sold the assigns of J. Sowle, in White-Hart-Court, in Gracious-Street, and at the Bible in George-Yard, Lombard-Street, 1715), 61.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Gragg, "A Puritan in the West Indies: The Career of Samuel Winthrop," 774.

⁸⁰ Edmundson and Stoddart, *A Journal of the Life, Travels, Sufferings and Labour of Love in the Work of the Ministry, of That Worthy Elder, and Faithful Servant of Jesus Christ, William Edmundson, Who Departed This Life, the Thirty First of the Sixth Month 1712*, 62.

as being great Persons,” and not Quakers marked by drab clothing. As the colonels proceeded to “trim and dress themselves,” a Marshall came aboard with orders that “none should come ashore, until he knew whence the vessel came, and who were in her.” Winthrop sent a message to Governor Wheler through a carrier, and soon an officer and a soldier arrived on board and ordered that no one from Winthrop’s ship “should go ashore, or any come from shore to speak with us, upon penalty of great fine.” News of their arrival had already reached the public, and the two soldiers, who were “very kind” to Edmundson, disobeyed Wheler’s orders and permitted several people to board the ship. In response, Wheler paid the shipmaster a bond of £1,000 to carry the group back to Antigua. The governor wanted the Quaker missionaries to leave the Nevisian shores immediately.

Just before their departure, William Stapleton (still Deputy-Governor of Montserrat) came on board accompanied by several other men. Edmundson, annoyed by Wheler’s subterfuge, appealed to Stapleton’s sentiments as a fellow Englishman abroad. “I told them it was very hard usage, that we being English men,” he recalled in his *Journal*, “coming so far as we had done to visit our Countrymen, could not be admitted to come on shore...within King Charles’s Dominions.” Speaking on behalf of Wheler, Stapleton agreed that Edmundson’s words had merit. “But,” he added, “we hear that since your coming to the Carribbee-Islands, there are several hundred of our militia turned Quakers; and Quakers will not fight, and we have need of men to fight.” The Leeward Islands were “surrounded with enemies, and that is the very reason why Governor Wheler will not suffer you to come ashore.”⁸¹

⁸¹ Ibid., 63.

Defining Englishness Abroad: Race & The Murder of “Indian Warner”

“Surrounded with enemies:” as Governor-General over His Majesty’s Leewards, Stapleton seized upon this fear to promote the idea of mutual defense for white colonists in Antigua, Nevis, Montserrat, and St. Kitts. Fostering new alliances among white inhabitants who lived in the English Leewards was one part of a three-pronged effort to improve English imperial standing in the islands. Ginning up hatred against Carib communities in the eastern archipelago was another, and one that could unite white colonists in the four islands together against a perceived common enemy. Beginning in the 1670s, Stapleton began to authorize attacks against Carib communities to the south as a way to promote the idea that “His Majesty’s Leeward Caribees” were a unified colony that held shared interests. “One of the considerablist services which may be done to these islanders in case of breach with the French,” Stapleton related in 1674, was “the destroying of the Caribbee Indians of St. Vincent and Dominca.”⁸²

Carib fighters proved instrumental to the French-led attacks of Antigua and Montserrat in 1666 and 1667. Many had joined in the invasion of St. Kitts as well. One report stated that Carib warriors from Dominica, St. Vincent, and St. Lucia far to the south had built eighty pirogues in preparation for the war.⁸³ At first, colonists blamed the French for promoting Carib involvement. Petitioners from St. Kitts noted that the English Crown should investigate the “bloody and barbarous usage of the Indians” by the French, and Willoughby noted that the Caribs had been instructed to be as inhumane as

⁸² Governor Stapleton to the Council for Trade and Plantations, Nevis, January 9, 1674, CO 1/31/4.

⁸³ Francis Sampson to his brother John Sampson, Nevis, June 6, 1666, CO 1/20/97, extracted in CSPCO 5/1212/386-387.

possible against the colonists in Montserrat.⁸⁴ Stapleton did not mince words either. He called the Caribs the French Navy's "bloodhounds."⁸⁵

The alliance between French governors and Carib leaders during the 1666-1667 war marked a decisive shift in a complex relationship between the empires and indigenous islanders. From the 1620s to the 1650s, Carib-European relations were characterized by cycles of peace and violence. In moments of peace, French and English traders and sailors had developed reciprocal relationships with Carib communities—at times trading gifts of rum, cloth, and beads for items such as carefully crafted hammocks, periaguas, and wood cutting rights. Violence was nonetheless characteristic of European expansion from the earliest days of French and English settlement in the region. English and French governors coordinated joint attacks against Carib communities, the most significant being in 1627 and 1658.⁸⁶

By the 1640s, Carib communities in the Leewards had been driven out of the English islands and forced to reside on the windward sides of Guadeloupe and Martinique. In 1658, English governors from Nevis, Montserrat, and Antigua colluded with de Poincy from St. Kitts and the governor of Martinique to drive them even farther south.⁸⁷ After the last Carib inhabitants were driven out of Martinique in 1659, the French and English governors signed a treaty with Carib leaders that stipulated Dominica

⁸⁴ Petition of Clement Everard, Theodore Lovering, William Freeman, Roger Erington, Gilbert Loxley, Philip Payne, William Rice, John Allen, Alexander Overy, William Willes, and Samuel Payne in behalf of several thousand distressed people, some time the inhabitants of the island of St. Christopher's to the King, November 13, 1667, CO 1/21/145, reprinted in CSPCO 5/1629/517-518, Governor William Willoughby to the King, February 11, 1668, CO 1/22/34, extracted in CSPCO 5/1629/546-547.

⁸⁵ Governor Stapleton to the Council for Plantations, Montserrat, August 7, 1672, CO 1/29/19, extracted in CPSCO 7/906/399.

⁸⁶ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 119-120.

⁸⁷ Clement Everard, who replaced Warner as governor of St. Kitts after his death, did not support the joint effort.

and St. Vincent would not be subjected to future European incursions.⁸⁸ Importantly, the Governor-General at Barbados did not grant approval of the agreement even though the Leeward governors were technically supposed to ask for it. Unbeknownst to the Leeward governors at the time, the treaty marked a major turning point in the balance of power in the region. It defined Anglo-French territorial disputes into the next century, when in 1748 the two Crowns finally conceded that Dominica, St. Vincent, and St. Lucia were to remain “neutral islands” in the archipelago.

After the signing of the 1658 treaty, English and French policy toward the Carib islanders began to diverge. French governors in the archipelago believed that an alliance with Carib communities could help them advance their aims of containing English expansion, and Carib leaders apparently viewed French efforts to protect Dominica and St. Vincent as sincere. In 1663, Francis Willoughby attempted to settle St. Lucia and St. Vincent but was rebuffed by Carib warriors with the help of the French. One critic believed that Willoughby’s failed colonization scheme destroyed all hope of an Anglo-Carib alliance three years later.⁸⁹ The governor’s actions had little blowback on Barbados, but had significant repercussions in the Leewards. The Carib attacks at Antigua and Montserrat during the war of 1666-1667 infuriated white colonists, who claimed that the Indians had turned Christians into slaves while the French stood by and watched.⁹⁰ Colonists petitioned the Governor-General at Barbados to retaliate against the Caribs at Dominica, but instead, Willoughby made an effort to curry their favor. This was a key dynamic of the Leeward separatist movement. After 1670, Leeward elites and

⁸⁸ Egerton 2395/186-87, Higham, *Development of the Leeward Islands*, 123-124. See Boucher, *Tropics*, 92-93.

⁸⁹ Higham, *Development of the Leeward Islands*, 126.

⁹⁰ Proposals of the Inhabitants of Antigua by their Deputies to Lord William Willoughby, Antigua, January 31, 1668, CO 1/22/29, extracted in CSPCO 5/1687/544-545.

Stapleton in particular seized upon the fear of enslavement at the hands of the Caribs to bolster the power of the post-war government. When he became Governor-General, Stapleton used Indian hunting to prove that “His Majesty’s Leewards” could act on their own interests even if they diverged with the colonial authorities in Barbados.

Well before French officials from St. Kitts and Martinique began to court Carib power in preparation for war against England, English colonists mocked and derided the ways that French officials negotiated with Indians in the archipelago. As early as the 1630s, English colonists believed that French residents went naked and painted their skin red to gain the confidence of Carib leaders.⁹¹ Francophone sources confirm the practice. In his account of the French settlement of Martinique and Guadeloupe, Jacques Bouton described how Governor du Parquet painted his skin with annatto and styled his hair like a Carib during gift giving ceremonies in Martinique.⁹²

Painting their skin red was one way that French officials tried to engage Carib leaders on equal footing, but they also enlisted the help of missionaries who lived with in Carib villages to help negotiate trade arrangements and peace deals. The Dominican priest Du Tertre noted that a Jesuit Father who resided in Dominica had a key role as an interlocutor in the 1659 negotiations.⁹³ Catholic missionaries, although largely ineffective in converting locals, returned to France in the 1660s and began to promote their ideas about Carib conversion. Raymond Breton, a Dominican missionary who lived in Guadeloupe with the Caribs in the 1630s, produced the first *Dictionnaire Caraïbe François* in 1665, six years after the 1659 peace treaty and just before the outbreak of the

⁹¹ Colt, “Voyage of Colt,” 97-98.

⁹² Jacques Bouton, *Relation de L'establissement Des Francois Depuis L'an 1635, En L'isle de La Martinique, L'une Des Antilles de L'amerique. Des Moeurs Des Sauvages, de La Situation, & Des Autres Singularitez de L'isle.* (Paris: Chez Sebastien Cramoisy, 1640), 40. See Boucher, *Tropics*, 72.

⁹³ Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale*, 1:577, cited in Higham, *Development of the Leeward Islands*, 124.

Second Anglo-Dutch War.⁹⁴ John Davies translated the work into English and appended it to his translation of the 1658 work *Histoire Naturelle & Morale des Îles Antilles de L’Amerique*.⁹⁵ Together, the two works were published as *The History of the Caribbee Islands*, which made it to press in 1666, the same year the crises of imperial war erupted in the Leewards.⁹⁶

Although French officials and missionaries were more willing to engage Carib communities and court their power than Leeward governors, English-Carib relations were not completely defined by animus after the war. Although Stapleton desperately wanted to lead an invasion of the Carib islands in retribution for the violence committed against English colonists in the Leewards during the war, some elites from Barbados made an effort to create an alliance with a group of Caribs at Dominica after the 1666-1667 conflicts. In 1672, Barbadian governor William Willoughby had temporarily returned to England, leaving Christopher Codrington in his place. While Willoughby was gone, rumors began to circulate throughout the archipelago that silver mines had been discovered in Dominica. After receiving a piece of silver from a contact at the island, Codrington convened his council on April 4, 1672 to discuss the matter. Of principal concern was whether or not the French knew of the silver mine.⁹⁷ The rumor spread across the Atlantic. Codrington relayed the news back to England and sent a letter about

⁹⁴ Some dispute whether Breton’s translations were Carib or Arawak. Some of Breton’s translations already appeared in Du Tertre’s early history of St. Kitts, see Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale Des Illes Des S. Christophe*, 9-12.

⁹⁵ For a discussion of these works, see “Rochefort: French Collusions to Negotiate,” in Sandiford, *The Cultural Politics of Sugar: Caribbean Slavery and Narratives of Colonialism*, 41-66.

⁹⁶ For a literary discussion of the work, see Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean*, 51-61.

⁹⁷ Minutes of the Council of Barbados, April 4, 1672, CO 31/1/94-195.

it to Henry Drax, his cousin, but Willoughby's somehow obtained the letter.⁹⁸ Eager to get his hands on the silver, Willoughby worked to persuade the Council of Plantations to grant him a patent to the mine. He had already convinced the Privy Council that Dominica, St. Vincent, and St. Lucia should fall under his governorship. Power brokers in the archipelago were also busy trying to figure out how they could secure the silver for themselves. By December, Wheler and Stapleton had heard the silver rumor, and tried to instigate the Council of Plantations to action by insisting that the French had a "great mind to set down on the island."⁹⁹ News of the mine even caused Stapleton to resist growing pressure from his constituents to invade Dominica. His hesitation was short lived.¹⁰⁰

Codrington worked most feverishly to gain information about the mine. His principal source in Dominica was a man named Thomas "Indian Warner." Thomas was rumored to be the son of the founder of St. Kitts (his namesake) and a Carib woman. He lived in a Carib community—called "Warner's Indians" by the English—on the leeward side of the island. Du Tertre claimed that Indian Warner had pro-English tendencies and cited his invasion of French occupied Grenada in 1659 as proof of his alliance with the English, but Indian Warner may have been motivated by recent anti-Carib attacks committed by the French governors.¹⁰¹ In a history of Grenada written by the Dominican missionary Bénigne Bresson, the father described Indian Warner as a duplicitous character who used his knowledge of Christianity to attack unsuspecting French settlers

⁹⁸ Higham, *Development of the Leeward Islands*, 129.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 128-129. Account of the Present State of the Leeward Islands delivered to the Committee of the Council for Plantations by Sir Charles Wheler, December 14, 1672, CO 1/29/61, extracted in CSPCO 7/987/446-447.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 128.

¹⁰¹ Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale*, III:536, cited in Boucher, *Tropics*, 321, n.323.

on Sundays.¹⁰² Seven years later, Indian Warner may have sided with the English during the war of 1666. Du Tertre claimed that Francis Willoughby had granted him a commission in 1664 to serve as an agent of the Crown and reprinted a copy of the commission editions of *Histoire* published after the war. Willoughby's successors also confirmed that Indian Warner had been made Deputy-Governor of Dominica, but an official commission was never produced.¹⁰³ Warner's alliance with the governor from Barbados led him to be captured and held as a prisoner by the French for two years, from 1666-1668. After the Treaty of Breda, William Willoughby negotiated his release and insisted that Thomas "Indian" Warner be allowed to return to Dominica. Upon resettlement, the governor instructed Indian Warner to negotiate a peace treaty with windward Caribs, a move that the Leeward colonists did not appreciate.¹⁰⁴

As rumors of the silver mine began to circulate, Codrington's courtship of Indian Warner ultimately helped to exacerbate the view that Barbadians cared little about white Leewardians. From point of view of white imperialists in Antigua and Montserrat, Caribs were "bloodhounds" and racial others who were notoriously war-like. Yet from the point of view of Codrington and the governors that came before him, Indian Warner's English heritage was enough to turn him into a Deputy-Governor empowered as an agent of the Crown. These conflicting views about whether Indian Warner was a true English

¹⁰² Boucher, *Tropics*, 321, n. 324.

¹⁰³ The commission never made its way into the archival circuits, but later governors claimed that it made Indian Warner a Deputy-Governor of the Island. See Sir Jonathan Atkins, Governor of Barbados, to the Secretary, February 17, 1675, CO 1/34/13, extracted in CSPCO 9/439/175. When disputes over the island arose later in the century, Christopher Codrington claimed that he had granted Indian Warner a commission to serve as Deputy Governor. His testimony was taken in 1688 and is extracted in Report of the Council of Trade, N. 17, September 7, 1730, CO 71/2. In the same report, the secretary responsible for finding the original commission noted that the only copy of it appeared in Du Tertre's work. The copy can be found in Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale*, III:85.

¹⁰⁴ Lord Willoughby's Instructions to Major James Walker for his Voyage from Antigua to Dominica, February 2, 1668, CO 1/22/32.

subject came to a head in 1674, when Stapleton ordered the invasion of Dominica and Indian Warner was executed by Philip Warner, his half-brother.

Stapleton believed that taming the Dominica frontier and extirpating Caribs was key to unifying the war-torn Leewards under his the new government. Since he did not have to rely on the Governor of Barbados to authorize the campaign, Stapleton used the tensions to promote the power of the new Leeward federation and prove that the islanders could work in concert to defend the English colonies. When several Carib men were captured in Antigua and accused of killing two white residents and injuring two others in 1672, Stapleton seized the moment. He declared the attack a breach of the peace Willoughby had negotiated with Indian Warner and appealed to have Charles II negotiate with the French for help in eliminating the Carib threat.¹⁰⁵ White Montserratians also backed an attack and voted to retaliate. For them, the capture of twenty-eight Carib men who were found paddling pirogues offshore of Montserrat was a sure sign that they were the next victims of the “heathenish villains.”¹⁰⁶ Although the Carib men were able to convince Stapleton that they had no intention to assault colonists at the island, the Governor-General refused to release them. He believed that the skirmish at Antigua had been ordered and that the men captured offshore of Montserrat knew who authorized the murders.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Colonel William Stapleton, Governor of the Leeward Islands to the Council for Plantations, St. Kitts, May 27, 1672, CO 1/28/61, extracted in CSPCO 7/842/364, Governor William Stapleton to the Council of Plantations, Montserrat, December 10, 1672, CO 1/29/57, extracted in CSPCO 7/983/442-443, Governor William Stapleton to the Council for Trade and Plantations, Nevis, January 9, 1674, CO 1/31/4, extracted in CSPCO 7/1201/547.

¹⁰⁶ Colonel William Stapleton, Governor of the Leeward Islands to the Council for Plantations, St. Kitts, May 27, 1672, CO 1/28/61, extracted in CSPCO 7/842/364,

¹⁰⁷ Governor William Stapleton to the Council of Plantations, Montserrat, December 10, 1672, CO 1/29/57, extracted in CSPCO 7/983/442-443.

Stapleton's requests that the Crown or Council of Plantations support a campaign against Caribs went unanswered, perhaps because they were weighing the issue of the silver mines. Stapleton and elites in the islands decided to act anyway. In September of 1674, the Assembly and Council in Antigua appealed to Stapleton to "grant a commission to make war" against the "Indians at Dominica."¹⁰⁸ Stapleton granted the commission to the Governor of Antigua, Philip Warner, the son of Thomas Warner and supposed half-brother of Indian Warner. He assembled a fighting force of more than 300 men from the islands, and on December 21, 1674, Philip Warner led his reluctant crew on a four-day journey to Dominica. Once there, Philip Warner committed an act of mass murder so violent and troubling to English interests that King Charles II asked the Governor of Barbados to deliver the heads of the perpetrators to the victims in Dominica as a personal apology on his behalf.¹⁰⁹ As a result of the massacre, Philip Warner was jailed in the Tower of London for a year before being tried in Barbados.

Philip Warner's imprisonment resulted from a deposition provided to Governor Atkins (Willoughby's replacement) and the Barbados Council shortly after the massacre. William Hamlyn was a twenty-three year old commander of the sloop *Betty*, one of the ships commissioned to sail with Philip to Dominica. Hamlyn testified that two ships and 300 men arrived at the leeward side of Dominica on Christmas day, 1674, where they were met by Indian Warner, the "Deputy Governor for His Majesty." Philip Warner told Indian Warner that they were revenging wrongs done to them at Antigua. According to Hamlyn, Indian Warner agreed to let sixty of his men aid his half-brother revenge the

¹⁰⁸ Address of the Governor, Council, and Assembly of Antigua, n.d., included in Stapleton's letter to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, April 26, 1676, CO 1/36/52xi, extracted in CPSCO 9/902xi/384.

¹⁰⁹ Secretary Coventry to Sir Jonathan Atkins, Governor of Barbados, Whitehall, June 23, 1675, CO 391/2/70-71.

murders. He also provided provisions. The force tracked down the Windward Caribs; Hamlyn believed that at least 34 were killed in the skirmish. Three people “were drawn by a flag of truce” to Philip Warner’s ship only to be executed.

Hamlyn related that after the initial attack on the Windward Caribs, Philip Warner invited Indian Warner “and his Indians, to the number 60 or 70 men, women, and children to an entertainment of thanks” on the boat. The governor provided the crew and his guests with rum, and then, after everyone was “very drunk,” he “gave a signal” and some of the English crew began to massacre the unsuspecting families. Hamlyn stated that the “slaughter was by the sole direction” of the governor “against the consent of his officers” whom Hamlyn claimed to have heard “declare against it.”

One of these dissenters was Samuel Winthrop. According to Hamlyn, Philip Warner ordered Winthrop to kill Indian Warner, but he refused to kill the governor’s half-brother. Hamlyn himself “took an Indian boy in his arms to preserve him, but the child was wounded in his arms and afterwards killed.” The bodies were thrown overboard, filling the salty water below with blood. After the massacre, a young Carib who identified himself as Indian Warner’s son canoed to Philip Warner’s ship, got on board, and announced that since the governor “killed his father and all his friends,” he wanted the governor to take his life at well. He tilted his head to expose his neck, and Philip ordered the final blow. His body was flung overboard, where it sunk alongside the bludgeoned corpses of his father and friends.¹¹⁰

After hearing Hamlyn’s testimony, Atkins sent a copy of it directly to the King’s Privy Council, testifying that he felt the commander was a “serious and intelligent man of

¹¹⁰ Deposition of William Hamlyn, Commander of the Sloop Betty of Antigua, aged 23, before his Excellency and Council, Barbados, enclosed in Atkin’s letter to the Secretary, February 17, 1675, CO 1/34/13i, extracted in CSPCO 9/439i/175-176.

his quality.”¹¹¹ They viewed the conflict as a crisis. Fearing that the windward Dominicans had been “much alienated from the English by” his actions, Secretary Coventry wrote to Atkins, telling him that the King Charles II wanted him to provide “some signal” or “public demonstration of his justice” to the Caribs, perhaps by sending them “some heads” so that “they may be satisfied of the detestation his Majesty and the whole nation hath of this proceeding of Colonel Warner’s.”¹¹²

Warner’s imprisonment in London may have benefited him in the long run, because he was able to get appeals delivered to the Privy Council with some regularity. He argued that Hamlyn had a vendetta against him and that the young commander was acting in revenge for being punished for smuggling tobacco.¹¹³ The councilors at Whitehall were largely unsympathetic, and even considered having Warner tried at Dominica until they realized there was no English settlement on the island. Instead, they decided he should be tried in Bridgetown. The former governor of Antigua believed that he would find no sympathy from elites in Barbados, and lobbied hard to have his acquaintances from the English Leewards serve as jurists. Warner was successful, and in April of 1676, he left England onboard the H.M.S. *Phoenix* to be tried in Barbados for the atrocities he committed at Dominica by a jury partially comprised of English colonists from the Leewards.

During Philip Warner’s time in the Tower, William Stapleton began to generate several documents in an attempt to justify the commission he granted to Philip Warner. Stapleton attempted to explain away his actions by claiming that a group of Caribs had

¹¹¹ Sir Jonathan Atkins, Governor of Barbados, to the Secretary, Barbados, February 17, 1675, CO 1/34/13, extracted CSPCO 9/439/175-176.

¹¹² Secretary Coventry to Sir Jonathan Atkins, Whitehall, June 23, 1675, CO 391/2/70-71, extracted in CSPCO 9/601/248.

¹¹³ Higham, *Development of the Leeward Islands*, 133.

committed “murders and rapines upon Antigua a little before Christmas” of 1674. However, there is no proof that this actually occurred. No letters from the Leewards sent between late November and December mention an attack. Only correspondence compiled after the massacre took place mention Carib violence as a cause for the war party. Stapleton was intentionally vague in many of his letters to England, noting in one piece of correspondence that prior to Philip Warner’s departure, “Indians” had “sometime before” “landed at Antigua” and “committed many outrages and murdered some of his Majesty’s inhabitants.” In another letter, Stapleton provided evidence to support his actions. In a letter sent to the Lords of Plantations in 1676 during the run up to Philip’s trial, Stapleton enclosed a letter supposedly written from Robert Jones at Guadeloupe. It was dated November 23, 1674 and told of a rumor Jones had heard from one “Monsieur Bovine” at the French island. Jones claimed that Bovine had told him that he had seen “Warner’s Indians” at Grande Terre, Guadeloupe “making ready and poisoning their arrows.” According to the letter, Bovine believed an English speaking Carib man was the prime instigator and that he was revenging his enslavement at the hands of the English. Bovine reportedly told Jones that the English-speaking Carib man was not going to halt assaults on the Leewards until he had “them in keeping that kept him.”¹¹⁴

In addition to providing authorities in England letters like the one supposedly written by Jones, Stapleton also went to work by gathering several depositions on Philip Warner’s behalf. He sent two groups of documents; the first was sent sometime in late December of 1675. It likely arrived in England eight or nine weeks later, but they were

¹¹⁴ Copy of Intelligence of an Indian design about the time of the people of Antego’s going against the Indians, Guadeloupe, dated November 23, 1674, received June 29, 1676, CO 1/31/79, extracted in CSPCO 7/1391/624. The original should be properly filed as CO 1/36/52x along with the rest of the items sent to London by Stapleton at that time, but at some point it was placed according to its signed date, giving the impression that it was generated in 1674 and not in 1676.

not read to the councilors until April 6, 1676, days before the *Phoenix* lifted anchor. The Lords of Trade received the second series on June 29, 1676, after Warner already departed for his trial in Barbados. Judges, governors, and militia leaders took the depositions from inhabitants in St. Kitts, Nevis, Montserrat, and Antigua and provided them to Governor-General Stapleton at Nevis. Two of the deponents were women and many of the men were members of the local militias. The documents provide insight into the ways that Stapleton and Warner intended to mount his defense for killing his supposed half-brother and Carib Deputy-Governor of Dominica.

What is fascinating about the depositions is that the majority of them do not discuss the massacre. They do not even deny that it happened. Instead, the depositions are mostly focused on several overlapping narratives about Indian Warner, all pertaining to his identity. Nine of the twelve depositions were taken from people who claimed to know Indian Warner as a child; the three others testified to Carib assaults on Antigua. Of the nine who testified to knowing Indian Warner, each deponent swore that he was Thomas Warner's slave and implied that the murdered man was not the English governor's son. Four of the nine deponents buttressed their claims by noting that they believed Indian Warner was never baptized.

Whether Indian Warner dressed like a Carib or Englishmen was not important, and while it was generally accepted that he spoke English, the deponents and elite working to free Philip Warner seem generally unconcerned with his cultural practices. Instead, they were more concerned with more juridical issues that would have made him an English subject in the view of the English monarchy and Privy Council. It is important to recall that Governors Atkins and Codrington from Barbados had previously

written to the Privy Council and informed them that Indian Warner had been granted a commission to serve as Deputy-Governor of Dominica on behalf of the Charles II. Under these terms, he would have had to taken the oath of allegiance to the Crown of England, testified he was an Anglican, and thus because of his fealty, would have been an English subject—juridically a “free born English man” guaranteed protection from the Crown. In order to prove that Philip Warner’s actions were justified, Stapleton and the other elites in the Leewards had to create a case that Indian Warner was never rightfully free, that he was never a Christian, and as a result he could have never been a rightful subject to the Crown of England. This helps to explain why the testimony provided to the Lords of Trade during Philip Warner’s imprisonment focused primarily on three issues—that Indian Warner was not the natural born son of Thomas, that he was a slave, and that he was never baptized. All three of these pieces of information were provided to mutually enforce the idea that Indian Warner could have never truly been legally English and thus could not have rightfully been given the title of Deputy-Governor of Dominica. If he was not an agent for the Crown, then Philip Warner had simply killed a Carib, which was not against the law.

Several of the deponents painted Indian Warner as a slave who lived with Thomas Warner in a domestic “family.” This is an interesting aspect of the Leeward propaganda campaign, for none of the deponents denied that Indian Warner was affiliated with the man rumored to be his father. One of the deponents was Walter Carwardine, who “came over with Sir Thomas Warner to the Indies about forty-six years since and waited on him about four years.” He swore that “Sir Thomas had in his family of Indian slaves a male child commonly called Warner, or Indian Warner” and that he “was never baptized or

looked on as any other than a slave or negro's child, and was not reputed the child of Sir Thomas Warner."¹¹⁵ Sarah Choppin, a woman who was once a servant to Sir Thomas and now the wife of a militia lieutenant, testified that "Indian Warner always lodged in the Indian house, and never was reputed Sir Thomas's son."¹¹⁶ Her husband explained where Indian Warner got his name. Robert Choppin said that soon after he arrived in St. Kitts early in 1629 or 1630, "Sir Thomas called all his Indian slaves before him, to the number of twenty-four, and named a child (the first-born in his family of slaves) Warner."¹¹⁷ The Deputy-Governor of Nevis (and father-in-law of William Stapleton) testified that he "lived in Sir Thomas Warner's employ several years, and took account of his family, both of Indians and others," including Indian Warner, who was "so called because he was the first-born slave in the General's family in St. Christopher's."¹¹⁸

In St. Kitts, seventy-eight year old Gilbert Loxley swore to Deputy-Governor Abednego Mathew that he could recall "well" that "forty-six years ago" Thomas Warner had "several Indian slaves." One of the Sir Thomas's slaves was also named Tom, and he had an "Indian wife and a little boy, commonly called Warner, but never heard that the boy was baptized."¹¹⁹ Major Henry Cooke swore that he "frequented the house of Sir Thomas Warner and saw an Indian boy called Warner who served as a slave."¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Deposition of Walter Carwardine, Nevis, December 18, CO 1/35/63i, extracted in CSPCO 9/748i/320.

¹¹⁶ Deposition of Sarah Choppin, wife of Lieutenant Robert Choppin, Nevis, December 18, 1675, CO 1/35/63iii, extracted in CSPCO 9/748iii/320.

¹¹⁷ Deposition of Lieutenant Robert Choppin, Nevis, December 18, 1675, CO 1/35/63ii, extracted in CSPCO 9/748ii/320.

¹¹⁸ Deposition of Colonel Randall Russell, Deputy Governor of Nevis, Nevis, December 20, 1675, CO 1/35/63iv, extracted in CSPCO 9/748iv/320.

¹¹⁹ Deposition of Gilbert Loxley, aged 78, taken before Colonel Abednego Mathew, Governor of St. Christopher's, St. Kitts, n.d, CO 1/36/52iii, extracted in CSPCO 9/902iii/382.

¹²⁰ Deposition of Major Henry Crooke, Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, taken before Colonel Abednego Mathew, Governor of St. Christopher's, St. Kitts, n.d, CO 1/36/52vii, extracted in CSPCO 9/902vii/382.

The cultural logic driving these claims about Indian Warner's heritage was infused with ideas about "just war," a theory deeply entangled with cultural attitudes about slavery and the innate human nature of American Indians. Unlike a holy war, which was divinely ordained, a just war had to be fair, legal, and limited—based on just cause and carried out with just conduct.¹²¹ Spanish theorists such as the Jesuit Acosta and the Dominican Las Casas had taken up the issue of whether indigenous peoples were capable of rational thought a century before it was considered a relevant issue in Anglophone circles, and in 1542 Charles V banned the enslavement of Indians in Spanish territories, even if they were captured during a just war.¹²² English theorists interested in just war theory borrowed from the Dutch theorist Hugo Grotius, who explored in his 1627 text *De Jure Belli Et Pacis* how the "laws of nations" (theoretical rules governing warfare between Christian nations) could be reconciled with Thomas Aquinas's "laws of nature," or the innate principles of humans who possess reason.¹²³ By the time Indian Warner was born, Anglophone elites were only beginning to consider whether Indians were barbarian slaves to nature who should be treated according to the rules of holy war or rational beings who simply lived like children (that is, at a lesser state of civilization that was capable of being improved).¹²⁴

Whether or not Stapleton, Philip Warner, and Jonathan Atkins read the works of Thomas Aquinas or Hugo Grotius is unclear. However, the different attitudes and

¹²¹ Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 108-109.

¹²² Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World*, 98, Alan Galloway, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670-1717* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 46.

¹²³ Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity*, 107-108.

¹²⁴ Although he does not discuss the English, Pagden's work is informative about Eurocentric philosophical and juridical theories about Indians, see Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), especially Chapter 4.

rhetoric they used to describe the massacre of Indian Warner suggests that they had divergent (although ambiguous) views about whether the son of an English noble and a Carib woman was an uncivilized barbarian or a man capable of reason, and in turn, justifiably an agent of the Crown. In Atkins and Codrington's view, Indian Warner was clearly capable of governing a polity under their watch and serving as a English subject, but Stapleton, Philip Warner, and their fellow elites in the Leewards were bent on casting Indian Warner as a vengeful, blood thirsty warrior who cared little about military ethics.

Twenty members of the government of St. Kitts sent a letter to the King on behalf of Philip Warner, stating that the "cannibals" and "savages" of Dominica "proved themselves treacherous and perfidious, taking all opportunities to rob, murder and commit outrages on his Majesty's subjects who have been inhumanly butchered, miserably mangled, dismembered, and other villainies not to be mentioned by a Christian."¹²⁵ The governments at Antigua and Nevis were less forceful but cited previous Carib attacks as just cause for Philip Warner's assault.¹²⁶ Members of the London Adventurers merchant guild also appealed to the Lords of Trade, noting that a trial would be of "great encouragement to those infidels" and an "absolute overthrow of Antigua."¹²⁷

Jonathan Atkins at Barbados did not believe that Philip Warner had just cause to commit the massacre at Dominica. He wrote that the former Governor of Antigua

¹²⁵ Representation of the Deputy Governor, Council, and Assembly of St. Christopher's to the King, n.d., CO 1/36/52xii, extracted in CSPCO 19/902xii/384-385.

¹²⁶ Representation of the Deputy Governor, Council, and Assembly of Nevis to the King, n.d., CO 1/36/52xiii, extracted in CSPCO 19/902xiii/385, Representation of the Deputy Governor, Council, and Assembly of Antigua to the King, n.d., CO 1/36/52xi, extracted in CSPCO 19/902xi/384-385.

¹²⁷ Petition of Several Merchants of London Adventurers to the Caribbee Islands to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, January 10, 1676, CO 1/36/5, extracted in CSPCO 9/779/33. They asked for the trial to be moved to Nevis.

“assassinated” his “brother” in an “intemperate act” of “the greatest inhumanity.” Although Atkins called the Caribs “savages” and noted that they had committed “pernicious” acts against inhabitants of the Leewards, he also stated that they were capable of amity and friendship with the Crown. Atkins viewed the assault as “an affront done to himself in his government,” and was willing to defend the claim that Indian Warner was a subject of the Crown of England.¹²⁸

If rumors that silver mines in Dominica did not exist, would the arguments about Indian Warner’s birth or baptism matter? Would Jonathan Atkins have felt differently about the need to maintain good relations with Carib leaders? Or was all of this rhetoric simply pieced together by leaders savvy of military rule and legal maneuvering who were interested in buttressing their own power and influence in a subdivided archipelago, where racial Others served as foil to promote imperial power?

There is no way to say for certain. There are no transcripts of Philip Warner’s trial, only evidence of how it ended. He was acquitted. The jury comprised of elites from the Leewards and Barbados concluded that insufficient evidence existed to convict him. William Hamlyn, the impressed commander who testified about the atrocities, did not testify at the trial. Later, Stapleton offered a story about Hamlyn’s disappearance. He informed Secretary Robert Southwell that Hamlyn had been captured in Curaçao, an island that Hamlyn frequented in the *Betty*. Stapleton sent a letter to the Dutch Governor that he was wanted for “stealing thirty odd negroes from the English part of St. Christopher” and asked to have him arrested. Hamlyn was captured and sent to Holland

¹²⁸ Governor Atkins to the Secretary of the Council of Trade and Plantations, Barbados, February 8, 1675, CO 1/34/13, extracted CSPCO 9/439/175-176.

in irons.¹²⁹ Atkins suggested that Hamlyn was purposefully “carried away,” and as a result, “it was easy to persuade others who were in the action that by accusing Warner they would condemn themselves.”¹³⁰ Philip Warner returned to Antigua, where white residents gladly welcomed him back. Although the Privy Council ordered that Warner be denied office, by 1679 he was elected to the Antigua Assembly and chosen by his friends to be speaker.¹³¹

The massacre of Indian Warner and the subsequent trial of Philip marked the ascendancy of the planters of the English Leeward Islands as a distinct social and political force influencing the balance of power in the Lesser Antilles. The ability of Stapleton and the other elites in English St. Kitts, Nevis, Montserrat, and Antigua to work against Barbadian interests proved that there were benefits to working under the umbrella of a single political body. Warner’s courthouse victory also signaled that colonials would continue to sanction military campaigns against Carib populations. In 1681, this time with permission from the Crown and acknowledgment from Barbados, Stapleton organized Leeward men to go “Indian hunting” in Dominica and St. Vincent. Again, Stapleton used rumors of a pending attack sent to him from Guadeloupe as justification for his campaign. After engaging in a small skirmish at Dominica, he had his men burn all of the periaguas they could find on the shoreline, leaving only three behind. Stapleton

¹²⁹ Governor Stapleton to Sir Robert Southwell, Nevis, November 22, 1676, CO 1/38/64, extracted in CSPCO 9/1151/497.

¹³⁰ Governor Sir Jonathan Atkins to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Barbados, September 25, 1676, Co 1/37/56, extracted in CSPCO 9/1040/457.

¹³¹ Higham, *Development of the Leeward Islands*, 136.

estimated that his crew burned upwards of three hundred “houses” and destroyed a “prodigious quantity of their provisions.”¹³² He wanted the Caribs to leave or starve.

Violence and disease either killed Caribs in Dominica or drove them farther south as the end of the century neared. One source suggests that the Carib population at Dominica had dwindled to 600 by 1683, two years after Stapleton’s expedition. Another source noted that 400 Caribs were living on the windward of the island in 1730; more French settlers probably inhabited Dominica in the 1720s than did Caribs.¹³³ When he visited Dominica in the early eighteenth century, the French Dominican missionary Jean-Baptiste Labat had to hire guides to find the Carib village.¹³⁴

Surrounded on both sides by much larger and more heavily populated Guadeloupe and Martinique and forced into relative isolation by repetitive attacks from Leeward governors, Caribs at Dominica could no longer afford to coordinate a stiff resistance after 1680. Instead, they survived by withdrawing from imperial conflicts and relied on French governors to protect them from enslavement or death at the hands of English colonists bent on taking the island. Some Caribs at Dominica continued to welcome interisland traders, smugglers, and pirates who came to the island to fetch wood and water.

Unlike in St. Vincent, a sizeable community of so-called “Black Caribs” never took hold in Dominica.¹³⁵ Whether this was because black runaways were unwelcome at the island or because French and English governors had an easier time forcing the

¹³² Sir William Stapleton to the Lords of Trade, Nevis, June 15, 1683, CO 1/52/17, extracted in CSPCO 11/1126/447-448.

¹³³ Pritchard, *Search of Empire*, 9.

¹³⁴ Boucher, *Tropics*, 302.

¹³⁵ Colonists did not use the term “Black Caribs” to describe the people of African descent who lived in St. Vincent until later in the century.

diminished population to return runaways is difficult to assess. Whatever the case, by the turn of the century, elites in the English Leewards could no longer claim that Caribs from Dominica were a threat to their livelihood and property. For them, the island frontier of Dominica had been tamed and the Carib threat neutralized. Leeward power was vindicated and their independence from Barbados verified in the acquittal of Philip Warner, their Carib-killing hero who murdered his half-brother in order to defend the porous borders from people viewed as outsiders.

Conclusion

Local elites and metropolitan imperialists concerned with St. Kitts, Nevis, Montserrat, and Antigua worked to create the idea of His Majesty's Leeward Caribbees as a way to contend with the challenges posed by an imperially divided set of closely linked islands. By granting the islands separation from Barbados and their own Governor-General, metropolitan officials hoped to rein in factionalism and integrate the islands more completely into the imperial body. In part, this reform was intended to enhance control over trade, but Whitehall's interest in the region was not simply about the balance of trade between the Leewards and England. The conflict in St. Kitts and the temporary loss of Antigua and Montserrat illustrated to empire makers in England that the tiny islands had a strategic, geopolitical importance that exceeded their value as productive colonies. Because they were at a unique convergence of the Atlantic currents, the Leewards were a hub for commerce between West Africa and the Caribbean, Barbados and Jamaica, and the Lesser Antilles to North America. They were key links in the growing imperial chain of commerce, but they could also be used as bases for the Royal Navy to pick off imperial competitors. In part, this is why the Council of Trade and

Plantations began to take more interest in the ethnic composition and economic conditions of the islands—their strategic import rested on their development as vibrant “English” colonies. As Charles Wheler noted in a letter to the Council in 1672, St. Kitts was in some ways the keystone of an integrated empire, for it held “the balance between His Majesty’s interest and that of the most Christian King, it being certain that who has that island entire will be master of all the rest.”¹³⁶

The creation of “His Majesty’s Leewards” had major effects on the way power aligned in the archipelago. In 1672, the newly formed Royal African Company established its Leeward entrepôt in Charles Town, Nevis, within view of Stapleton’s estate, “Jennings and Balls Range.” The creation of the Royal African Company (RAC) in 1672 provided a means for Leeward elites to transform the colonies from frontier outposts to productive sugar producing islands. Plantation owners in Nevis benefited most from the creation of the RAC and the small island quickly became the largest producer of sugar and the only black majority in His Majesty’s Leeward Caribees before 1680.¹³⁷ Despite protests over the RAC’s choice to establish the Charles Town slave mart, all of the islands in the English Leewards experienced a rise in the black population after the RAC arrived. Between 1672 and 1688, 96 slave ships arrived at the islands, 66 of them to Charles Town, Nevis.¹³⁸ The number of enslaved folk living in the English

¹³⁶ Account of the Present State of the Leeward Islands delivered to the Committee of the Council for Plantations by Sir Charles Wheler, December 14, 1672, CO 1/29/61.

¹³⁷ Antiguans complained that the entrepôt unfairly hindered their ability to secure slaves. *Laws of the Leeward Islands*, 49. The formation of the Company of Royal Adventures trading to Africa in 1660 did little to increase the number of Africans forced to work in the English Leewards. The monopoly company only commissioned four ships to the Leewards, where it sold 1,113 men and women, all of whom arrived in the islands in 1664. *Voyages*, <http://slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces?yearFrom=1600&yearTo=1672&mjstptimp=33400.33500.33600.33700> (accessed October 23, 2009).

¹³⁸ *Voyages*, <http://slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces?yearFrom=1672&yearTo=1688&mjstptimp=33400.33500.33600.33700> (accessed October 23, 2009).

Leewards catapulted from 3,700 to over 8,400 within six years of the RAC's arrival.

Although European colonization stagnated, the only place where enslaved folk outnumbered white colonists was in Nevis, where people of African descent outnumbered English, Scottish, and Irish settlers 3,849 to 3,521 in 1678.¹³⁹ By 1688, the RAC had sold 17,182 people to slave in English Leeward islands. This number does not include the 5,202 who died during the Middle Passage.¹⁴⁰ In short, facing a labor shortage and the exodus of planters from the islands, elites drawing support from the new Stuart policies regarding the slave trade consciously switched to enslaved African labor after the Second Anglo-Dutch War.

At the same time that English power began to coalesce around Nevis, French officials decided to shift their focus away from Basseterre, St. Kitts toward Martinique. Between 1664 and 1674, French commerce in the region was controlled by the Compagnie des Indes Occidentales, or French West India Company. Although the company disbanded in 1674, it helped increase immigration to St. Kitts, Martinique, and Guadeloupe and accelerated commerce to the French islands. In 1660, only four ships arrived in the French islands, but by 1674, 131 sailed to the Antilles.¹⁴¹ The company helped turn the French islands into black majorities.

Following the war of 1666-1667, the population in French St. Kitts stood at 3,333 white settlers (including Dutch settlers and at least 290 English residents), 4,468 blacks

¹³⁹ The 1678 has been discussed extensively in Zacek, "Dangerous Tenants: Conflict and Community in a Colonial British American World, 1670-1763", Chapter 1, Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World*, 189-200, and Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 126-131.

¹⁴⁰ *Voyages*, <http://slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces?yearFrom=1672&yearTo=1688&mjstimp=33400.33500.33600.33700> (accessed October 23, 2009).

¹⁴¹ The company was intended to break Dutch hegemony in the slave trade. Prior to its formation, France had been buying sugar, much of it produced in Martinique, St. Kitts, and Guadeloupe, at a cost of 1,885,000 livres per annum from Dutch traders. Blackburn, *Making*, 283, Mims, *Colbert*, 180.

(of which at least 187 were owned by resident English), and 112 *gens du couleur*, or “mixed race” people of color. The population in French St. Kitts was slightly larger than that of the larger island of Guadeloupe, where an estimated 3,331 white colonists, 4,267 black folk, and 98 people of color labored in the mixed tobacco, indigo, and sugar fields. Martinique had the largest black majority and overall population in the French islands—4,326 white settlers lived in the new French seat of power in the Îles du Vent, while 6,582 enslaved folk comprised the bulk of the labor power in the colony in 1671. In total, the population in three largest French territories in the archipelago stood at about 11,000 people who identified as white and more than 15,300 who were identified by the colonial state as “Nègre.”¹⁴²

Martinique became the base of French power in the eastern Caribbean in the 1670s. After the French West India Company disbanded, French finance-minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert established the new mercantilist regime known as the *exclusif*. Under the new policy, French ships the colonies were required to dock at selected ports, where duties on goods were paid on imported goods.¹⁴³ Direct French exports of sugar from the islands rose, but Dutch traders from St. Eustatius continued to dominate the slave trade to the French islands. Colbert specifically noted the impact of the tiny Dutch island on French commerce as a problem. In 1669, he instructed the French Governor-General to “keep special watch on the Dutch established at St. Eustatius, who will miss no opportunity to employ every means to sell their merchandize in the French islands and to carry away the products thereof.”¹⁴⁴ Two years later, the French Crown moved the center

¹⁴² Pritchard, *Search of Empire*, 50,54.

¹⁴³ Blackburn, *Making*, 283.

¹⁴⁴ March 27 and October 4, 1669, B/1/164, 170, *Archive Nationale* (Paris), reprinted in Mims, *Colbert*, 186-187.

of power in the Îles du Vent out of Basseterre at St. Kitts and farther away from Dutch influence. Planters from the neighboring French islands had to travel to Point-a-Pitre to purchase slaves and export their goods to Europe. As a result, Martinique gained commercial as well as naval primacy over St. Kitts and Guadeloupe.¹⁴⁵ The move pushed the center of French power further to the center of the archipelago, virtually halfway between Barbados and Antigua. Growth in French St. Kitts stagnated—fewer people lived on the island in 1689 than did in 1671. Slowly, colonists began withdrawing from the French quarters. By 1697, when France officially gained authority over Saint-Domingue, French Basseterre was only a shell of its former self and the divided island was poised to become wholly English. In 1701, only 901 white colonists and about 950 people of color lived in French St. Kitts.¹⁴⁶ In 1713, following nearly two decades of back and forth skirmishes between the two crowns, France finally ceded the tips of the island to Queen Anne. As the imperial lines hardened in the Leeward archipelago, enslaved folk were caught in the crossfire.

¹⁴⁵ Blackburn, *Making*, 282-283, Dubois, *Colony of Citizens*, 32.

¹⁴⁶ Pritchard, *Search of Empire*, 49-50.

Chapter III

A Contradiction of Very Pernicious Consequence

Late one evening in early December, 1714, well after the sun had disappeared from the sky, a man named Michel hurried his two children Anne and George down a dirt path toward a rickety wooden dock in Les Abymes, Guadeloupe. Close behind were eleven other slaves from Guillaume Garet's plantation, including Louise, Jacob, and one man named Rock du Congo. As they reached the end of the dock, Michel offered his hand to his kinfolk from the plantation as they stepped into a wobbly wooden pirogue carelessly tied to Monsieur Clocke's *embarquadaire*. Once aboard, the makeshift crew pushed off, paddling swiftly but quietly into the open waters separating French Guadeloupe and English Montserrat. They were in search of freedom, in search of a new land. They wanted to be someplace else; anywhere but Les Abymes.

The flight of Michel, his children, and the other men and women from Guadeloupe speak to a paradox that erupted in the Leewards at the turn of the century. At the heart of this contradiction was the relational meaning of English Liberty in the context of imperial slavery. Colonialism is by definition a practice involving both boundary and identity making. Racial plantation slavery posed a unique problem to this practice. In order to create empires, imperial power brokers had to define their boundaries and work to limit the liberty of the highly mobile populations that made them possible. On one hand, the plantation regime lent itself to these interwoven facets of the

imperial project. Plantations required a concerted effort of elites and poorer whites to police movement and restrict travel in order to thrive; legal distinction of enslaved folk as property and severe restrictions on legal freedom for people of color buttressed those aims. On the other hand, the racial plantation regime in small islands created colonies where the vast majority of the inhabitants were excluded from the supposed benefits of empire. Imperial slavery in the Lesser Antilles created forced founders with few reasons to align themselves with imperial aims. In part, Michel's decision to take flight from Guadeloupe emerged out of this contradiction.

The timing of the escape from Guadeloupe also speaks to a more specific context that dominated the experience of enslaved folk in the islands at the turn of the century. Living in the Leewards meant being exposed not only to the rumors of war and the lived realities of imperial conflict and competition, but also the social effects of new ideas about imperial ideology. At the same time that the racialized sugar plantation came to define the political-economy of Nevis, Montserrat, Antigua, and St. Kitts, the language of "liberty" and "free born English" rights became more salient than ever for colonists in the archipelago. Seizing upon this rhetoric, Protestant elites in the islands prosecuted a war with their French neighbors under the guise that they were protecting themselves from "popery and slavery." In 1710, these conflicts turned inward when a group of colonists in Antigua assassinated Governor-General Daniel Parke, a Virginia-born gentryman and staunch supporter of the Stuart Crown.¹ Colonists accused him of conspiring to turn the island over to the French. For English colonists, these conflicts were fought in the name of preserving liberties and defending the rights achieved of the "Glorious Revolution,"

¹ Natalie Zacek, "A Death in the Morning: The Murder of Daniel Parke, Antigua, 1710," in *Cultures and Identities in Colonial British America*, ed. Robert Olwell and Allen Tully (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 143-146.

but in reality, the conflicts in the Leewards were about expanding land ownership and the slave regime. For enslaved folk caught in the crossfire, the problems their masters faced during an era of internal and external social disruption offered new ways for people of African descent to resist their exploitation. By seizing upon their own agency in the middle of these crises, black folk in the islands began to challenge both the physical and ideological terrain imposed upon them and, in turn, ever so slightly began to redefine what real liberty meant in an imperially crowded archipelago.

Conspiracy, Rebellion, and English “Slavery” in the 1680s

The 1680s marked a period of heightened anxiety on both sides of the emerging English Atlantic Empire. In the Caribbean as well as in England, issues of liberty and slavery were front and center. While the debates in England centered around the political power of James II and his efforts to create a modern English Empire, in the colonies, the issues concerning the monarchy were interwoven with the practice of racial slavery.

For most of the decade, the British Isles were preoccupied with the possibility that James II, Duke of York, was going to succeed his brother Charles II as heir to the throne. The politics of the succession had major reverberations in the slave trading colonies. James, who had a heavy hand in imperial affairs as Lord High Admiral of the Royal Navy and primary shareholder of the Royal African Company, had a vision for a more modern, centrally organized nation and empire. Partisans in England argued that James was a Bourbon sympathizer, Catholic tyrant, and an absolute monarchist. When James relinquished his post as Lord High Admiral in 1673 instead of renouncing his belief in transubstantiation as ordered by the Test Act of 1672, murmurs about his Catholic conversion and fondness for French ideas about monarchical absolutism reached new

heights. In April of 1685, fears of a Catholic succession became reality when James II was crowned king. Britons opposed to the succession of James II equated his views on absolute monarchism—what they called “arbitrary power”—with slavery, a theme most clearly articulated by Locke in his *Two Treatises*.²

Public rumor about James II’s desires to turn England into another France fueled fears among commoners and aristocrats alike in the metropole. The first bout of widespread hysteria surrounding the Duke of York erupted in 1678, with the false conspiracy known as the “Popish Plot.” Titus Oates, a former chaplain in the Navy, concocted a story about Jesuit priests who were lurking in England and prepared to kill Charles II and install James II in his place. James II’s political rivals in Parliament seized upon the fears to mount political opposition against the Duke. Calling themselves the “country party,” a tightly knit group led by the Earl of Shaftesbury engaged in a popular propaganda campaign to gain support for their effort to exclude James II from succession by a Parliamentary bill—the Exclusion Act. The group relied upon the coffee houses in London to coordinate marches and protests meant to delegitimize James.

Crowds mocked the image of papal slavery openly in London’s streets. In 1679 and 1680, protestors burned effigies at Temple Bar in huge bonfires that lit up the sky. During a parade celebrating the ascension of Queen Elizabeth on November 17, a large crowd gathered and marched down the street dressed as catholic clergymen, carrying an effigy of the pope sitting in a chair of state above their heads as they strutted mockingly through the city.³ The events were both religious and political in nature, aimed at a

² John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett, Cambridge Texts in History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 284.

³ Some involved in prosecuting the Popish Plot aided the protestors directly. William Waller provided a cache of catholic religious objects and books so that they could be burnt in public ritualistic bonfires. Tim

perceived threat to broadly conceived Protestant liberties.⁴ The protests fueled the belief that succession would lead to metaphorical enslavement of Englishmen. As dissenter James Holloway recalled, Britons believed that “the Liberties of the people were daily more and more infringed, and that Arbitrary Government and Popery was coming in apace.”⁵

The hysteria surrounding the succession did not fade after Londoners learned that the Popish Plot was a fake. Opposition to James grew. In June of 1683, Britons learned of a preemptive coup—the “Rye House Plot”—supposedly organized by the “country party” to overthrow the Stuarts. Plotters including William Russell and Algernon Sidney were executed for their supposed role in the coup, but several other country party suspects implicated in the Rye House Plot fled to the Netherlands. One of those who fled was James Scott, Duke of Monmouth, who claimed to be the Protestant heir to Charles II. Within months of James II’s coronation in 1685, Scott sailed from the United Provinces with a small group of soldiers to Dorset in an effort to launch a takeover of the Crown (the Earl of Argyle planned a simultaneous attack in Scotland). Monmouth pressed locals in the region to fight for his cause, but he was captured after a two-month struggle and beheaded at Tower Hill. When his co-conspirator Richard Rumbold was brought to the

Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II: Propaganda and Politics from the Restoration until the Exclusion Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 102-108.

⁴ As Steven Pincus has recently pointed out in his study of the Glorious Revolution, the period leading up to 1688 involved a complex interplay of religious and political anxieties that are difficult to neatly untangle. He contends, “just as the English were radically transforming their social and economic environment in the later seventeenth century, so were they shifting their political attitudes. Religion remained an important element of English political life, but it had ceased to dominate it. The English, by 1685, had begun to move beyond identity politics.” The subject of empire remains largely absent from his wonderful analysis of the revolution. Steven C. A. Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 94. To date, the best study of the Glorious Revolution in the (North) American colonies is still David S. Lovejoy, *The Glorious Revolution in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

⁵ James Holloway, *The Free and Voluntary Confession and Narrative of James Holloway* (Edinburgh: Reprinted by the Heir of Andrew Anderson, 1684), 2.

scaffold in Scotland on June 26, 1685, he shouted to the glaring crowd that his efforts were not in vain, but for “just rights and liberties” and “against popery and slavery.”⁶

English “Slavery” in the Islands

The emerging paranoia about “arbitrary government,” popery, and slavery played out in the slave holding colonies with a degree of irony. For many slave-owning whites, James II—primary shareholder of the Royal African Company—symbolized the enslaving power of monopoly over the liberties of the “free trader.” Yet the official position of the West Indian colonial governments was to praise the Crown for surviving the political crises. On September 26, 1683, the Jamaican government petitioned Governor Thomas Lynch to appoint a day of thanksgiving on the island “for the escape of the King and Duke of York from the late horrid” Rye House Plot.⁷ The Council of Barbados made November 18, 1683 a day of thanksgiving in honor of the discovery of the conspiracy.⁸ Later, the St. Kitts government issued a belated response to the Crown that congratulated the Stuarts for surviving “black and hellish designs of that vast number of bloody miscreants and king-killing men.”⁹

⁶ Reprinted in Melinda Zook, ““The Bloody Assizes:” Whig Martyrdom and Memory after the Glorious Revolution,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 27, no. 3 (1995): 390. For informative discussions of the street protests surrounding the Exclusion Crisis and propaganda that inspired them, see Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II: Propaganda and Politics from the Restoration until the Exclusion Crisis*, 102-108. For a general introduction of the motives of the country party, see Melinda S. Zook, *Radical Whigs and Conspiratorial Politics in Late Stuart England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 102-109, 126-137. On the use of the trials of Monmouth and his followers by Whig “martyrologists,” see Zook, ““The Bloody Assizes:” Whig Martyrdom and Memory after the Glorious Revolution.”

⁷ Minutes of the Council of Jamaica, September 26, 1683, CO 140/4/19a-20, CSPCO 11/1267/504, September 19, 1685, CO 140/4/87-89, 100-102, extracted in CSPCO 12/372/95.

⁸ Minutes of the Council of Barbados, November 7, 1683, CO 1/53/43, extracted in CSPCO 11/1369/540.

⁹ Address of the Deputy Governor, Council, and Representatives of St. Christophers to the King, January 26, 1684, CO 153/3/136-137, extracted in CSPCO 11/1520/580-581.

These official declarations of support glossed over the emerging problems of faction in the West Indian colonies, where imperial political tensions were entangled with issues of local political authority and religious identity.¹⁰ In the same letter that remarked on the new thanksgiving in Barbados, the governor also informed the Lords of Trade that he was asking former governor Peter Colleton—one of the most powerful absentee plantation owners from Barbados—to account for a load of ginger and sugar that he was supposed to have provided for the benefit of the island’s public.¹¹ The inquiry was not coincidental. Colleton was an acquaintance of the Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Earl of Shaftesbury and agent provocateur of the country party. His name was found on a paper belonging to a Rye House plotter and was believed to be a contributor to Titus Oates’s pension.¹²

In Jamaica, the tensions surrounding the Rye House Plot also shaped domestic power struggles, as leaders debated the problems of piracy and dependency on the Royal African Company for access to slaves. Writing to the Lords of Trade from Port Royal in November of 1683, Jamaican governor Thomas Lynch admitted that he was facing “more trouble than I ever had in my life” from a new political group known as the “Loyal Club” on the island. Led by the pirate turned privateer turned plantation owner Henry Morgan, the group publicly “cursed and damned” dissenters on the island and painted Lynch as a politician bought by the Royal African Company. “The whole country was provoked by their taking the name of the Loyal Club,” Lynch wrote, and the public began to cast

¹⁰ Even before the Rye House coup was supposed to occur, dissent regarding James II’s possible succession crept into struggles for power in New England. See the Trial of Edward Gove for Treason, Governor Cranfield to Sir Leoline Jenkins, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, February 20, 1683, CO 1/51/34I.

¹¹ Minutes of the Council of Barbados, November 7, 1683, CO 1/53/43, extracted in CSPCO 11/1369/540.

¹² “Sir Peter Colleton,” in Basil Duke Henning, *The House of Commons, 1660-1690*, 3 vols. (London: Published for the History of Parliament Trust by Secker & Warburg, 1983), I:106.

Morgan as “head of the Tories” and that Lynch was “one of the Whigs.” “The people are offended at being called duke-killing rogues,” Lynch added.¹³

The Monmouth Rebellion amplified already existing worries about internal political dissent throughout the colonies. In 1685, the Crown was so worried that “false reports” about Monmouth’s success “should be spread by the malicious” in the colonies that a circular was sent out from Whitehall declaring the “total defeat of the traitor.”¹⁴ Governor Dongan in New York reported to Earl of Sunderland that false reports stating the Duke of Monmouth’s success had been entering the colony from Boston before the circular arrived.¹⁵ Whether or not these rumors made their way to Barbados and the Leewards is unclear, but when news of Monmouth’s campaign reached Jamaica, a captain of the militia on the island began to stir up locals by “vilifying the commissions” issued by the now dead Charles II “and encouraging others to despise” Lieutenant-Governor’s authority. For uttering his words of “serious import,” the Governor of Jamaica had Captain Charles Hudson tried for treason and hanged.¹⁶

Rumors of the political crisis in England played out most dramatically in Bermuda, where local petitions had led Charles II to annul the Somers Isles Company charter and turned the island into a crown colony in 1684. Governor Cony, appointed by recently crowned James II, faced a colony “nearly fallen to ruin” in the wake of the Duke

¹³ Governor Lynch to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Jamaica, November 2, 1683, CSPCO 11/1348/533-535.

¹⁴ The King to the Governors of the Plantations, Whitehall, June 26, 1685. Circulars appear in the following locations: Leewards, CO 153/3/185-187, Barbados CO 29/3/308-309, Maryland CO 5/723, New England CO 5/904/239-240, Carolina CO 5/288/61-62, Jamaica CO 138/5/80-83. The circular is reprinted in CSPCO 12/253/59-60.

¹⁵ Governor Dongan to the Earl of Sunderland, New York, September 18, 1685, CO 1/58/58, extracted in CSPCO 12/371/95.

¹⁶ Lieutenant-Governor Molesworth to William Blathwayt, Jamaica, September 25, 1685, CO 138/5/103-112, extracted in CSPCO 12/378/96-98.

of York's ascension. Before news of the Monmouth Rebellion arrived, Cony wrote that "the clamour of the country is that I have no power to govern but through the Duke of York, a Papist." Locals, who were known throughout the colonies for their fast moving "Bermuda sloops," specifically complained of the new governor's efforts to halt the building of ships and use of timber for export to "foreign parts."¹⁷ "People draw up articles against me," Cony anxiously wrote, "my warrants are disobeyed" and "prisoners break out of prison in mere contempt."¹⁸ Believing the commissions issued to Cony by James II were not valid, Anthony White, Richard Stafford, and several others beat drums throughout the island and gained signatures for the "good of the country" "according to their custom against the late Company." In a letter to the Earl of Sunderland, Cony detailed how the white Bermudians imagined their new "enslavement" to James II's empire:

They cry out, "What! Are you sent hither to enslave us? We are a free-born people; our lands are our own, and we will do with our own what we please; and if we do not like the King's Government, we can leave the Island and go and live elsewhere. The Company was a Company of rascals, and thought to have brought us under their command, but now we find we are in a way to be perfectly ruined and enslaved." This is their frequent discourse to me, for they esteem all government, not of their own establishing, to be slavery.¹⁹

All government not of their making was slavery. This was a common refrain heard by the gentry in the islands.

¹⁷ On the Bermuda sloop, see Michael Jarvis, "Maritime Masters and Seafaring Slaves in Bermuda, 1680-1783," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (2002), and Michael Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

¹⁸ Governor Cony to the Earl of Sunderland, Bermuda, October 8, 1685, CO 1/58/70, extracted in CSPCO 12/396/100-103.

¹⁹ Governor Cony to the Earl of Sunderland, Bermuda, June 4, 1685, CO 1/57/135, extracted in CSPCO 12/210/48-51.

Of course, white Bermudians had nothing to say about their practice of enslaving people of color. In fact, one of their major complaints about James II was that he ordered Cony to claim all slaves formally owned by the company to be taken from Bermudian households in the name of the crown. These men and women, who Cony called “the King’s slaves,” were targets of revenge for white Bermudians and “frequently beaten” because they labored for the new governor. Bermudians wanted to be free to trade with whom they wanted and protect their rights to hold humans as property. For Anthony White, Richard Stafford, Joseph Milburn, and most others in Bermuda, English liberty meant the freedom to enslave racial others.

In the Leewards, news of the Rye House Plot and Monmouth Rebellion played out differently in each of the religiously plural colonies. In Antigua, stories about the Rye House conspiracy arrived as Protestant colonists on the island were in a tizzy over suspected papists lurking through the island and performing public mass. Antigua, which had yet to become the full-fledged sugar producer that it would become only fifteen years later, still had a sizeable though marginalized Irish community in the early 1680s.²⁰ In September of 1683, the assembly issued a request to the council that a writ of posse comitatus be issued to the marshal of the island to arrest a “Roman priest” named Doctor Port who was believed to be lurking on the island. The posse was also charged with finding Jasper Joyce, a man who threatened to murder the men who informed against

²⁰ People identified as Irish in the 1678 census amounted to 26.4% of the white population. Governor Stapleton to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Nevis, June 29, 1678, Zacek, “Dangerous Tenants: Conflict and Community in a Colonial British American World, 1670-1763”, 61.

Port's public masses. The council conceded to the request, but what happened to the two men is unclear.²¹

The overlapping political and religious tensions in the islands helped to fragment political union in the newly formed Leeward colony. As rumors about the plots and conspiracies in England pulsed through the islands, William Stapleton, the Governor-General of the Leewards, faced accusations that he was trying to consolidate his power in the new Leeward General Assembly, which was intended to synchronize the laws of the four largest islands in the government. Many merchants and plantation owners—especially those in Antigua—resented Stapleton's efforts, fearing that laws passed in the General Assembly would limit their power and enhance Crown power to police interimperial trade.²²

Facing a stiff resistance to his efforts to unify the islands under a single legislative body, Governor-General Stapleton petitioned Charles II to end his commission over His Majesty's Leewards in November of 1683.²³ The Council of Nevis seized on the news to lobby for the Governor-General of their choice. Access to slaves was becoming a major political issue in the tiny island colony, as it pitted patrons of the Royal African Company officials against plantation owners who relied on the illicit Dutch trade through neighboring St. Eustatius. The Nevis councilors wrote that they wanted someone with “loyalty, courage, fidelity, and military prudence” to “check our potent French

²¹ Journal of the Council and Assembly of Antigua, September 25, 1683, CO 1/49/81, extracted in CSPCO 11/1266/503.

²² Journal of the General Assembly of the Leeward Islands, Nevis, October 30, 1683, CO 155/1/25-28. On the General Assembly, see the dated but informative Higham, “General Assembly of the Leeward Islands.” Whether Stapleton modeled the General Assembly on the New England Confederation is unclear, but certainly worthy of study.

²³ Petition of Sir William Stapleton to the King, Nevis, November 7, 1683, CO 1/53/43, CSPCO 11/1370/540.

neighbors.”²⁴ In truth, they desired a governor who could lobby for increased access to the slave trade and provide cover from the RAC’s efforts to curb the growing slave trade with Dutch St. Eustatius.²⁵ In August, just before news of the Rye House scare reached the island, a letter from Windsor arrived in Nevis reprimanding Stapleton for not fully prosecuting several plantation owners who were accused of actively circumventing the RAC monopoly. The planters had also been implicated in the murder of a Royal African Company servant. Stapleton’s inaction on the matter drew reprimands from abroad.²⁶

Although Protestant hard-line reformers in the Leewards hated the thought of a Catholic monarch, James II’s coronation signaled potential peace in divided St. Kitts. In November of 1686, the crowns of England and France signed the *Treaty of Peace, Good Correspondence, and Neutrality in America*, which outlined a series of articles that governed interimperial relations in the colonies. As its title indicates, the treaty was created to maintain peace between colonists living in the French and English colonies throughout the New World. Yet the treaty also outlined mutual recognition of autarkic

²⁴ The Council of Nevis to Lords of Trade and Plantations, Nevis, February 14, 1684, CO 153/3/150-152.

²⁵ Petition of the Royal African Company “praying for orders to the Governor to put a stop to a practice of introducing Negroes into the Leewards Islands from St. Eustatia,” April, 1687, CO 1/62/33 extracted in CSPCO 12/1229/362.

²⁶ Order of the King in Council, Windsor, August 25, 1683, CO 1/52/72, extracted in CSPCO 11/1214/480. The Council of Nevis specifically recommended the Lords of Trade to commission John Knight, a Bristol merchant, as the new Governor-General. Knight was active in the sugar and slave trades and had lived in Montserrat. Interestingly, he also had Jacobite political leanings. He came from a family of Church of England Tories who viewed dissenters and Catholics with equal disdain (in 1696, several years after the Nevisian councilmen nominated him, Knight was accused of plotting to assassinate King William, but was released for lack of evidence). The Council of Nevis to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Nevis, February 14, 1684, CO 153/3/150-152; Paul D. Halliday, ‘Knight, Sir John (d. 1718)’, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online edition, Jan 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15727> (accessed May 2010). The Lords ignored the Nevisian appeal, supposedly because William Stapleton and a group of “five Papist Councilors” from Montserrat had lobbied against their choice. Order of the King in Council, June 13, 1684, CO 153/3/157-158, extracted in CSPCO 11/1744/652-653. Stapleton’s metropolitan overseers also shelved his request to have his commission terminated until 1686, when he was replaced by Nathaniel Johnson, a dedicated Anglican but also a proud supporter of James II’s plans to modernize and centralize power under his control. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 133-134.

policies aimed at restricting interimperial trade, limited the use of privateers to disturb each empire's shipping, and outlined the joint effort of the two crowns to eradicate piracy in the colonies.²⁷ Article twenty specifically mentioned the earlier St. Kitts agreements and stated that they were to be followed as law as long as they did not contradict the broadly conceived peace treaty of 1686. Whether or not the ambassadors of two crowns used the complicated matter of the tiny divided island of St. Kitts to envision the much larger terms of peace and neutrality between the empires of James and Louis is difficult to determine, but clearly, they had the small island on their minds when they set out to maintain peace in the colonies.²⁸

While the signing of the *Treaty of Peace* had geopolitical effects throughout the colonies, the treaty also provided the context for expanding public religious freedom to colonists in the plural Leeward archipelago who had been marginalized by the Test Acts and anti-French sentiment. Many of the Catholics and French Huguenots in the Leewards believed that James II's ascent broadened the meaning of liberty to include them.²⁹ When James II took the Crown in 1685, the Lords of Trade allowed William Stapleton to leave the Leewards for France. Nathaniel Johnson, an Anglican but proud defender of James II's new imperial vision, took over Stapleton's role as Governor-

²⁷ In 1684, the General Assembly of the Leewards passed a law to restrict privateering and punish pirates. *Laws of the Leeward Islands*, no. 72, 74.

²⁸ *Treaty of Neutrality*. The issue of the salt ponds and common shipping lanes at St. Kitts pushed Stapleton to appeal for royal backing of a neutrality pact repeatedly during his time as Governor-General. See Governor Stapleton to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Nevis, June 18, 1679, CO 153/2/361, extracted in CSPCO 10/1024/376 and Governor Stapleton to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Nevis, June 29, 1678, CO 1/42/98ix, extracted in CSPCO 10/741/262-268.

²⁹ Poor Irish Catholics comprised a large percentage of the white population islands in each of the islands by 1678—in St. Kitts Irish men were 26% of the small white male population, in Antigua Irish men may have been upwards of 50% of the male population, while in Montserrat 1,869 of the 2,682 white men, women, and children were identified as Irish in the 1678 census. Governor Stapleton to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Nevis, June 29, 1678, CO 1/42/98i, extracted in CSPCO 10/741/262-268.

General.³⁰ As agent of the Crown for His Majesty's Leewards, the new governor's power extended across the islands and could tap into the latent Catholic desire for public religious acceptance in each of the islands simultaneously. Soon after he arrived in the Leewards, Johnson received a petition from a group of Roman Catholics in the islands for the "free exercise of their religion," which he granted. Even before his arrival, Catholics in St. Kitts and Montserrat began building and decorating chapels. Noting that the expenses of the Catholics were great, Johnson exempted them from paying taxes towards the support of Protestant ministers.³¹

French Protestants who fled the French islands also found Johnson willing to incorporate them into Leeward society. Following Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes in October of 1685, Huguenot families faced increasing limits to their religious freedom in French St. Kitts. Johnson wrote to the Lords of Trade on the eve of the Glorious Revolution about the flight of French Protestants from the French colonies to English St. Kitts and Montserrat. "Daily complaints are made to me by French Protestants who have fled from their islands to our, and on their bended knees beg the King to grant them the mercy he grants to their brethren in England," the governor wrote. His liberal attitude toward French-speakers in the islands apparently was not welcomed in Nevis, but he pushed forward anyway. Normally, Johnson did not "harbor refugees who have fled because of debt or of crime." Yet because "one of these Protestants, who was redelivered to the French by the Governor of Nevis" during Johnson's absence from the island was promptly hung by French authorities in St. Kitts, Johnson offered them asylum

³⁰ Dunn called Stapleton the "stoutest Jacobite in America" and called him a *gubernator tryannus*, perhaps a bit harsh for a man interested in extending liberties to the poorer white inhabitants of the islands. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 134.

³¹ Governor Sir Nathaniel Johnson to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Nevis, March 3, 1688, CO 1/64/28, extracted in CSPCO 12/1653/513.

in the other English islands. Johnson believed that naturalizing French Protestant refugees would be a “great advantage for settling and strengthening these islands, which are not one third as well peopled as they were some years ago.”³² In this regard his policy was nothing new—as discussed in the previous chapter, earlier governors, especially Stapleton, allowed French Protestants to settle in the English sector of St. Kitts immediately following the war. What was new, however, was official rather than tacit royal support for local efforts to bring Catholics and French Protestants under the same imperial tent.

While news of the tumult in England may have shaped concerns about local power and authority in the islands indirectly, there were also more direct connections between the plots and the general air of uneasiness that befell colonists in the 1680s. Individuals directly involved in the Rye House conspiracy and the Monmouth Rebellion ended up in the West Indies following the events. James Holloway, a Bristol merchant whose fear of “arbitrary government and popery” led him to join with the Earl of Shaftesbury and other members of the “Protestant Gentry” in the Rye House plot, used his connections in the islands to evade capture from authorities for nine months.³³ In his lengthy confession published soon after his execution at Tyburn in April of 1684, Holloway related how he used the islands in the Lesser Antilles to thwart potential captors.

After taking on a cargo of Brandy from La Rochelle, France, Holloway sailed for Barbados, where he landed in November of 1683. News about Rye House had already arrived. While at Barbados, he heard that his name had appeared in a newspaper

³² Governor Sir Nathaniel Johnson to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Nevis, February 20, 1688, CO 1/64/25, 153/3/296-297, extracted in CSPCO 12/1639/505-506.

³³ Holloway, *The Free and Voluntary Confession and Narrative of James Holloway*, 1.

circulating through Bridgetown, so decided to head to Antigua, where he disposed of the rest of his cargo over a period of ten days. “Thinking it not safe to lie long there,” Holloway decided that he should see other islands in the archipelago to test and see where he might find protection and refuge. After visiting Montserrat, Nevis, St. Kitts, St. Eustatius, and Anguilla, Holloway decided to lay low in St. Kitts for a few weeks since no one there recognized him. From St. Kitts, he was able to write to one of his factors he knew from the Bristol trade at Nevis, who in turn reported him to Governor-General Stapleton. Holloway caught wind of his “discovery” and fled to the Dutch island of St. Eustatius (on both sides of the Atlantic James’s rivals found comfort in Dutch hands). Despite Holloway’s efforts to evade authorities, Stapleton was able to use his influence with the governor in the Dutch island to allow five of his men to enter the island and arrest him. He was brought back to Nevis, where he was placed in jail until he was sent back to England and tried for treason.³⁴

Whereas Holloway fled to the islands in an effort to evade capture, several hundred captive supporters of the Duke of Monmouth were shipped to the West Indies as punishment. In October of 1685, James II issued a circular that detailed how the local colonial governments were supposed to handle the rebels. Unlike indentured servants who usually served for four years before being freed, the Monmouth rebels were obligated to serve their masters for ten years. Each island government was responsible for crafting its own laws to deal with the crown requirements. An important stipulation

³⁴ Ibid., 4.

was that they were not allowed to “redeem themselves by money or otherwise till that term be expired.”³⁵

Upwards of eight hundred rebels were sent to Jamaica and Barbados as well as Nevis and St. Kitts in the Leewards.³⁶ Several rebels claimed that they were not really sympathizers of the Duke, and a few were able to convince local governors to appeal their case. Daniel Manning, a blacksmith’s apprentice from a village near Taunton, convinced Lieutenant-Governor Stede in Barbados that he and many of the other servants shipped to the island had been “kidnapped” and “sent to the colonies against their wills.”³⁷ Convicts from more privileged backgrounds were able to bribe the merchants responsible for transporting them to the islands to rip up their indentures.³⁸ Perhaps the most famous to do so in the Leewards was Azariah Pinney, the son of a dissenting minister who would become one of wealthiest land owners and slave merchants in Nevis. Pinney was convicted of joining the Monmouth rebels, but a relative was able to bribe one of the men responsible for organizing their exile with £65 to guarantee he did not have to labor as a servant.³⁹ Instead, the son of a lace-maker seized the opportunity to

³⁵ The King to the Governors of the Plantations, October 11, 1685, extracted in CSPCO 12/404/105; the Leeward Islands circular can be found in CO 153/3/188-189.

³⁶ Lists of transported rebels can be found in the following locations: List of One Hundred Convicted Rebels to be Transported from Taunton, with receipt of John Rose for the same, CO 1/66/147, A List of One Hundred Rebels Received by Sir William Stapleton, as agent to Charles Pym, and shipped by him to Nevis and St. Christopher’s, CO 1/58/89, George Penne to Jerome Nepho, CO 1/66/148, A List of Convicted Rebels sent to Barbados, with Sir William Booth’s Receipt for the Same, CO 1/66/149, A List of Names of Two Hundred Western Rebels, CO 1/58/90I, several lists are enclosed in Governor Stede to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Barbados, January 8, 1686, CO 1/59/7-7IV.

³⁷ The Examination of Daniel Manning, enclosed in Lieutenant-Governor Stede to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Barbados, February 3, 1686, CO 1/59/15, 15ii, extracted in CSPCO 12/561/148-149.

³⁸ The Examination of Randolph Babington, enclosed in Lieutenant-Governor Stede to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Barbados, February 3, 1686, CO 1/59/15, 15i, extracted in CSPCO 12/561/147-148.

³⁹ Richard Pares, *A West-India Fortune* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1950), 6-9.

own slaves and cane fields in Nevis himself. Within twelve years of his arrival on the island, Pinney began serving as treasurer of the island.⁴⁰

Not only did the influx of new white men add to the militia roles and labor supply in the Leewards, but it also infused the islands with a new cadre of colonists who resented James II. Exiling his opposition may have benefited James in England, but in the colonies, it fueled resistance against him. Political dissidents like Pinney, purged from England, had to wait until the 1688 revolution before they could begin to see their vision of true liberty from “popery and slavery” realized.

Conspiracies, Revolts, and Black Liberty in the 1680s

Collective slave resistance became more common in the English colonies in the same decades that tensions surrounding James II began brewing in England. In part, this was directly due to the aggressive role of the Stuart-supported slave trading companies. From 1624 to 1670, nearly 30,000 men, women, and children were sold to English ships destined for the New World. From 1671 to 1688, after the formation of the RAC, the number more than quintupled to 148,655.⁴¹ During the same period, at least 22,195 people of African descent were shipped in shackles and chains to the four largest English

⁴⁰ Minutes of the Council of Nevis, June 16, 1697, CO 155/2/418-419, extracted in CSPCO 15/1088/511-512. While the infusion of upwards of two-hundred rebels may not seem like a considerable number of people, consider the size of the population in Nevis and St. Kitts in the years leading up to the turbulent 1680s. St. Kitts had been decimated by the war of 1666-1667. In 1678, the English quarter was still considerably under-populated compared to what it had been during the tobacco boom thirty years earlier. Stapleton reported that only 695 white men inhabited middle sector of the island—and 369 of them were French, 187 were Irish, and at least 11 identified as Dutch. In Nevis, the most populated and most advanced toward sugar production, the size of the white male population probably hovered around 1,000 in 1678. The influx of one hundred men from England and Scotland to either island would have been a significant boom to the population. Governor Stapleton to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Nevis, June 29, 1678, CO 1/42/98i, extracted in CSPCO 10/741/262-268.

⁴¹ *Voyages*, Variables—Years: 1624 to 1688; Flag: Great Britain, <http://slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces?yearFrom=1624&yearTo=1688&natinimp=7> (accessed February 2010).

Leewards, thousands dying before they even reached the shoreline. An unknown number of men and women—probably in the thousands—were smuggled via the Dutch islands.⁴²

Slave dissent increased in the islands during the 1670s and 1680s, when the political tumult in England fueled domestic anxieties about order and imperial power. In flat Barbados, where sugar production had gobbled up woodlands and limited the ability of enslaved folk to hide from slave catchers, resistance took on a more public, expressive character that provoked white anxieties. White Barbadians feared that black folk were trying to install their own form of government on the island in 1675, 1683, 1686, and again in 1692.⁴³

In Jamaica, organized black resistance took the form of flight to the densely wooded mountains. More direct, violent resistance accelerated at the end of the 1670s in the hinterland surrounding Spanish Town, where gigantic sugar plantations were beginning to take over the landscape. In 1673, 200 slaves revolted on Lobby's plantation, killing a dozen white colonists before fleeing to the mountains. Three years later, the governor declared martial law in St. Mary's parish to curb slave flight, and in 1678 slaves laboring on Captain Duck's plantation rebelled. Resistance intensified as the decade proceeded and took on a more island-wide character. Enslaved folk rebelled on a plantation in Guanaboa Vale just outside of Spanish Town in late July of 1685, leading to

⁴² Although the number of African people sold to the Leewards seems small compared to the number sold to Jamaica and Barbados, it was more than five times the number sold to Virginia during the same period. More than 16,000 men, women, and children were sent to Nevis from the West African coast. People from the Niger delta and Bight of Biafra made up a plurality of the slaves sold to the Leewards between 1671 and 1688, but men, women, and children all the way from the Senegambia to the Kongo River basin were placed on ships bound for the Leewards, where they were forced to labor alongside each other in the islands. *Voyages, Variables—Flag: Great Britain; Years: 1671-1688; Principal Place of Slave Landing: St. Kitts, Antigua, Montserrat, Nevis*, <http://slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces?yearFrom=1624&yearTo=1688&natinimp=7&mjslptimp=33400.33500.33600.33700> (accessed February 2010).

⁴³ Jerome S. Handler, "Slave Revolts and Conspiracies in Seventeenth Century Barbados," *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids/New West Indian Guide* 56 (1982), Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 109-114.

a yearlong series of skirmishes. In 1690, all 500 slaves laboring at Sutton's estate in Clarendon rebelled and took to the mountains.⁴⁴

News of the events in Jamaica and Barbados made their way northward and influenced the ways white slaveholders in the North American English colonies perceived the threat of collective black resistance. Authorities in Northern Neck and Middlesex Virginia faced a cycle of conspiracy panics and organized dissent in 1686 and 1688, as rumors about discontent in England circulated the tobacco colonies.⁴⁵ Slave resistance was empire wide in an era when their masters' were rethinking the meaning of liberty.

News of slave dissent in the colonies overlapped with rumors of African conspiracies to commit coup d'états in the colonies and sparked the imagination of the growing Atlantic reading public. Perhaps the most widely discussed of the slave plots was the 1675 scare in Barbados. The plot was famously described in the eleven-page pamphlet *Great Newes from the Barbadoes* (1676), which provided readers in England with one of the first "anthropological" discussions of slave culture on the island. The printed narrative describes how a group of Coromantee men plotted to murder "all the whites" on the island except the women, who were going to be "converted to their own use."⁴⁶ White colonists on the island believed that the plot was hatched three years

⁴⁴ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 74-76, Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development, and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica*, 268-269.

⁴⁵ Minutes of Council of Virginia, October 24, 1687, CSPCO 12/1475/456, Anthony S. Parent, *Foul Means: The Formation of a Slave Society in Virginia, 1660-1740* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 147-150, "Punishment for a Negro Rebel," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (1902), Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime*, Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 5th ed. (New York: International Publishers, 1983).

⁴⁶ *Great Newes from the Barbadoes, or, a True and Faithful Account of the Grand Conspiracy of the Negroes against the English and the Happy Discovery of the Same with the Number of Those That Were*

earlier and involved the election of a “King, one Coffee an Ancient Gold Coast Negro.” Coffee’s ennobling ceremony involved a procession where he sat upon a “chair of state exquisitely wrought and carved after their mode, with bows and arrows to be likewise carried in State before his Majesty their intended king.”⁴⁷ Another account of the Barbados conspiracy appeared in a pamphlet about Metacom’s rebellion in New England. The text stated that God had delivered Barbadians from the “Tyranny” of the “barbarous cruelty of Savage Heathens.”⁴⁸ No evidence of a trial exists, but Governor Atkins had at least 35 slaves executed “for example” of what happened to blacks on the island who wished to turn the colonial order on its head.⁴⁹

Did the “antislavery” rhetoric circulating the Atlantic have an effect on the ways white colonists in the islands viewed local practices of “arbitrary power” against enslaved people of color? While the 1675 Coromantee-plot was believed to be the work of slaves alone, colonists in Barbados believed that the 1683 and 1686 scares had support from

Burned Alive, Beheaded, and Otherwise Executed for Their Horrid Crimes: With a Short Description of That Plantation, (London: Printed for L. Curtis, 1676), 10.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁴⁸ *A Continuation of the State of New-England Being a Farther Account of the Indian Warr, and of the Engagement Betwixt the Joynt Forces of the United English Collonies and the Indians on the 19th of December 1675, Together with an Account of the Intended Rebellion of the Negroes in the Barbadoes*, (London: Printed by T.M. for Dorman Newman, 1676), 19.

⁴⁹ Governor Sir Jonathan Atkins to Secretary Sir Joseph Williamson, Barbados, October 13, 1675, CO 1/35/29. It is possible that whites were simply witnessing a reinvented, creolized version of the yam and corn harvest festivals common in the Gold Coast and Bight of Biafra. In all probability, the “chair of state” was a sacred stool that signified to enslaved folk from the Gold Coast Coffee’s status as an elder, leader, and perhaps unifier of Akan-speaking slaves on the island during a seventeenth-century version of the Odwira or Gã Homowo festivals. On Akan stools in American slave communities, see Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South*, 105-112. On the seasonality of planting and harvesting, see Robert Dirks, *The Black Saturnalia: Conflict and Its Ritual Expression on British West Indian Slave Plantations* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida University of Florida Press, 1987). Gold-Coast slaves probably came from both Gã and Akan speaking communities. For a dated but informative discussion of Gã Homowo corn-harvest festivals, see A. B. Quartey-Papafio, “The Ga Homowo Festival,” *Journal of the Royal African Society* 19, no. 75 (1920). Akan yam festivals are widespread, but for a discussion of Odwira in the Akuapem kingdom in the twentieth century, see Michelle Gilbert, “Aesthetic Strategies: The Politics of a Royal Ritual,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 64, no. 1 (1994).

white settlers. The 1683 panic erupted after an “old Negro” owned by Madam Sharp told her, “some Christians who were beating Negroes, that the Negroes ere long would serve the Christians so.” He was burnt alive for his supposed intransigence. Following his execution, fearful white colonists began finding handwritten notes addressed to the “Brothers” of “all Countrys of our side”—suggesting that the plot involved not a specific “ethnic” element of the Barbados slave community, but a broader black alliance. However, some white colonists believed that the letter was written by a “mischievous person” who forgot that “Negroes are not able to read.”⁵⁰ In 1686, the Barbados Council ordered the justices of the seven parishes to search the slave quarters for arms and ammunition because there were “signs of an insurrection of Negroes and white servants.”⁵¹

How the influx of news from England and rebels like Holloway to Barbados may have influenced the context for these panics to erupt is difficult to assess. While island elites made no direction correlation between the two, the timing of the scares does roughly correspond with the arrival of news from England about the Rye House Plot and James’s circular about the Monmouth Rebels. Did the news signal to slaves and servants on the island that elites there were prone to faction? Did the anti-slavery rhetoric that infused the anti-Jacobean cause become twisted into a rumor about the end of slavery on the island? Did elites use the specter of slave and servant collusion to foster a colonial hegemony and underscore white power in the face of a pending imperial crisis? Such an analyses is certainly valid given the temporal context of the conspiracy scares in

⁵⁰ The document is enclosed in a letter from Barbados, December 18, 1683, CO 1/53/102, and stamped 102I. The document is partially reprinted in Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 110.

⁵¹ Minutes of Council of Barbados, February 16, 1686, CO 31/1/675-676, extracted in CSPCO 12/572/155.

Barbados, but at this point, the research has not provided enough private source material to elaborate on these possibilities with any certitude.

What is certain, however, is that the plots in Barbados were part of a larger picture of slave dissent in the colonies. News and rumors about black insurrection circulated the islands and blended with local concerns about internal order, the power of the colonial microstate, and white supremacy. Following the 1675 conspiracy in Barbados, the Jamaican Council ordered that no more slaves from the island far to the east could be imported to the island. “On reading advices from Barbados concerning the late rebellion attempted by the negroes there and on consideration of the dangers that might accrue to this island by the ill-government of negroes,” the Jamaican Council ordered that “no negroes concerned in the late rebellion or convicted of any other crime in Barbados be permitted to be bought or sold” in Jamaica. They ordered the collector at Port Royal to examine all ships from Barbados for slaves involved in the plot and ordered shipmasters plying from the island to take an oath that they were not delivering any black conspirators. Slave traders who left “such negroes” on Jamaican shores were fined £50 for introducing the rebels to the island.⁵²

In the Leewards, where sugar was also rapidly taking over the countryside, organized resistance and flight were also beginning to pose a greater problem to local order. Only months after rumors of the 1683 plot in Barbados and the arrival of Rye House plotters like Holloway to the archipelago, officials in St. Kitts found it necessary to legislate against an upsurge in “depredations” by black folk on the island. The St. Kitts Assembly and Council ordered that every “Negro taken in theft of canes or

⁵² Minutes of the Council of Jamaica, September 3, 1675, CO 140/3/434-438, extracted in CSPCO 9/661/274; Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 357, n.312.

produce” was to be whipped thirty times. “Negroes found in the highways or in any plantation” after 10 p.m. without a pass suffered retribution, and men or women caught pilfering under the cover of dark could be shot. In addition to limiting the movement of black folk, the law also forbid the beating of drums on Sundays and prohibited people of African descent from “walking with great clubs or bangalos.”⁵³

In nearby Antigua, slaves began taking to the hills and mountains in greater numbers in the 1680s. The same year that St. Kitts passed legislation aimed at curbing the “depredations” of “runaway Negroes” on the island, councilors in Antigua pushed for the kill or capture of “several runaway Negroes whoe doe much Mischief in this Island they being all ready in a great body together which may prove of Very ill Consequence to all.” The government offered bounties of five hundred pounds of muscavado sugar for any slave taken alive and two hundred for a murdered rebel (to be paid by the owner).⁵⁴ Like the rebels in Jamaica, those in Antigua used the unsettled mountain land in the small island to escape the plantation regime. The Shekerley Mountains, which provide stunning southerly vistas of the archipelago, became the base of operations for a band of male and female runaways who pilfered plantations in order to survive.

The number of men and women who took to the hills in Antigua expanded as the 1680s drew to a close. By February of 1687, white Antiguans believed that the runaways were trying to “force their freedom” upon their former masters. Members of the council proclaimed that there was a “discourse through the Country that some of the Negroes of this Island have plotted and continued to putt themselves in A bodie, and force their freedom by Destroying their Masters, and other Christian people.” The rumors “filled the

⁵³ Minutes of the Council and Assembly of St. Christophers, May 1, 1684, CO 1/57/48 extracted in CSPCO 11/1655/624.

⁵⁴ Reprinted in Gaspar, *Bondmen & Rebels*, 175-176.

Ears and minds of the negroes in Generall wch may bee A means to putt them upon practices not before intended by any”—namely outright rebellion rather than withdraw. Slaveowners were ordered to “keep their Negroes from leaving their estates” and encouraged to “allow no drumming or noise” from their estates which might be used to signal to slaves in other plantations.⁵⁵ Fears of a slave revolt may have spread to Nevis. Only two days after the rumors of “forced freedom” were circulating in Antigua, the Nevis Assembly pressed the Council to “restrain the insolence of Negroes” in the small island that sits to the southwest of Antigua.⁵⁶ Months later, the Nevis Council and Assembly agreed to award 1,000 pounds of sugar to anyone “taking or killing an outlawed negro.”⁵⁷

The relatively open lands and sparsely populated island allowed for the rebels in Antigua to keep their pursuers at bay for weeks.⁵⁸ But the tumult was also attracting new recruits from the plantations—apparently regardless of ethnic affiliation. One free man, named John Premeer, was also suspected of taking part in the struggle.⁵⁹ To prevent slaves from joining the rebels, mounted patrols rode through Antigua on Saturday afternoons to arrest slaves who did not have tickets. The council ordered that a file of men from each divisional militia be sent out against the group, which was said to be “forty or fifty strong and armed with guns in the mountains.”⁶⁰ On March 17, a man

⁵⁵ Ibid., 176. Minutes of Council of Antigua, February 14, 1687, CO 155/1/95-96, extracted in CSPCO 12/1134/317.

⁵⁶ Journal of the Council and Assembly of Nevis, February 17, 1687, CO 155/1/126.

⁵⁷ Minutes of Council and Assembly of Nevis, September 1, 1688, CO 155/1/179-180, 225, extracted in CSPCO 12/1880/593.

⁵⁸ Minutes of the Council of Antigua, March 17, 1687, CO 155/1/101-102.

⁵⁹ A list of twenty-two runaways in the mountains lists men and women identified as “Mallagascos,” “Collamantee and Lampo,” “Magasco,” Ibo, Angola, and Papa. Minutes of the Council of Antigua, March 24, 1687, CO 155/1, also reprinted in Gaspar, *Bondmen & Rebels*, 181.

⁶⁰ Minutes of the Council of Antigua, March 9, 1687, CO 155/1/99, extracted in CSPCO 12/1175/340.

suspected of being in communication with the rebels in the mountains was brought before the government. Philip, who belonged to James II's supporter Governor-General Johnson, was accused of entertaining runaways. As punishment he was sentenced to have his leg cut off and his tongue cut out to make a "living example to ye rest."

A week later, the council faced mounting resistance, as if the government's efforts were making their own problems worse. On March 24, the council reported that "it appears this day that the fugitive Negroes on the Mountains doe still persist in their Villainy, and sending about their Agents to Encrease their Numbers and doe by force of Armes Defend themselves." Although legally property, the Antiguan government painted the rebels as traitors. In the view of the council, the maroons were in "Defiance to the King's Authority."⁶¹ In response, the government painted colluders as traitors and sentenced them to death. The Antiguan government considered white folk who provided help to black fugitives "enemies of the country."⁶²

Coupled with the decade of news and rumor about rebellion and plots in England, it is not surprising that some colonists began to think that slaves intended to overthrow the "King's Authority." A Papa slave named George was accused of gathering slaves from the plantations in Falmouth Division so that they could make him "governor." The most damning evidence against George came from Thomas Smith who testified that he saw George riding on the shoulders of another slave. Smith asked another Papa slave what was meant by the scene, who purportedly told him that George had been elected as a "Grandy man" and that he was going to be their governor.⁶³

⁶¹ Minutes of the Council of Antigua, March 24, 1687, CO 155/1/103-109, reprinted in Gaspar, *Bondmen & Rebels*, 178.

⁶² Minutes of the Council of Antigua, March 24, 1687, CO 155/1/103-109, reprinted in *Ibid.*, 181.

⁶³ Minutes of the Council of Antigua, March 24, 1687, CO 155/1/103-109, reprinted in *Ibid.*

It is interesting that Smith testified that George was chosen as a “Grandy man” and “governor” among the slaves in Falmouth. The term “Grandy” or “Grandee” was a colloquial expression used in the Leewards to describe men of elite status and significant landowning, a term that distinguished the gentry from both poorer whites and enslaved folk.⁶⁴ When used to describe each other, slaves likely viewed the position differently—one less tied to issues of property ownership but linked more to George’s cultural power and leadership qualities. The testimony against George suggests that some colonists took his election as a Grandy as a sign of inversion, of slaves intending to become masters over their own liberty. Whether or not the election of George was truly intended to signify a world-upside-down is impossible to determine, but in an era marked by anxieties and fears about both local power under the Jacobite Governor-General Johnson and monarchical power in England, the specter of a black leader with the title of “governor” or “Grandy” was evidence for island elites to have George executed. George’s case also reveals that the plantocracy was increasingly aware that enslaved folk had developed their own ideas about authority and power, a practice that subverted both the power of the crown and the liberty of their masters.

One fascinating aspect of the 1687 conspiracy scare in Antigua is how it complicates the way scholars have tended to examine slave resistance. The event illustrates black practices of creolization in motion. It tells a story of how Africans from a wide variety of language and religious backgrounds were joining together in the mountains and forming new bonds of association and affiliation. Moreover, the conspiracy involved two intertwined elements that scholars tend to dichotomize. White

⁶⁴ Natalie Zacek, “Yeomen or “Grandy-Men”? Class Struggle and Land Distribution in a West Indian Plantation Society,” *Manchester Papers in Economic and Social History*, no. 60 (2007): 9-10.

Antiguans feared that the “outlaws” in the mountains—maroons—were both symbolically and directly contributing to sense among enslaved folk in the lowlands that it was time to “force freedom” in Antigua. Thus, one way of interpreting the events in Antigua in 1687 is to see it as two interrelated forms of creolization—one cultural, involving the formation of new bonds between men and women of different backgrounds, and the other involving the innovation of new ideas about class and racial solidarity. The specter of black folk living in the mountains and staving off white power underscored for slaves throughout the island that people of African descent not only shared a common oppression, but that they could also band together and create a counterpower that had the potential to challenge white authority. The existence of both maroon-style resistance and black “outlaws” in the mountains and the specter of black inversion in the lowlands suggests that there was a plurality of ideas about the types of resistance black folk should pursue. While there was a broad, evolving consciousness about what it meant to be black and enslaved on the island, there was not a single, unifying political ideology uniting enslaved folk, but rather an effervescence of new ideas and practices that black folk could draw from as Africans and their island-born children came to outnumber the local white community. These innovations occurred alongside—not independently—of the changing imperial and political atmosphere that enveloped the Leeward Islands as the century drew to a close.

Caught in the Crossfire: The Black Experience of Imperial Warfare

From 1689 through 1713, save the five-year peace from 1697 through 1702, warfare engulfed the Leeward Islands yet again, this timing pitting a coalition of the United Provinces, England, and Spain against France. In 1688, supporters of William of

Orange staged a coup of James II on the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot, driving the Stuart monarch to France. The Protestant insurgency—later called the “Glorious Revolution”—marked the culmination of more than a decade of protest against James II’s “arbitrary power” and “slavery” over Englishmen. In the long run, the revolution had major effects on the way the British Empire worked in the Atlantic, for the revolt against James II helped to undo the RAC’s slave trade monopoly, eventually opening the door to the “free trade” in human beings from Africa.⁶⁵

In the Leewards specifically the effects of the revolution and subsequent pan-Atlantic war were dramatic. With the exception of some aristocratic Anglicans, William’s ascent triggered a Protestant backlash against Irish and Jewish colonists in the English territories, who were targeted as threats to the fragile colonial order. Nathaniel Johnson, James II’s appointee for the post as Governor-General, was forced to flee the islands for Carolina after he was accused of allowing the French to capture English St. Kitts. Johnson’s replacement was Christopher Codrington—the Barbadian elite involved in the Indian Warner affair who had recently concentrated his efforts in developing his massive sugar plantation in Antigua. Codrington, a staunch Williamite, was so wealthy that he could single handedly subsidize attacks against the French from his own pocket. Much his personal fortune may have come from circumventing the monopolistic trade routes of Stuart mercantilism, as he was actively involved in smuggling sugar and slaves from his Antigua and Barbados plantations to the Dutch at Curaçao and the Danes at St. Thomas.⁶⁶ As Governor-General, Codrington oversaw the execution of Irish dissidents

⁶⁵ William A. Pettigrew, “Free to Enslave: Politics and the Escalation of Britain’s Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1688-1714,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (2006).

⁶⁶ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 134-135, Vincent T. Harlow, *Christopher Codrington, 1668-1710* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 15-30.

accused of treason and saw to it that the local governments heavily policed Jewish merchants, who were accused of “engrossing commodities” during the war with France.⁶⁷ He also organized a massive counterattack against the French at St. Kitts in 1690 that resulted in English control of the island until 1697. After he died, his son—also Christopher Codrington—took up his post and led the a renewed campaign against the French at St. Kitts again in 1702, a move that proved to be the final blow to French colonization on the once divided island.

Enslaved folk and free people of color were caught in the crosshairs of the ensuing battle for imperial supremacy in the Leeward archipelago. At first, imperialists fought for control over the small islands in the region—places like St. Eustatius, Saba, Mariegalante, St. Bartholomew, and St. Martin—in order to cut off the crisscrossing slave, beef, and flour trade routes to the larger, more populated colonies. The invasions and counter-invasions in the Leewards caused the forced migration of white and black colonists alike. Facing reprisals, hundreds of Irish refugees from the English islands fled to the smaller Virgin Islands and found sanctuary in French islands such as St. Martin.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ On Codrington’s approach to the “Irish problem,” see Thomas Spencer, *A True and Faithful Relation of the Proceedings of the Forces of Their Majesties K. William and Q. Mary, in Their Expedition against the French, in the Caribby Islands in the West-Indies: Under the Conduct of His Excellency Christopher Codrington, Captain General and Commander in Chief of the Said Forces, in the Years 1689, and 1690* (London: Printed for Robert Clavel at the Peacock, at the West-end of St. Paul’s church-yard, 1691), 2. Lieutenant-General Codrington to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, November 11, 1689, CO 152/37/52. Codrington feared that “Papists may be expected to welcome Papists” in the Leewards, particularly in Montserrat, but encouraged the colonists to weigh their options. In a carefully crafted letter to the governor of the island, Codrington noted that if Irish landowners (or as he called them, the “more intelligent”) supported the French, they would surely lose their land to the French overt time, but if they supported England, a successful King James would still retain Montserrat, where they could enjoy their “estates as freely and happily as the English” and had the “indulgence, too, in matter of religion.” Lieutenant-General Codrington to the Governor of Montserrat, February 18, 1690, CO 152/37/83viii. On the policing of Jewish merchants, see “An Act against Jews ingrossing Commodities imported in the Leeward Islands, and trading with the Slaves belonging to the Inhabitants of the same,” no.11, August 31, 1694, *Laws of the Leeward Islands*, 3.

⁶⁸ Account of the Action at St. Martin’s under Captain Hewetson, enclosed in Governor Codrington to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Antigua, March 1, 1690, CO 152/37/83i, extracted in CSPCO 13/789i/229-

Codrington, fearing a French invasion of Montserrat, recommended that “all slaves and valuables belonging to English and Irish be at once removed” from the island to Nevis or Antigua, but the forced evacuation of the island did not come to fruition.⁶⁹ When Timothy Thornhill invaded St. Bartholomew and St. Martin, he sent some of the prisoners to Nevis and sold off their slaves to planters on the tiny island, which was already overcrowded by the English and Dutch colonists and their slaves who managed to flee St. Eustatius and English St. Kitts during the French invasions.⁷⁰ French colonists were also displaced in large numbers. Upwards of 1,800 dispossessed French colonists from the French controlled territories were shipped to the western shores of Hispaniola, which formally became Saint-Domingue in with the peace of 1697.⁷¹ They were joined by the French colonists and the people of African descent who labored in St. Croix in 1695, when the French commander decided to force them to resettle on northern Saint-Domingue instead of defending the island from a potential English assault.⁷²

Slaves were not only shuffled through the islands when their masters were forced to flee. People of African descent also took an active role in shaping the course of the invasions. Soon after the French takeover of St. Kitts in 1689, several enslaved men “formerly belonging to the English” managed to sneak across the channel to Nevis.

231. In November of 1689, Codrington had three Irishmen from Anguilla tried and executed for treason and had a Irish shipmaster who “brought strange reports of King James’s successes in Ireland” detained. Not all Irish colonists chose sides in the conflict, and Irish colonists in Montserrat did not side with the French, as Codrington feared. Lieutenant-General Codrington to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Antigua, November 11, 1689, CO 152/37/52, Lieutenant-General Codrington to the Governor of Montserrat, Antigua, November 11, 1689, CO 152/37/83viii, extracted in CSPCO 13/789viii/235-237.

⁶⁹ Lieutenant-General Codrington to the Governor of Montserrat, Antigua, November 11, 1689, CO 152/37/83viii, extracted in CSPCO 13/789viii/235-237.

⁷⁰ Governor Codrington to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Antigua, March 1, 1690, CO 152/37/83, extracted in CSPCO 13/789/225.

⁷¹ Boucher, *Tropics*, 218.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 219.

When they arrived, they informed General Codrington that the French troops on St. Kitts were suffering from small pox and a malignant fever and that they also lacked significant provisions.⁷³ Seizing the moment, Codrington and Thornhill decided to strangle the French at St. Kitts by cutting off trade routes via the small islands that provided ships access to the French encampments. Thornhill and Codrington organized attacks on St. Martin, St. Bartholomew, and Marie-Galante. After cutting off the trade in beef and other provisions to St. Kitts, the English governor organized the recapture of St. Kitts in June and July of 1690 with a force of more than 2,500 men. A month later Thornhill captured St. Eustatius, which the French had previously seized from the Dutch. With each invasion, enslaved folk were forced to attend to new masters from different empires.⁷⁴

Enslaved folk not only provided intelligence to imperialists during the wars, but also actively engaged in combat. Codrington's troops in 1690 were comprised of militia fighters from Barbados, Nevis, Antigua, and Montserrat, but probably included free and enslaved people of color who labored as boathands and porters.⁷⁵ Enslaved folk from the French quarter fought against the English during the attempt to retake the island. "French" slaves fled up the steep mountain slopes to avoid capture, gaining the label "rebel Negroes" in the process. Some runaway French prisoners reportedly joined the black rebels in the mountains.⁷⁶ Slaves in Guadeloupe and Martinique took up arms

⁷³ Lieutenant-General Codrington to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Antigua, November 11, 1689, CO 152/37/52.

⁷⁴ Pritchard, *Search of Empire*, 307.

⁷⁵ Governor Codrington to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, St. Kitts, July 4, 1690, CO 152/37/87.

⁷⁶ Deposition of Joseph Crisp, Barbados, July 2, 1691, CO 28/37/31, Memorial in Answer to Marquis D'Amblemont's Demands upon the Restitution of the French part of St. Christophers, St. Kitts, February 5, 1699, CO 152/3/3viii; Jean Baptiste Labat, *Nouveau Voyage aux Iles de L'Amérique*, 6 vols. (Paris: Chez P.F. Giffart, 1722), I:70.

alongside white colonists during the English attacks of 1691 and 1693, the latter of which ended with at least 800 white colonists killed, wounded, or sick.⁷⁷

While planning to invade Martinique in 1690, Codrington feared that the French might arm upwards of 8,000 “intelligent blacks” to help defend mountainous island, but this was an overestimate.⁷⁸ Instead, enslaved folk took up arms in small bands—not organized in official regiments. Some plantation owners fled their estates and left white servants and slaves behind to defend their property. During the attack on Saint-Pierre, fifty-two of Sieur Rose’s slaves took up arms to defend themselves against the English.⁷⁹ Enslaved folk also put up a resistance against buccaneers who were hired to raid the islands—a practice that colonial governors encouraged as the war progressed. Père Labat noted how a group of armed slaves defended themselves from a buccaneer invasion of a plantation in Martinique in 1697. George-Roche and his men were caught off guard when they tried to capture black men and women who resided in Capisterre. Some of the slaves spoke English, and hearing the sailors hatching their plans, were able to successfully hold off the invaders with arms.⁸⁰ In 1702, Codrington the younger hatched a plan to send his Creole slaves to the windward side of Guadeloupe in light sloops and brigantines as a diversionary tactic, but the plan did not come to fruition.⁸¹

The most dramatic episode of black resistance to capture appeared in Nevis in 1706 when a French force sacked the island. Nevisians expected the attack. Several months before the attack, two spies—one black and one white—were caught on the

⁷⁷ Pritchard, *Search of Empire*, 310.

⁷⁸ Governor Codrington to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Antigua, March 1, 1690, CO 152/37/83.

⁷⁹ Cited in Boucher, *Tropics*, 219.

⁸⁰ Labat, *Nouveau Voyage*, IV.

⁸¹ Christopher Codrington to the Lords of Trade,

island and accused of having orders to set fire to the cane fields. Antigua had already been attacked, and a French force had already captured more than 300 slaves at St. Kitts at the beginning of the year. Despite the warning signs, however, the commander in charge of defending the island believed it was in his best interest to move his men to Antigua, which had become the English base of operations in the Leeward theatre. Only 470 armed white men were left to defend the island, where more than 5,000 enslaved folk labored in the cane fields. When the French finally did arrive, thousands of black Nevisians fled up Mt. Nevis to avoid capture. They prepared for the worst, bringing arms, provisions, and even cattle up the steep slopes, not knowing how long they would have to fend off the French forces that wanted to reenslave them in the French islands.⁸²

More than 3,200 men and women did not make it up the peak in time and were divvied out to the French flibustiers as booty. Those who did make it into the maroon hideouts, however, staged an armed defense that ultimately caused the French to retreat. Enraged, French commander Iberville demanded that the English masters make their slaves return to the lowlands, promising that he would return to the island and burn what was left to the ground if they did not comply. Citing the episode of marronage in French St. Kitts in 1690, Colonel Abbott reminded Iberville that when the English captured the French quarter, the French black rebels “kept out in the mountains more than a twelvemonth, and never could be brought in,” and actually “killed many [of the] English” who tried to capture the maroons who had formally belonged to French owners.⁸³

Ultimately, the estimated 1,400 enslaved folk who found safety in their hideouts upon

⁸² Thomas Easom to Lady Francis Stapleton, Nevis, April 22, 1706, Stapleton MSS. (Stapleton Manuscripts), 6/13.

⁸³ Remonstrance by Colonel Abbott and Mr. Burt to Monsieur D’Iberville, Nevis, March 30, 1706, CO 184/1/6iv, reprinted in *CSPCO* 23/357iv/145-146.

Mt. Nevis proved victorious, thus managing to stake a claim to their autonomy as Nevisians.

The most significant dispersal of colonists occurred when Codrington and Thornhill recaptured St. Kitts from the French in 1690. The invasion essentially ended French settlement of the island. On the eve of the invasion, the total population in the French sector stood at about 7,598, more than 4,000 of which were enslaved folk. By 1701, four years after the French sector was restored, the population of the French in St. Kitts stood at a mere 1,854, nearly half of which were enslaved people of African descent.⁸⁴ At least 3,200 enslaved folk were thus displaced from St. Kitts, some probably forced to leave for Saint-Domingue, but others taken as prizes of war.

Where did the thousands of enslaved men, women, and children who were captured by the English end up? Circumstantial evidence suggests that they were brought to Antigua and enslaved to English masters, where they may have been forced to labor alongside enslaved folk taken during the battles for Guadeloupe and Martinique. Antigua, which sits farther out in the Atlantic and has dozens of natural inlets that doubled as important defensive positions against naval threats, served as a base of operations for Codrington and Thornhill's squadron during the war. In all likelihood, the thousands of slaves captured at St. Kitts from the French were probably taken back to Antigua when the ships refitted. Enslaved men and women who were already familiar with methods of sugar cultivation and had lived through the hell of "seasoning" in the islands were highly valued war prizes. One colonist with knowledge of the expedition against St. Kitts believed that Codrington had personally seen to it that slaves from the

⁸⁴ Pritchard, *Search of Empire*, 50.

French sector were sent to Antigua. Joseph Crisp testified that Codrington “took advantage of the hiding places of the Negroes” and had them “clandestinely” shipped “to his own plantations at Antigua.” Crisp also testified that Codrington had several hundred others re-branded “with the General’s mark.” During the English occupation of the island, Codrington was rumored to have given a Frenchman in St. Kitts a commission “to command a company of French mulattos” to “make indigo for the General.” According to Crisp, Codrington not only took men and women who slaved for the French, but also slaves that belonged to English slaveowners as well.⁸⁵

Evidence suggests that the reenslavement of slaves captured in French St. Kitts and their transportation to Antigua dramatically increased the size of the black population in the island to the east. Despite embargos and limited shipping opportunities during the war, Antigua experienced rapid increase in the size of the enslaved labor force during the 1690s.⁸⁶ In 1678, the enslaved population stood just above 2,100. Codrington claimed in 1689 that Antigua had only “a third of the number of Christians or slaves” as the much smaller island of Nevis, which, if accurate, suggests that black population still hovered around 2,000 in the 1680s.⁸⁷ Yet by 1699, when the Antigua Council and Assembly voted to lay a 30lb per poll sugar tax on slaveowners, they noted that some 8,000 people of African descent lived on the island. By 1703, the black population on Antigua hovered near 11,000.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Deposition of Joseph Crisp, Barbados, July 2, 1691, CO 28/37/31, extracted in CSPCO 13/1609/480.

⁸⁶ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 141-143.

⁸⁷ Lieutenant-General Codrington to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Antigua, November 11, 1689, CO 152/37/52.

⁸⁸ Minutes of the Council and Assembly of Antigua, December 14, 1699, CO 155/2/333; Gaspar, *Bondmen & Rebels*, 83.

Was the legal slave trade the source of this rapid spike in the number of people of African descent who labored in Antigua? Statistics on the slave trade suggest that at least 2,539 men and women were sold to Antigua between 1678 and 1698, but more than 40% of the “saltwater slaves” probably died due to malnutrition and disease during their “seasoning.”⁸⁹ Codrington commented on the slow arrival of slave traders to Antigua in 1697, noting, “in the last eight years we have not had in all this Government a thousand negroes imported from Guinea nor elsewhere.” The dearth is confirmed by the *Voyages* database, which accounts for only 2,539 black arrivants to Antigua between 1678 and 1698.⁹⁰ In light of the demographic numbers cited by the government in 1699, a major source of slave labor in Antigua between 1689 and 1697 must have been the islands sacked during the war. As Codrington noted at the conclusion of the conflict, the reduction of St. Kitts “and what our privateers have taken off the enemy’s islands” helped catapult the island toward large-scale sugar production in the 1690s.⁹¹

The Contradictions of Protestant Liberty and Slave Flight

Following the Glorious Revolution, Protestantism—broadly conceived—became a banner under which colonists and metropolitans could imagine a broader, free imperial

⁸⁹ *Voyages*: Variables: Dates 1678 to 1698, Principle Place of Slave Landing: Antigua, <http://slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces?yearFrom=1678&yearTo=1698&mjstimp=33400> (accessed February 2010). Dirks, *The Black Saturnalia: Conflict and Its Ritual Expression on British West Indian Slave Plantations*, 92, Robertson, *A Detection of the State and Situation of the Present Sugar Planters of Barbadoes and the Leeward Islands*, 44.

⁹⁰ *Voyages*: Variables—Dates: 1689 to 1698, Principle Place of Slave Landing: Antigua, <http://slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces?yearFrom=1689&yearTo=1698&mjstimp=33400> (accessed January 2010). Governor Codrington to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Antigua, March 1, 1690, CO 152/37/83, extracted in CSPCO 13/789i/227.

⁹¹ Governor Codrington to the Council of Trade and Plantations, Antigua, September 27, 1697, CO 153/16/114-126, extracted in CSPCO 15/1347/622.

community.⁹² But by holding Protestantism up as a banner of liberty, colonists who advanced the Glorious Revolution as a triumph over slavery raised the ideological stakes as these same colonists argued for greater access to the slave trade and stronger private property rights over human beings. Black mobility across imperial boundaries during times of imperial conflict tested contradictions of an empire based on slavery yet conceived as “Protestant” and “free.” When slaves crossed boundaries between “Catholic” and “Protestant” islands in search of a better life, they tested the ideology that linked Protestantism and liberty in the English Empire.

Some evidence suggests that enslaved folk decided to help white imperialists during the wars in an effort to gain their freedom, but when peace returned, they lacked the legal recourse to prove their case. In a society where skin color alone excluded them from access to the official circuits of civil and political rights, free people of African descent faced steep obstacles to staying free.⁹³ Thus being forced back into slavery after gaining freedom during wartime was not only a real possibility, but also a probability. Take, for example, the case of Ardra. He lived in Guadeloupe in 1703, when the British fleet commanded by Christopher Codrington raided the island. Believing that he had a better chance to obtain his freedom by siding with the English, Ardra elected to desert his French master and joined Codrington’s men with the understanding that “he was to have been freed & set at Liberty” after returning to the British Leewards. However, once he stepped foot in Antigua, Codrington refused to provide him manumission papers. Ardra appealed his case to local legislators. After several hearings the Antiguan government

⁹² Carla Gardina Pestana, *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 150, Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, 173.

⁹³ Elsa V. Goveia, *Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century*, Caribbean Series, (New Haven,: Yale University Press, 1965), 82-83.

agreed that he could be left to his own devices, but stipulated that his freedom was provisional. The councilors agreed that Codrington's right as a property owner trumped Ardra's right as a soldier. Ardra was only free until Codrington returned to the islands and could argue why the mulatto from Guadeloupe was in fact his property.⁹⁴

As Ardra's case highlights, imperial wars also provided an imperial education for enslaved folk and people of color caught up in the conflicts. Capture and re-enslavement of slaves created local black diasporas that stretched across imperial boundaries and exposed slaves immediately to the tensions that existed in the fragmented archipelago. In turn, enslaved folk used their knowledge of the competing empires to exploit the imperial boundaries. Michel—the slave whose story opened this chapter—was one such man. His family's flight from Guadeloupe to Montserrat highlights how enslaved folk seized on their knowledge of imperial tensions to exploit boundaries in the islands.

Interestingly, evidence suggests slave flight across imperial island boundaries accelerated during moments of peace, after enslaved folk who were captured or elected to fight for foreign masters realized that life in a new land was not much different from life on their old master's plantation. For slaves who took to the sea to reach their former colonial homeland, the motives were complex and involved weighing both the risks of getting caught and the benefits of returning to family members and a plantation where their return might translate into better treatment. What these cases of interimperial flight suggest, however, is that black men and women in the islands had developed a keen sense of the problems an imperially divided archipelago posed to slave ownership.

⁹⁴ Antigua Minutes of Council in Assembly, May 24 & March 24, 1707, March 13, 1708, Antigua, CO 9/1. Gaspar, *Bondmen & Rebels*, 162-167.

Whether or not enslaved folk took flight with the intent of forcing competing imperial planters to reconsider how they understood the relationship between liberty and slavery is unclear, but when flight did occur, it certainly drew the attention of governors and other slaveowners who attempted to rationalize slave agency within a context that made sense to them—particularly the growing sense that the English Empire was militantly free and “Protestant” and the French Empire popish and “Catholic.” From the perspective of English colonists, slaves were lured to French colonies because they were extended more free time in the form of Catholic Holy-Days. In contrast, French colonists maintained that slaves arrived in Guadeloupe or Marie-Galante because they wanted to live in a colony where they could “live as Christians.” Yet when enslaved folk such as Michel and his family pushed off for English colonies, the discourse about Catholic liberties to slaves did not apply, and English masters rarely if ever suggested that fleeing slaves came to Montserrat or Antigua in search of religious freedom.

Slave flight proved to be a major diplomatic issue during peacetime. On February 4, 1699, the Council of Nevis wrote to the newly Council of Trade to inform them of the state of Anglo-French relations in the region. “We daily fear that this practice of running away of our French Negroes taken in the late war,” the councilmen related, “if special care be not taken, will prove of very pernicious consequence to many of His Majesty’s subjects, and we pray your Lordships’s attention to prevent this growing evil.” Earlier that year, Christopher Codrington and John Hamilton of Antigua had twenty-one men and women flee the island, purportedly for Guadeloupe. They wanted them back, but the French governor refused to return them until the English governors returned the free people of color as well as enslaved men and women who they had seized during the war.

According to the French Governor's instructions for carrying out the terms of the Treaty of Ryswick, he was in charge of making sure that "all free Negroes and Mulattoes who lived among the French before the war and have since been taken by the English at St. Christophers, Martinique, and Guadeloupe" had to be immediately restored. Article seven, which was modeled after a similar provision in the 1667 Treaty of Breda, stipulated that all slaves taken by the English had to be "permitted to return to their French masters" by their own volition.⁹⁵ The English believed this was impossible, since all of the slaves taken by the English during the war had been "sold into a thousand hands."⁹⁶ The Marquis D'Amblimont, the Governor-General of the Îles du Vent, noted that if the commissioners refused to allow the slaves to return, he could not "give up the slaves who have risked their lives to return to their masters in accordance with the liberty secured by the Treaty."⁹⁷ French colonists accused the British of not letting men and women who used to slave in St. Kitts and Guadeloupe return, but apparently, many were fleeing anyway and creating a "pernicious" problem for the sugar planters who had benefited from their labor.

As English officials petitioned the French for the restitution of the twenty-one slaves who fled to Guadeloupe, the French officials responded by submitting their own claims for men and women taken during the war. As part of their claims against the English, French officials submitted at least one list of "mulatres libres" (free mulattoes)

⁹⁵ Copy of Marquis D'Amblimont's and Monsieur Robert's Demands made to the English Commissioners after the Restitution of the French part of St. Christophers, Nevis, January 26, 1699, CO 152/3/C18. Unlike the Treaty of Breda, the Treaty of Ryswick did not specifically deal with slave returns, which gave colonial officials wiggle room to debate how to proceed. The full text of the treaties signed at Ryswick can be found in Fred L. Israel, *Major Peace Treaties of Modern History, 1648-1967*, V vols. (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1967), I:145-176.

⁹⁶ Memorial in Answer to the Marquis D'Amblimont's Demands upon the Restitution of the French part of St. Christopher's, Nevis, February 1, 1699, CO 152/3/3viii (marked C20).

⁹⁷ Memorial of Le Marquis D'Amblimont and François Robert, St. Kitts, February 5, 1699, CO 152/3/3xi.

and slaves of the “famille de la verdure du Grosier de la Grandeterre de la Guadeloupe” who had been taken during the expedition against the island several years earlier. Most of the people men, women, and children listed were described as “libre.” D’Amblimont insisted that the English return these “Nègres François” who were taken during the war, reminding the commissioners in charge that keeping “it is part of the Law of Nations that free Negroes in any country must not be sold but enjoy the same prerogatives as men born free.”⁹⁸ Colonel Hamilton argued the French claim was bogus, and that the French colonists were simply trying to obtain slaves under the pretence that they were illegally seized free people. Although the Lieutenant-Governor of St. Kitts believed the sixth article was “reasonable,” he maintained that the French overstated the number of free people of color taken, since the number was “much more than all the free Negroes and malattoes I know of in all or any of the islands.”⁹⁹

Some sources suggest that English and French claimants believed that religion was a major reason slaves decided to flee during peacetime. The group that fled Antigua for Guadeloupe was probably the same party described by a Jesuit missionary in 1710. Looking back on his time in St. Kitts, the missionary recalled that during the conquest of Saint-Christophe in 1690 the English “took away six thousand blacks.” The missionary maintained that all of the captured slaves were “Catholics” who by conquest “became the slaves of the English.” Referring to the English slaveholders as “heretics,” he noted that plantation owners like Codrington and others in the English Leewards “do not baptize

⁹⁸ Marquis D’Amblimont to Governor Norton, February 5, 1699, CO 152/3/3ix. It is significant that many of the free people listed are described as “mulattoes,” and suggests that unlike in the English colonies, French colonists had a greater tendency to emancipate enslaved children of white masters and black women.

⁹⁹ Memorial in Answer to the Marquis D’Amblimont’s Demands upon the Restitution of the French part of St. Christopher’s, Nevis, February 1, 1699, CO 152/3/3viii (marked C20).

their slaves.” Protestants in the colonies, he rightly generalized, claim “that slavery is a condition in opposition to the children of God, and consequently they never speak to them of religion and let them live in their own fashion.” By comparison, the Jesuit missionary asserted that in the French islands, “all our slaves were baptized, well instructed, and several had piety.”¹⁰⁰

The missionary’s assertion that “all” the enslaved folk in the French islands were baptized and well instructed was an exaggeration, but the statement was also grounded in knowledge of official French policy. According to the second article of the 1685 Code Noir, all slaves owned in French colonies had to be baptized.¹⁰¹ Unlike the English islands where Protestant ministers did not actively seek out black converts, a few Catholic missionaries did take an active role in ministering to enslaved folk in Saint-Christophe, Guadeloupe, and Martinique. In some cases, priests were assigned the specific role of ministering directly to the enslaved population in a given parish—an unheard of practice in the English colonies. The Jesuit Père Mongin ministered as a *cure des Nègres* in French Saint-Christophe in the 1680s.¹⁰² The Dominican missionary Jean-Baptiste Labat noted that during his visit to a Jesuit mission in the Îles du Vent in 1694, he encountered a missionary by the name of Lageneste who was known as the “le Père des Nègres” by his black parishioners.¹⁰³ Priests differed in their approach to converting

¹⁰⁰ The report is partially reprinted in Sue Peabody, “A Dangerous Zeal: Catholic Missions to Slaves in the French Antilles, 1635-1800,” *French Historical Studies* 25, no. 1 (2002): 53-54.

¹⁰¹ *Code Noir, Ou Recueil D'edits, Declarations et Arrêts Concernant Les Esclaves Negres de L'amerique, avec Un Recueil de Reglemens, Concernant La Police Des Isles Francoises de L'amerique & Les Engages*, (A Paris: Chez les libraires associez., 1743), 12-13.

¹⁰² Peabody, “A Dangerous Zeal,” 61, Jean Mongin, “Copie de La Lettre Du P. Jean Mongin, Missionnaire de L'amerique À Unde Personne de Condition Du Languedoc Écrite de L'île de Saint-Christophe Au Mois de Mai 1682,” *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe* 60-62 (1984).

¹⁰³ Labat, *Nouveau Voyage*, I:68.

enslaved folk, and often disagreed about the requirements that people of color had to meet before being baptized.¹⁰⁴

Mongin's account provides historians with a detailed view of the encounters between priests and African and Afro-Creole slaves in the French islands. He concentrated on newly arrived "saltwater slaves" for baptism, approaching them as they labored in the sugarcane fields and preaching to them behind the closed doors of the local chapel. Once enslaved men and women confessed their sins and demonstrated penance, some priests provided their converts with Catholic icons in the form of medallions, icons, and colorful rosaries.¹⁰⁵ After baptizing his converts, Mongin worked to arrange marriages for them—a practice that encountered more opposition from slaveowners than baptism. According to the Jesuit missionary, it was a custom of slaveowners in Saint-Christophe to prevent slaves from different plantations from receiving a Catholic marriage. Slaveowners wanted their property to only cohabit within the plantation bounds in an effort to exact power over black families as well as the reproduction of the labor force. Priests like Mongin struggled to work against this practice, arguing that Christian marriages created more pious and obedient slaves. Although he sought permission from masters to marry his converts, Mongin took some slaveowners to court over the matter.¹⁰⁶ In addition to marriages, priests encouraged enslaved folk to celebrate Catholic feast days and even testified in court for slaves they believed were wrongfully accused of crimes.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Peabody, "A Dangerous Zeal," 72.

¹⁰⁵ Mongin, "Copie de La Lettre," 79, Peabody, "A Dangerous Zeal," 63.

¹⁰⁶ Mongin, "Copie de La Lettre," 91, Peabody, "A Dangerous Zeal," 68.

¹⁰⁷ Peabody, "A Dangerous Zeal," 68-69.

While priests challenged the secular authority of slaveowners and provided converts with an alternative source of power to bend to their needs in the island community, enslaved folk did not blindly accept their missionary's rules for conversion and marriage. Africans and island-born Afro-Creole folk sometimes challenged the wishes of their parish's missionary. In his account of the Jesuit mission in Saint-Christophe, Mongin noted how some of his converts resisted his efforts to marry them because the couple did not share the same "country" or African identity.¹⁰⁸ Priests also faced the realities that enslaved folk were not altogether willing to forgo their belief in "sorcery," "idolatry," and Islam, but frequently noted that enslaved folk from Angola and Kongo arrived with some knowledge of Catholic practices, which they attributed to the work of Portuguese missionaries.¹⁰⁹

The writer of the 1710 memoir did not mention the resistance missionaries faced when they encountered enslaved folk unwilling to accept the Catholic missions with open arms. Instead, he used cases of slave flight as evidence that people of color in the islands were actively attracted to the Catholic faith. In particular, the writer related a story about a family of enslaved folk who had been captured during the English counterattack on St. Kitts to underscore the successes of his mission. In the missionary's eyes, the flight of the family from Antigua to Guadeloupe was evidence that enslaved folk in the islands

¹⁰⁸ Mongin, "Copie de La Lettre," 89.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.: 87-88, Labat, *Nouveau Voyage*, IV:124-125, 131-132, 136-137, Peabody, "A Dangerous Zeal," 76-77, 86-87. On the history of Catholicism in Kongo/Angola, see John Thornton, "The Development of an African Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Kongo, 1491-1750," *Journal of African History* 25, no. 2 (1984), John K. Thornton, *The Kingdom of Kongo: Civil War and Transition, 1641-1718* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), John K. Thornton, *The Kongolesse Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684-1706* (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), John K. Thornton, "Legitimacy and Political Power: Queen Njinga, 1624-1663," *Journal of African History* 32, no. 1 (1991). Also note Simon Bockie, *Death and the Invisible Powers: The World of Kongo Belief* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), Wyatt MacGaffey, *Religion and Society in Central Africa: The Bakongo of Lower Zaire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

were dedicated to Christ, so much so that they would risk their lives to obtain the sacraments from a priest. Of the captured slaves sent from French St. Kitts to Antigua, the missionary noted how there was

One very clever one among them had fallen into the lot belonging to the English governor of Antigua with his entire family. He was well treated by his master and by his services he gained the good graces and confidence of his master such that after several years he was made the head man of a large plantation. Having all amenities, he lived there in some comfort and almost entirely free, so that with regard to material well-being he could not wish for anything more. This poor slave, however, was not content, seeing himself deprived of the sacraments and other succors of Religion. Moved by his condition, he decided to flee. . . He stole a small boat and, with his family, whom he had secretly and skillfully assembled, and several of his friends, numbering twenty-two, came to see me in Guadeloupe, where I was then. Having known me in Saint-Christophe, they came to find me, told me of their adventures, and told me that, in returning as they had among the French, they understood they would not be nearly so comfortable in life and in work as they had been with their English master, but their displeasure at living among brutes, the fear of dying without rites had resolved them to return to a country where they could live as Christians.¹¹⁰

Remarkably, this group appears to be the men and women Codrington and Hamilton appealed to have returned to them in 1698. The missionary's story is certainly embellished in an effort to draw a clear distinction between French Catholic and Protestant English slaveholders. Yet the account is telling because it touches on so many of the issues that swirled around the relationship between Christianity and slaveowning. The Jesuit emphasizes that the runaways fled Antigua not because of ill treatment—for they were “was well treated by his master” “could not wish for anything more” and were “almost entirely free.” In the view of the Jesuit, the men and women who fled Antigua did so because they could not freely practice Catholicism.

¹¹⁰ Reprinted in Peabody, “A Dangerous Zeal,” 53-54.

One fascinating element of the Jesuit's story is his assertion that "the heretics do not baptize their slaves, claiming that slavery is a condition in opposition to the children of God." The Jesuit was referring to the belief held among English colonists that Protestantism was antithetical to slavery. As illustrated in the previous chapter, the issue of baptism was central to the way many colonists understood issues of freedom and slavery. During the trial of Philip Warner, the issue of whether or not Indian Warner had been baptized was central to whether or not he was an agent of the English empire or an outsider and slave. Because baptism connoted inclusion in the Protestant community and Protestantism was assumed to be antithetical to slavery, many colonists believed that baptism would force slaveowners to emancipate their slaves.

The issue of slave baptisms was a longstanding concern in the English colonies, one that continued to pose problems for slaveowners into the eighteenth century.¹¹¹ William Smith, an Anglican rector in Nevis in the 1720s, commented on the issue in his *Natural History of Nevis*. By the early eighteenth century, the issue had begun to attract the attention of metropolitans who were concerned with converting slaves. Smith wrote, "I have, since my return to England (several times), heard it objected by mistaken Zealots, that if the Masters of our Plantation Negroes would but have them baptized, and that if we Clergyman, would be at the pains to instruct them, they would do much better in all respects." Smith refuted this claim, citing several examples of enslaved men and women who, once baptized, viewed themselves "upon a level" with their masters. "Even if the whole Country was so mad" to convert their slaves, Smith related to his readers,

¹¹¹ Travis Glasson, "Baptism Doth Not Bestow Freedom': Missionary Anglicanism, Slavery, and the Yorke-Talbot Opinion, 1701–30," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (2010): 283-284.

“the effect would then be a general Rebellion, and Massacre, of us Whites: This is the Truth.”¹¹²

The issue of slave conversions was a matter of practice that went to the heart of what it meant to be a member of the evolving French and English empires. When captured enslaved folk like those who fled Antigua for Guadeloupe claimed sanctuary in Catholic territories, they were not only pitting competing slaveowners against each other, but also exploiting a contradiction at the center of the interwoven ideologies of empire, liberty, and slavery at the end of the seventeenth century. Flight itself raised the issue of free will. If slaves selectively chose to flee to competing empires under the pretense of seeking religious freedom, then their actions suggested that they had desired to become part of the Christian community, something that any good Christian was not supposed to deny. While in Catholic territories, the issue of baptism did not necessarily mean an avenue to freedom (although baptism could facilitate the inclusion of slaves into corporate associations and brotherhoods that could mitigate the exploitation of a single master), in Protestant colonies, especially those places where colonists embraced the revolutionary rhetoric that pitted Protestant liberty as the inverse of natural slavery, the issue of slaves requesting baptism challenged not only how they understood the tenants of their faith, but also the broader meaning of liberty as an inherently English quality.

Christopher Codrington believed that slave flight did have something to do with religion, but not in the sense that captured French slaves were returning to Guadeloupe and the other French colonies because they wanted to practice Catholicism. Instead, Codrington maintained slave flight had to do with the liberties and free time French

¹¹² Smith, *Natural History of Nevis*, 229-230.

owners had to extend their slaves because of Catholic celebrations. In a letter written to the Council of Trade just before his death, Codrington related that the flight of French slaves to their former masters was a matter of the most importance to the English colonies, “for a great number of Negroes will certainly get off in sloops and boats, both from a natural desire of changing their Masters upon the least severe usage and upon the encouragement of these many Holy Days the French allow their slaves.”¹¹³ Notably, Codrington did not say they had a “natural desire for liberty,” but rather, a natural desire to find better treatment. To claim that enslaved men and women had a natural desire for liberty would have gone too far in admitting that people of color had the capacity to contemplate their own freedom. Codrington’s own racism would not permit him to concede that people of African descent did not, as Locke argued, enter into a compact with “limited Power on one side, and Obedience on the other.”¹¹⁴

Codrington was right that enslaved folk would continue to take sloops and boats to flee the Leewards in search of better places. Slave flight did continue in the Leewards into next century, appearing in waves. As the War of Jenkin’s Ear drew to a close in the 1740s, slaveowners turned their attention to the growing Spanish sanctuary for runaways at Puerto Rico, on the other side of the Virgin Islands.¹¹⁵ In the early eighteenth century, however, enslaved folk remained more familiar with the Anglo-French balance of power. War returned to the Leewards again from 1702-1713, and again, St. Kitts was a target for invasions and counterattacks. France, now firmly aware that Saint-Domingue was going

¹¹³ Memorial of Colonel Codrington about Negroes Running Away to the French in the Leeward Islands, 1699, CO 152/3/30v (labeled D10).

¹¹⁴ Locke, *Two Treatises*, 284-285.

¹¹⁵ On slave flight to Puerto Rico during the War of Jenkin’s Ear, see J.L. Chinae, “Quest for Freedom: The Immigration of Maritime Maroons into Puerto Rico, 1656-1800,” *Journal of Caribbean History* 31, no. 1-2 (1997), Gaspar, *Bondmen & Rebels*, 205-207.

to be the next great imperial colony in the Antilles, conceded its French possession in St. Kitts to the English. However, enslaved folk remained savvy of the problem of imperial boundaries. In 1711, after the French had already been driven from their plantation lands surrounding Basseterre, the Assembly and Council of St. Kitts passed sweeping legislation aimed for the “better Government of Negroes, and other Slaves.” Article sixteen dealt exclusively with the issue of men and women who intended to exploit the imperial crises for their own benefit. “Lately sundry Negroes, and other slaves, have deserted their Masters and Owners,” the article began, “and have withdrawn themselves into the late French Quarter and there absconded themselves in the Grounds called the Salt Ponds, and in other Grounds lying to windward of Frigatt Bay.” Their “design and intent,” the law continued, was “not only to go over themselves to the Enemy, when opportunity shall present, but also to persuade and entice other Negroes and Slaves to go with them.”¹¹⁶ Men and women from St. Kitts, many of whom had probably lived through decades of rumors of war between France and England, had begun to maroon to the salt ponds in order to get away from their English masters.

It is notable that while English slaveowners and French priests claimed that enslaved people fled to the French islands from the English Leewards in search of Catholic freedom, French slaveowners did not accuse slaves who fled to English territories as seeking Protestant liberty. Nor did English colonists claim that runaways reached their island in search of an Anglican minister who could deliver them from Catholic tyranny. As Michel’s story highlights, enslaved folk also fled French territories

¹¹⁶ “An Act for the Better Government of Negroes, and other Slaves,” St. Kitts, 1711, *Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of St. Christopher, from 1711 to 1735, Inclusive*, (London: Printed, by Order of the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, by John Baskett, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1739), 12.

for the English Leewards. Read in relation to each other, these episodes of interimperial flight suggest that there was a deeper principle guiding slave travel across imperial boundaries, something more than the pursuit of “least severe usage.” The 1714 departure of Michel and his family from Guadeloupe to Montserrat underscores that while imperial religions played a role in shaping patterns of slave resistance, enslaved folk did not simply flee from one island to another with the sole purpose of receiving the proper faith.

Moreover, the practice of using imperial borders to gain greater freedoms suggests that enslaved folk understood that religion was a practical marker that clearly distinguished imperial boundaries in the archipelago. Stated simply, part of the acculturative process of becoming black in the archipelago involved not only learning about the master, but also the master’s enemy. By fleeing to French territories and claiming that they wanted to practice Catholicism, enslaved folk might be able to gain the attention of a compassionate priest, which in turn might help them have more access to personal time, the markets, and social gatherings. But Michel and his family’s flight to Montserrat highlight that in certain circumstances enslaved folk believed it was in their interest to flee to the English territories, where access to their master’s religion was far less common. Did people like Michel flee because they wanted to get back to the English plantations where they had worked all their lives before being captured in wartime raids? Was it because they had contacts in the English islands who they believed could help protect them from being sent back to Guadeloupe? Or did they simply decide to flee in hopes that they would find an island of their own, where they could stake their own claim to liberty? Answers to these questions are far from certain. Michel and his family’s voice are silent in the archive, and we are left with only fragments in the historical record

that shed light on their motives and the collective imagination that informed their flight in 1714.

Conclusion

While British debates, protests, and conspiracies about liberty and slavery involved concerns about the monarchical empire and the political apparatus of the nation-state, African and Afroamerican struggle in the colonies was focused on creating alternative possibilities for people of color in relation to the local regimes of power. Whether struggle involved fleeing to the woods and mountains or overtaking an island completely, slave resistance was not about reforming the British Empire. Flight was about escape, about a search for something new. This was true even in cases where slaves fled across imperial borders in hopes that they might find better treatment. As Codrington's comment about the "natural desire" of slaves suggests, the pursuit of better treatment at the hands of their master's competition was, at the very least, a statement about the colony they left behind. Yet at the same time slave struggle was always forged in relation to empire in the colonies. In the colonies, white settlers viewed collective flight or outright resistance as challenges to the stability of the colony. When white colonists discovered that enslaved folk were naming their own leaders "governors" or when rumors circulated that black men were organizing themselves with military titles and hierarchies, white colonists (poor and elite alike) not only feared that they were going to lose power over their property or that they would be attacked for the color of their skin, but that the entire colony might be lost. And the loss of an island in the Caribbean was like slicing through the sinews of a larger imperial muscle or breaking a link in chain of imperial commerce. The fear that black struggle could become contagious was

symptomatic of the interdependence of the islands as well as an expression of the belief among British colonists that slaves throughout the empire understood that their condition was the result of something larger than the local practice of racial exploitation and African enslavement. Interisland movement underscored the idea that black identity was extralocal. When legislators in Jamaica and the Leewards passed legislation targeting enslaved folk after hearing news of plots in Barbados, they were expressing in words the fact that problem of racism and empire were extraterritorial practices, and moreover, that empire and Afro-Creole identity making were dialectically related.

This chapter has attempted to investigate two seemingly disparate problems in Leeward society: the spread of a new ideology emanating from the monarchial crisis in England and centered around the idea that “liberty” was defined in opposition to “arbitrary power,” “slavery,” and absolute monarchism, and the increased problem of collective slave resistance and revolt, which, while colonists may have denied it, was the result of a system of economic exploitation and social reproduction that hinged on the denial of liberty to others. In short, I have attempted to set out a context for exploring the relationship between this top-down ideology and the bottom-up resistance, the interplay between the collective consciousness of a group of people who claimed liberty for themselves and the practical efforts of people exploited in its name. How did those colonists who viewed Protestantism as a defining feature of liberty and freedom from arbitrary power justify the enslavement of people who they consciously denied access to their religion? When slaves fled to other islands in the name of religion, were they not testifying to their desire to acquire knowledge about Christianity? When enslaved folk gathered to name their own governors and leaders, were not they also testifying to their

disgust with their own experience with “arbitrary power?” Did slave resistance in the archipelago influence or shape the imperial discourse about liberty at the turn of the century, if at all? These questions will be explored in more detail in Part Two, which focuses on Afrodiasporic life in the Leewards during the period between 1714-1736.

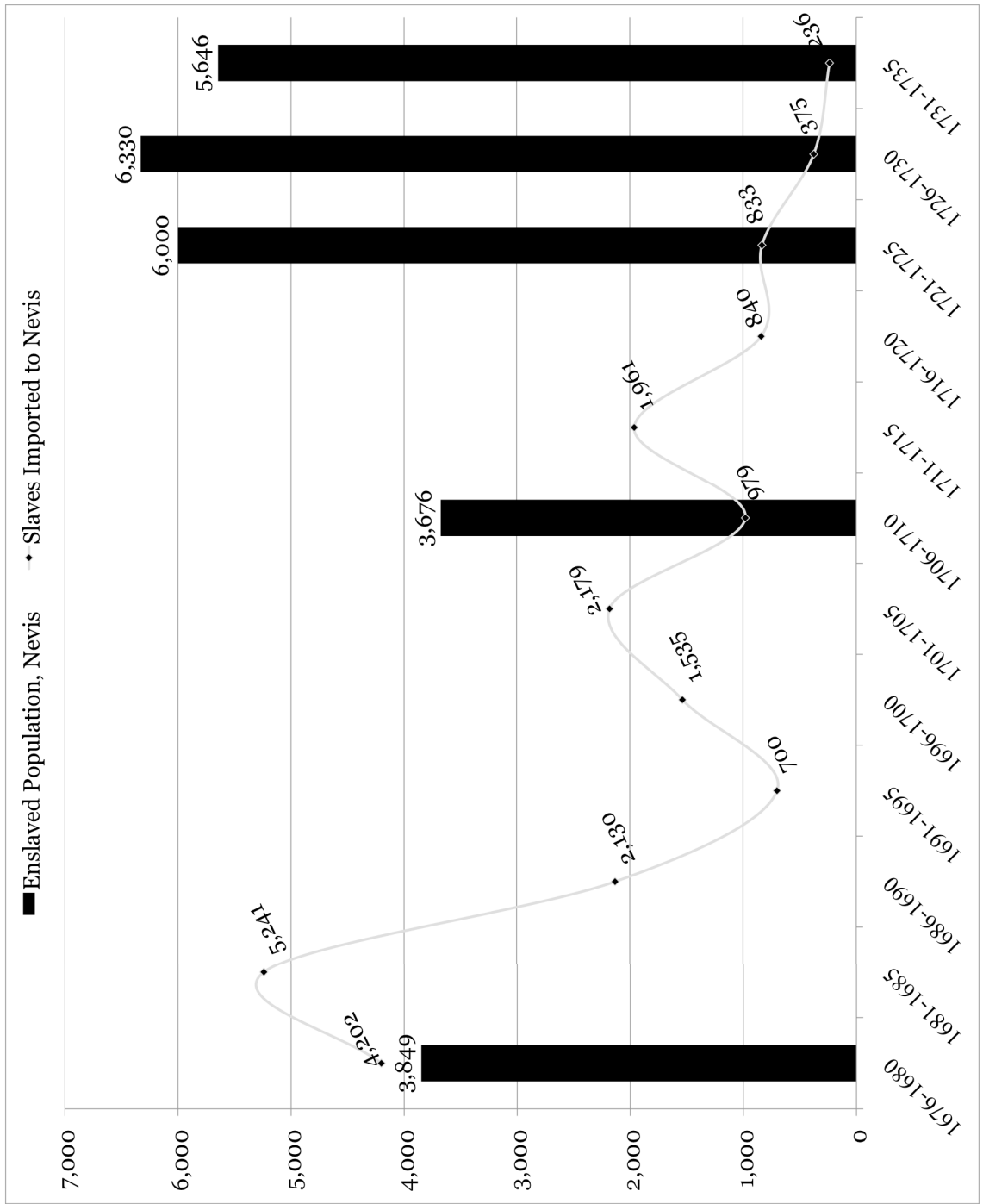


Figure 3:
Comparison of Enslaved Population vs. Number of Enslaved Folk Disembarked
Nevis, 1676-1735

Sources for Figures 3-6:
Voyages, CO 1/42/193-243, CO 152/14/R101, CO 152/20/V46.

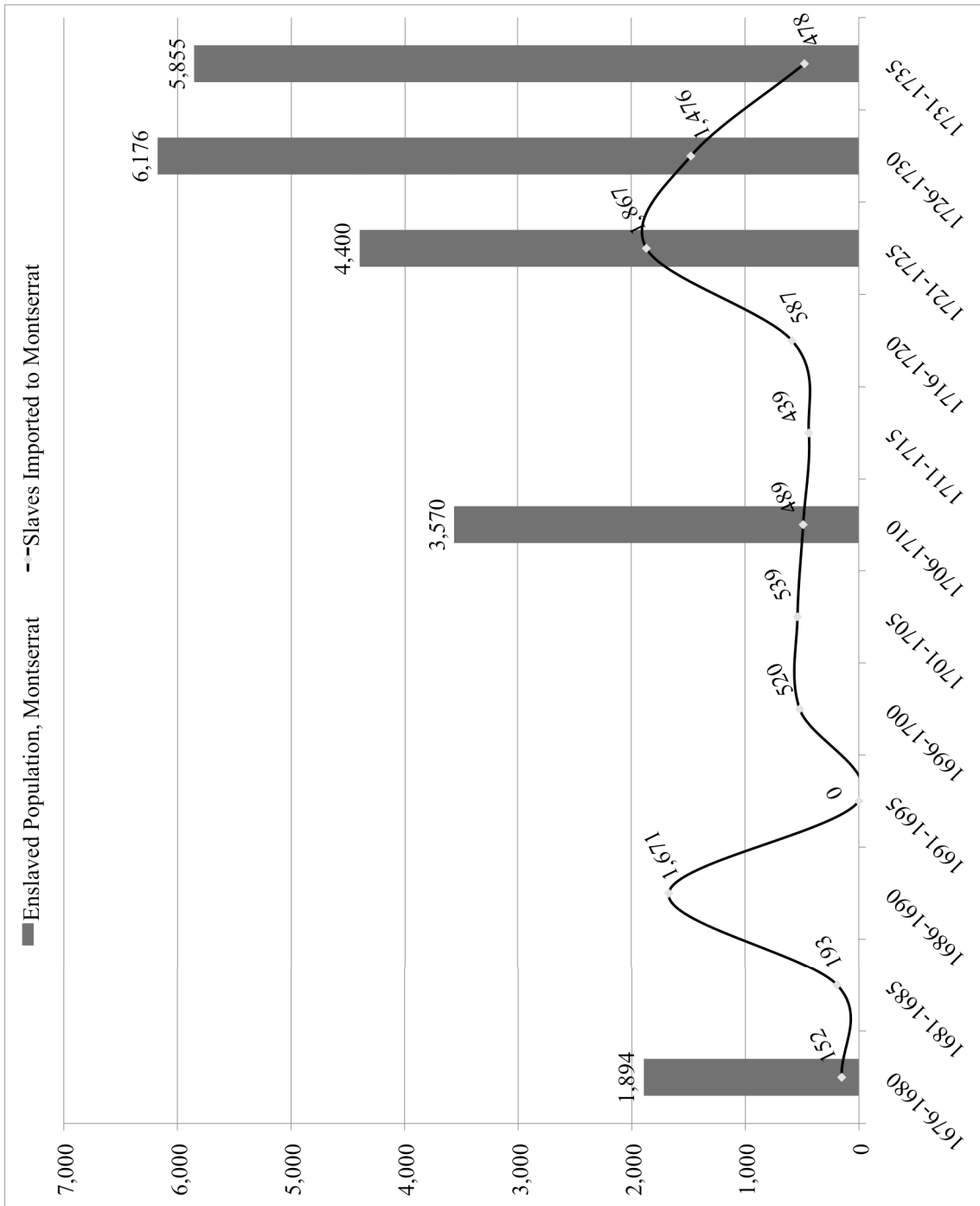


Figure 4:
Comparison of Enslaved Population vs. Number of Enslaved Folk Disembarked
Montserrat, 1676-1735

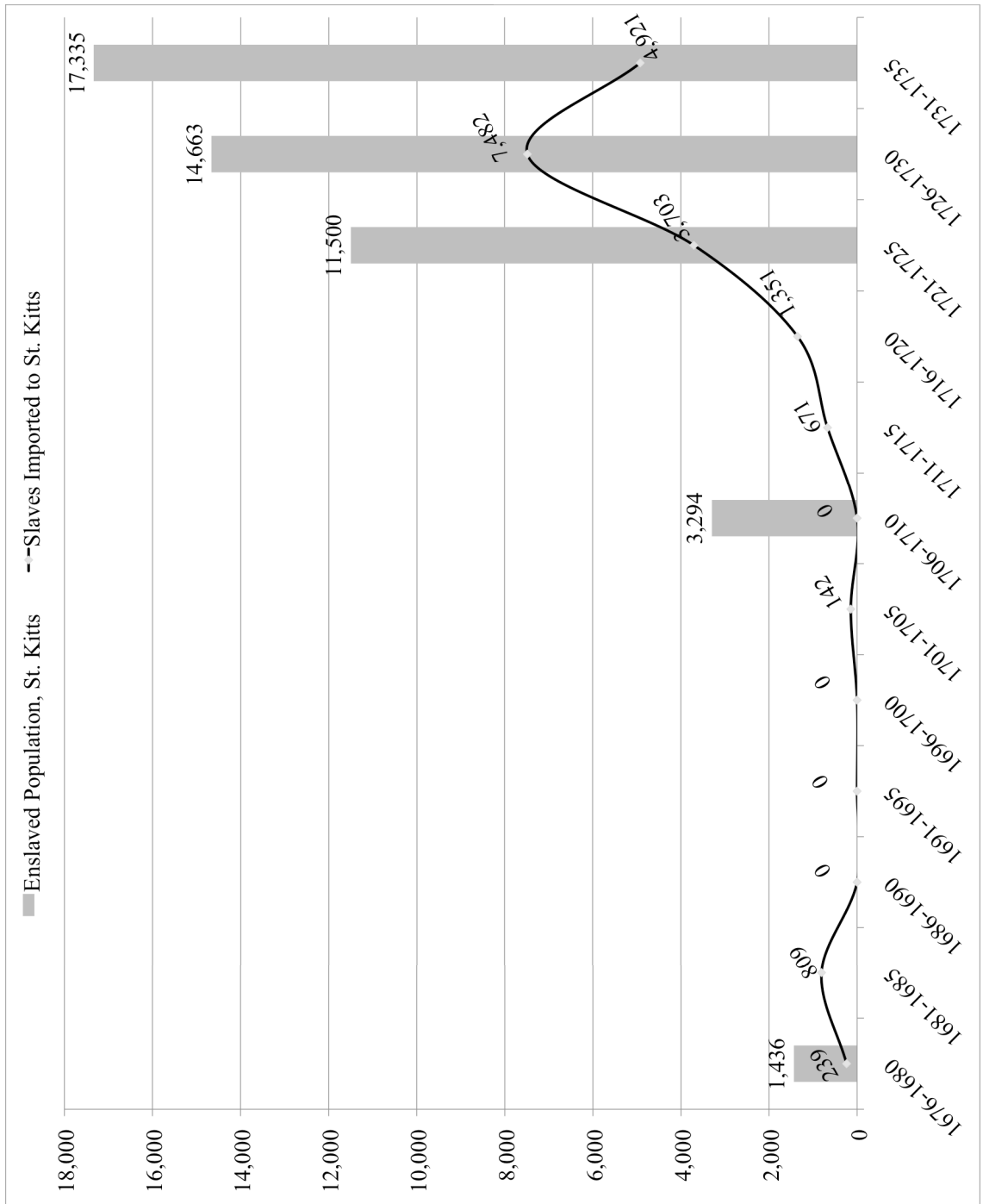


Figure 5:
Comparison of Enslaved Population vs. Number of Enslaved Folk Disembarked
St. Kitts, 1676-1735

(does not include French Quarter)

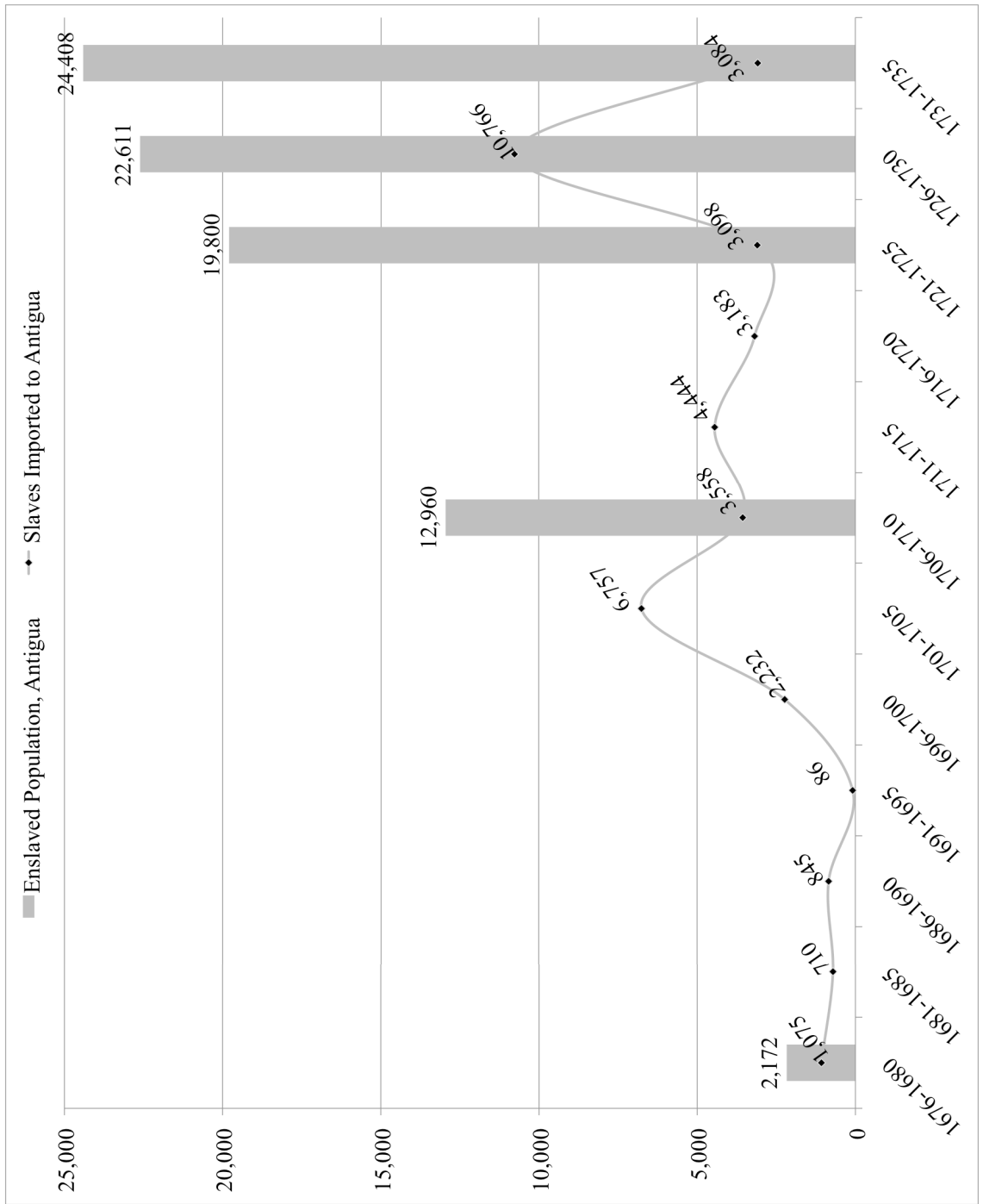


Figure 6:
Comparison of Enslaved Population vs. Number of Enslaved Folk Disembarked
Antigua, 1676-1735

PART TWO INVENTING AN AFRO-ARCHIPELAGO

Chapter IV

A Very Ungrateful Rogue

Power relations in the Leeward Islands in the early eighteenth century were not only defined by geopolitics and labor, they were intimately bound to issues of space and movement. Within any island, power from above and below concentrated in different places and at distinctive times, shifting with the course of the season and week from the cane fields to the mountains to the Sunday markets. Enslaved folk in the Leeward constellation lived this reality and developed an intricate understanding of how to negotiate the world that they worked to create. Whether a newly arrived “saltwater” slave or a child being raised under colonial slavery, learning how to navigate the different fields of power that overlapped in the islands was a central fact of both labor and creolizing processes.¹ Movement across boundaries educated slaves about the seemingly universal reality in the islands that dark skin was synonymous with slave status. Not only

¹ Men and women newly arrived from Africa were most often referred to as “New Negroes” on the plantations; here I borrow the term “saltwater slave” from Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007). Works that have informed my thinking of power and acculturation for this chapter are Ira Berlin, “From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American Society in Mainland North America,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (1996), Dubois, *Colony of Citizens*, and Thornton, “The Coromantees.”

was knowing how to get around instrumental to the workings of the plantation, but knowledge of the social cartography of power could prove the difference between life and death.² This chapter explores the relationship between space and power by thinking about the ways enslaved people used their knowledge of the landscape to negotiate the fields of power that shaped their everyday life in the British Leewards.

Movement was central to the formation of black identity in the British Leewards because it enabled people to create new bonds of affinity within a violently policed colonial space. For some men, women and children living in the Leewards, the plantation where they labored was the epicenter of interpersonal communication and contact. Just as plantation relationships influenced how people of African descent understood their power vis-à-vis the plantation manager or owner, movement across plantations underscored for many slaves the general view that they were part of a broader, racialized colonial world wherein they were an oppressed majority.

Yet because the islands in the British Leewards were so small and relatively close together, movement also brought slaves from competing sugar plantations and different islands into contact with one another with significant frequency. Life in the Leewards was dynamic. Although in many plantation societies slaves labored in a countryside relatively detached from the sea, in the Leewards, most African and island-born people of African descent could look out from the cane fields and see parts of an archipelago defined by competing empires and passing ships. As illustrated in Chapter III, enslaved folk and other inhabitants in the Leewards had the unique ability to not only imagine

² On space, power, and the culture of the enslaved, see Dubois, *Colony of Citizens*, 30-50, Stephanie Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), and Anthony E. Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

what it might be like to flee their particular colonial experience, but also to act on these dreams. Regional movement enabled enslaved folk to experience the broader mechanisms of power in the colonies in which they lived and created the context for the cross-fertilization of new ideas, rumors, and news. Movement was central to diaspora making, central to the ways people in the islands came to imagine themselves as being part of a much larger world that reached across saltwater boundaries.

Keeping these ideas in mind, this chapter explores movement from several different angles, places, and people. It is important to note, however, that this chapter was inspired by one particular slave whose name appears in documents at both the National Archives at Kew in England and the Stapleton Manuscripts held at the John Rylands Library at the University of Manchester. He was known as Frank. Some in Nevis called him “Daddy” or “Father” Frank, a nickname that was probably bestowed upon him not simply because he was a father but also because he was an elder in the slave community. Some enslaved folk in Nevis also called him “Mylady’s Frank,” a reference to his one time owner, Lady Frances Stapleton, daughter-in-law of the Governor-General responsible for creating the Leeward General Assembly in the 1670s. In the late summer of 1725, as a conspiracy scare gripped St. Kitts and Nevis, a white woman named Mary Combs accused Frank of being involved in a plot to take over the island. Two men were executed because of the accusations leveled against them, but Frank was spared, his life ultimately saved because he was able to convince both his overseer and absentee owner to intervene on his behalf.

Although he was able to avoid execution, Frank’s trial was not over. Residents in Nevis were convinced of his guilt and wanted him dead. In response, Frank fled the

island, eventually making his way to the Stapleton estate in England. After a year abroad, he returned to the Leewards and lived in Antigua before returning to his former plantation in Nevis. Upon his return, he remained fearful for his life. Soon after he fled to St. Kitts and was rumored to have gotten passage on a ship bound to Jamaica.

Frank's story is fascinating because it does not fit into many of the neat motifs historians have typically used to talk about resistance, movement, and identity. Frank's travels were not linear, one-way Atlantic crossings. Jamaica was but one star in a constellation of places Frank visited, England another. Most studies of slave conspiracies discuss the circumstances leading up to the discovery; Frank's story tells us how the imagination and concentrated hope that influenced ideas of collective dissent could also inspire others to search for a new land as they moved from place to place.

It is not possible to understand Frank without delving deeper into the culture of movement that surrounded him. Frank inhabited a sea of islands that was consistently informed by competing and articulating social forces. While he worked on one of the largest plantations in Nevis, he was not cut off from wider circuits of news and information. He understood that his owner William Stapleton lived in England; he probably knew that Lady Frances had given him away as a gift to her son. He knew that while his overseers Joseph Herbert and David Stalker could commit acts of violence against him, his kin, and other slaves on the plantation, he also knew that they needed him and his knowledge if they wanted to survive the serious droughts and get their sugar to market. Although Frank's travels were unique, his experiences blossomed out of the particular archipelagic context of the British Leewards. This chapter explores Frank's

world to make sense of this highly mobile, seemingly improbable plantation slave whose cosmopolitan experience led him to look for new horizons in the 1720s.

Island Networks: Names and Local Diasporas

Enslaved folk, as most scholars of colonial history are well aware, are virtually anonymous subalterns whose voices are largely silent in the archives. Yet there are ways in which scholars can dig into the archival record to undo the silences of history, to read against the grain in search of their story. One way to do this is to take account of the men and women who called them their property.

In the Leewards, as throughout much of the Atlantic slave-trading world, interisland business was conducted through genealogical circles. Scratch the surface of a business connection in the Leewards and you are likely to find articulating kin networks. As in Great Britain, elites and aspiring elites in the islands viewed marriage as a way to keep wealth in the family and to expand commercial networks. These connections not only helped people like the Winthrops, Langfords, and Redwoods maintain commercial connections to markets in Bristol, Philadelphia, Newport, and Boston, but also in maintaining the slave regime within the islands. Elite families like the Martins, Codringtons, Russells, Mathews, Stapletons, as well as aspiring elites like Augustus Boyd viewed marriage as a key link in a social network for retaining land and labor within controllable circles of wealth and inheritance.³ While some historians have focused on these connections and the ways white colonists tried to maintain or advance

³ On Boyd, see David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Any study of the Codringtons must begin with Harlow, *Christopher Codrington, 1668-1710*. For tracing particular genealogies tied to Antigua, Langford's study is of incredible value. Oliver, *History of the Island of Antigua*. Samuel Martin Senior to His Son, Antigua, September 24, 1750, Martin Family Papers, British Library, Add. MSS 41346.

their wealth, rarely have scholars discussed the implications these marriage practices had for the culture of enslaved folk laboring in the islands. Considered property and thus part of the estate, people of African descent in the Leewards were frequently gifted, bequeathed, and—when debt proved too burdensome—sold between families both within the islands and among them. Thus, in addition to the Atlantic slave trade, there existed a local traffic in people that caused men, women, and children to be shuffled about, torn from their families, and divided between the Leewards.

Enslaved folk in the islands responded to these acts of violence and forced dislocation by creating new ways of remembering their past in a way that affirmed their collective consciousness. These memories are directly reflected in naming patterns, which in turn illustrate how Afro-Leewardians affirmed that they were a diasporic people who had roots in homelands both local and across the Atlantic. Frank was in all likelihood familiar with this practice and had probably experienced it himself. For the historian, however, it is not as easy to trace his family network in the same way that we can aristocratic slaveowners like the Codringtons or Stapletons. Plantation owners and their managers cared little about keeping track of slave kin networks, and in fact, did their best to erase them both from their minds as well as the historical record. Plantation inventories—which were usually compiled by plantation managers for their absentee owners or by lawyers authorized to calculate estate property for wills—demonstrate on paper the indifference white managers and owners showed toward black kin networks that existed on the plantation.

In most cases, slaves for any given estate were listed according to their gender and age grade and by the European convention of “first” names. Most plantation

managers did not care to list who was related to whom on the plantation, although some managers did occasionally note kin relations in the margins. Most inventories followed the same outline—four categories of “men, women, boys, girls,” sometimes with ages and assigned prices listed next to the names. As a result, trying to figure out slave kin networks both within a given plantation as well as tracing a single person from one place to another is a difficult task. However, since land and slave trading occurred with in certain circles, it is possible to use plantation inventories, government correspondence, and personal letters to follow people like Frank as they moved from place to place.

Before proceeding with Frank’s story, however, it is important to focus for a moment on the issue of kinship and affiliation within circles of enslaved folk. As mentioned above, Frank was known by several names in Nevis. On plantation inventories he is listed simply as Frank, but in the minutes of the Nevis Assembly gathered during the 1725 conspiracy scare, he is also referred to as “Daddy” and “Father Frank,” not by his children, but by a white woman testifying against him. Her testimony suggests Frank’s name was colloquial and known outside of the boundaries of the Jennings and Balls Range plantation where he labored. Although Frank was a father, his local name indicates that he was known as a person of influence, perhaps a paternal figure who others could rely upon for aid, assistance, or access to social influence in within Nevisian slave social networks.

Daddy Frank’s name speaks to how enslaved folk created alternative notions of kinship, association, and family in the face of the dislocation and commodification imposed upon them by slavery and the slave trade. Enslaved folk in the Leewards kept track of kin relations, even when they entailed friends or acquaintances. In Antigua, for

example, the enslaved man Martin's Jemmy noted how he knew that Sampson (held by William Lavington) was the son of Lynch's Sampson even though they all lived on different estates.⁴ Jemmy also knew that the enslaved driver Billy had two brothers, one known as Tomlinson's Barryman and another named Cuffey despite the fact that none of them lived with Jemmy at Samuel Martin's plantation in St. John's Parish.⁵ Often times, when slaves gathered together or encountered each other at the crossroads, it was customary to ask about parents and elders. When Lavington's Sampson arrived at William Freeman's plantation to play the fiddle for a group of partying men and women, Secundi asked him "how his father did." Sampson reportedly replied, "brave and hearty."⁶

There are other examples of ways enslaved folk used names to signify status and familial connections. Nanny was a common name among black women and young girls throughout the British colonies. The name did not always connote a person responsible for taking care of the plantation infants, and its meaning was slippery enough to lend itself to uses similar to Daddy in many British colonies.⁷ Plantation inventories also suggest that children were often named after their parents; whether managers or owners did the naming is unclear. Boys and girls who shared the names of older people on Jennings and Balls Range were known simply by the adjective "little," such as Little Cuffee, Little Cuba, and Little Frank.⁸ Similar naming patterns were practiced on the Swete plantation in Antigua. Plantation records there list Little Stephen, Little Sharper,

⁴ Tryal of Lavington's Sampson, November 17, 1736, CO 9/10/62.

⁵ Tryal of Tomlinson's Barryman, November 17, 1736, CO 9/10/62.

⁶ Tryal of Lavington's Sampson, November 17, 1736, CO 9/10/62.

⁷ The most famous example of the name "Nanny" connoting a caretaking, elder woman is in the case of the Jamaican Windward Maroon whose ancestors in Moore Town still refer to her as "Granny Nanny." See Kenneth M. Bilby, *True-Born Maroons* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 182-213.

⁸ Fifteen dated plantation inventories for Jennings and Balls Range are contained in Stapleton MSS. 8/3.

and Little Hanna as boys' and girls' names, suggesting that these may have been the children of adults with the same names.⁹ It is also possible that the names were given in honor of elders, or that enslaved folk used expressions like "little" simply to distinguish individuals who shared the same name.

In addition to names signifying respect and kin connections, there were other names of affinity as well, some more closely tied to issues of identity and movement in the islands as well as the diaspora more broadly. Enslaved folk frequently used several different names when referring to each other, often without the manager's knowledge. Sometimes, but not always, plantation managers would report these "aliases" to absentees in their plantation inventories.¹⁰ Some young children born in the islands were named in West African traditions or inspired by them; on Jennings and Balls Range, parents named their children Quacoe, Bashee, and Abba.¹¹ Other slaves identified with both an Anglicized name and an ethnic identifier. On Frank's plantation in Nevis, Billy, Doll, Susanna, and Sarah were all known as Congo, as in "Congo Sarah" and "Congo Billy." Maria, a woman who slaved on the plantation with Frank, was known as Coromantee Maria—a signifier that she had Gold Coast roots. Several of the residents accepted the name Mina, such as Cuffy Mina, Hanna Mina, and Peter Minna.¹² Betty, Jack, Katy, Scipio were sometimes identified in the records by first names of Papa or Papaw,

⁹ A List of the Negroes on Late Mr. Swete's Plantations in Antigua, November 29, 1737, Swete Papers, 388M/E2.

¹⁰ The practice of multiple names led Joseph Herbert to misreport the number of enslaved folk laboring at Jennings and Balls Range. Joseph Herbert to Sir William Stapleton, Nevis, July 18, 1724, Stapleton MSS. 8/3.

¹¹ For example, see A List of all the Negroes Horses Mules and Horned Cattle Belonging to Sir William Stapleton Baronet on his Plantation in Nevis. Taken by David Stalker hither the 13 Day of July 1736, Nevis, Stapleton MSS., 8/3, List of Negroes and their value, with survey of Sugar Cane, Cattle Land, Building and Tools of Main Swete Deceased, Antigua, 1739, Swete Papers, 388M/E3.

¹² Stapleton MSS. 8/3, passim. On the ambiguities of the meaning of "mina," see Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Links*, 122-123.

suggesting they arrived via the slave forts that dot the coast of present-day Benin and Togo.

Scholars have debated what these names mean—whether they were imposed categories invented out of European discourses about West African places or whether they were self-referential terms that enslaved folk used as specific ethnic identifiers. In all likelihood, elements of both contributed to naming patterns. In some cases white managers referred to enslaved persons in terms that they gave meaning to, while in other cases slaves self-identified using terms they believed had a particular meaning. Whether these meanings were the same is debatable.

What is notable, however, is that rarely do slave names appear in the record that refer to specific, narrowly defined places. This is particularly surprising given that on both sides of the Atlantic during the slave trade, many Africans revered places where kin were born or buried.¹³ Instead, names like Mina and Papa referred to groups of people who shared a perceived or experienced common past, most likely broadly imagined in relation to language, practice, and notions of lineage. Although scholars dispute what these terms meant to enslaved folk and whether they were operative categories in West Africa, it is nonetheless true that they were distinct from the geographic categories used by European slave traders, such as Gold Coast and Slave Coast. I will discuss this matter more in later chapters, but for now it is worth noting that these categories had implicit meanings that were fashioned and refashioned within the context of diasporic movement. Moreover, they existed extra-locally, beyond the immediate plantation, in the towns, mountains, and other nearby islands as well—they were meanings that were familiar to

¹³ Mullin, *Africa in America*, 63-64, 73, 137.

enslaved folk in different islands and even different colonies. These parallel naming patterns reveal through practice the ways in which the making of the British Empire and the black Diaspora were entangled processes of extra-local identity formation.

The internal slave trade and the Atlantic slave trade were entangled with the local interisland slave trade. For-and-aft rigged sloops served as the primary means of moving men, women, and children between the islands. Under cover of night, Dutch traders from St. Eustatius traded slaves for sugar to the British colonies using sloops.¹⁴ The practice was long established in the region, so much so that “statia” was a colloquial expression for contraband.¹⁵ In addition to the contraband trade with Dutch sellers, a local interisland trade also shuffled men, women, and children between the islands. During the heyday of the Royal African Company in the 1670s, colonists in Antigua complained that they had to send sloops to Nevis to have fair access to new shipments of human cargo, but in the eighteenth century, the circuits reversed. By the 1720s, more slave ships were headed to St. Kitts and Antigua where the sugar regime was in full blossom, and managers in Nevis and Montserrat frequently had to rely on colleagues and attorneys in those islands to supply their plantations with new slaves.

Decisions to purchase men and women from the interisland slave trade were made abroad but negotiated locally. After a famine killed several of the men and women working on Jennings and Balls Range in 1730, William Stapleton sent word to family attorneys in St. Kitts and Nevis to obtain replacements. Several months later, his attorney Charles Pym secured eleven “Gold Coast” slaves for Jennings and Balls Range at market in Basseterre in St. Kitts and sailed them on John Woodley’s sloop across the channel

¹⁴ Dutch merchants refused to accept bills of exchange. Answers to the Queries from the Board of Trade, July 10, 1724, CO 152/14/R101/6.

¹⁵ Higham, *Development of the Leeward Islands*, 37.

separating the two islands. His agents Timothy Tyrrell and Joseph Symonds purchased six others (three men and three women) from the Gold Coast for the plantation directly in Charlestown, Nevis.¹⁶ Most were assigned new names at Jennings and Balls Range: listed as “New Men” and “New Women” in a 1731 inventory, the manager Joseph Herbert recorded the men as Priam, Cato, Pompey, Bray, Will, Gabriel, Micky, Daniel, Sharlo, and Toney, while the women were named Dorinda, Nano, Diana, Bawdoo, Celia, and Violet.¹⁷ While giving newly arrived slaves names was meant to erase their sense of independence and selfhood, some enslaved men and women rejected these efforts and continued insisted they be called by more ethnically specific names. Andrew, a young boy of 12, was known among his peers by his Akan name Quash. An older man recorded as “Africa” by managers in 1724, 1725, and 1726, went by the “alias” Donsoo in 1733.¹⁸

Reclaiming West African names were cyclical episodes of infrapolitics, moments of conscious dissent that created a steady current of alternative consciousness in the islands.¹⁹ In addition to taking on names that affirmed their diasporic past, the broader slave community also developed rituals that were used to signify to newly arrived Africans their introduction to plantation life and “whitefolk’s captivity.”²⁰ William

¹⁶ Joseph Herbert to Sir William Stapleton, Nevis, January 30, February 18, and May 15, 1731, Stapleton MSS. 5/5; Charles Pym to Sir William, St. Kitts, February 28, 1731, Stapleton MSS. 6/9. The Voyages database does not have any record for a slave ship arriving in Nevis between the years of 1729 and 1732.

¹⁷ A List of Negroes belonging to the Estate of the Honourable Sir William Stapleton Baronet taken May 17, 1731, Nevis, Stapleton MSS. 8/3.

¹⁸ List of Negroes belonging to Sir William Stapleton, September 14, 1733, Nevis, Stapleton MSS. 8/3.

¹⁹ The work of Robin Kelley and James Scott has influenced my thinking on the issue of infrapolitics. See Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994), and James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

²⁰ I use the term “whitefolk’s captivity” because the vast majority of men, women, and children who arrived in the New World would experience forms of forced labor and abuse that were not part of established practice in African forms of kin-based slavery in the seventeenth and eighteenth slavery. I borrow the term from Richard Price, *First-Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People*, Johns Hopkins Studies in Atlantic History and Culture. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

Smith, an Anglican rector and member of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, noted in his *Natural History of Nevis* how men and women already slaving on the island embraced those who experienced the terror of arriving to the shores of the Leewards in chains. Sometimes when new people arrived, black residents would “with a small comb, curl one another’s hair into inimitable knots, like Roses” and other unique shapes, “giving an addition to their beauty” with a skill that exceeded the best “*English Barber*.”²¹ In part, the ritual was meant to doctor slaves for sale and to make them look healthier to potential buyers, but it also marked a moment of ritual rebirth in the islands. Full of ambiguous meanings, the ritual of local slaves braiding the hair of newcomers signaled both the binding of Africans to European modes of slavery and the weaving together of Creole and African people in the Leewards.

Other naming patterns involving notions of place and movement existed in the islands. In addition to names like Little Hanna and Cuffy Mina, enslaved folk who lived in the British Leewards also were known by more locally derived names. These names reflect more precisely the interisland slave trade and overlapping networks of association that connected people living in the islands. One of the most notorious slaves in St. Kitts in the 1722 was a man known by both his Akan name as well as his local Leeward name—Antego Quamina. According to a law passed by the St. Kitts government that year, Antego Quamina was one of several leaders of an “armed band” of runaways who had taken to the mountains where they had been hiding for a “long while.”²²

²¹ Smith, *Natural History of Nevis*, 225.

²² Antego was a common spelling for Antigua. “An Act for Attainting several Negroes therein Mentioned; and for the more effectual preventing Negroes from Running Away from their Master’s Service; and for explaining and rendering more effectual an Act entitled, An Act for the Better Government of Negroes, and other Slaves,” 1722, *Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of St. Christopher*, 69, 70.

Why was a man known as Antego in St. Kitts leading a maroon group in the mountains of the island? The law states that Antego Quamina's owner was Marmaduke Bachelier. By tracing Bachelier's name in the letters sent from the local legislators to the Board of Trade, it is possible to outline why a maroon leader in St. Kitts would be known as Antego. Bachelier's name appears on a signed letter with several other "Merchants, Traders, Planters, and Inhabitants of Antigua" to the Council there praising Governor-General Walter Hamilton in June of 1718, soon after the Peace of Utrecht was reached.²³ Like so many residents both in the islands and elsewhere, Bachelier was eager to get his hands on some of the famous "French Lands" in St. Kitts that had recently been relinquished by the Crown of France at Utrecht. He did so by marrying a widow of prominent landowning family, Mary Willet, who had obtained more than 100 acres in Capisterre Quarter from the Governor-General after her husband's death. As was frequently the case for plantation owners and managers in the Leewards, Bachelier brought Quamina with him to St. Kitts to help start his sugar plantation on the new lands in Capisterre. Bachelier's opportunities quickly deteriorated and his efforts to start a new plantation caused him to take on insurmountable debts. He fled to nearby Dutch St. Eustatius to escape his responsibilities, leaving Antego Quamina behind. Shortly after his master's departure, Antego Quamina took to the hills in search of an alternative way of life. He became a bandit and led a small group of other maroons who had fled other plantations in the island.²⁴

²³ Merchants, Traders, Planters and Inhabitants of Antigua to the Council of Trade and Plantations, Received June 12, 1718, CO 152/12/90-91. As discussed in the first half of this study, St. Kitts was divided by the French and British in 1624 and remained so until 1714.

²⁴ Bachelier's debts are the reason it is possible to trace his movement in the Leewards; he eventually returned to St. Kitts in 1724 and sold his 100 acre estate for a mere £500 to recover his losses. See Memorial of John Burnett of the Island of St. Christophers and The Humble Petition of Jeremiah Browne

It was a common practice for enslaved folk to refer to each other by the names of islands from where they had previously labored. A 1706 inventory for slaves owned by Lady Frances and Dame Anne Stapleton of Nevis as owning three slaves known by Antego—Paro, Tom, and Nanny. Some enslaved folk had been sold northward to Nevis from as far south as Barbados. Prior to the French invasion of Nevis in 1706, Barbados Nanny and Barbados Joan labored alongside Antego Paro and Antego Tom in Nevis.²⁵ The inventory valued Nanny and Joan at £50, well above the average price for a newly arrived African woman in 1706. This suggests that slave buyers may have viewed slaves traded between the islands as having skills or abilities that were worth a premium price. Although “saltwater slaves” were also sold between the islands in the late seventeenth century and eighteenth century, it is very likely that many of the slaves who bore island names had already been acculturated to the severe work regime of the Leewards and developed the skills to be able to negotiate in the local creole.²⁶

Although men, women, and children were transshipped between the islands, it is not accurate to suggest that they were shuffled about in an open, free-market, where purchase was open to the highest bidder. Sometimes this was the case, especially when ships were captured for illicit trading and the Admiralty put the prize “goods” up for sale.²⁷ Instead, many slaves were gifted and bequeathed as well as bought and sold

of the Island of St. Christophers, n.d., received at Whitehall November 19, 1724, enclosed in CO 152/14/R109.

²⁵ Account of the Losses sustained by the Lady Ann & Lady Francis Stapleton in the Parish of St. John’s & St. Paul’s by the Late Invasion of the French, n.d., Stapleton MSS., 6/13

²⁶ The earliest text documenting spoken creole was published in St. Eustatius, but was written about St. Kitts. Samuel A. Mathews, *The Lying Hero* (St. Eustatius: 1793). For a summary of the unique characteristics of St. Kitts creole as compared to other British West Indian creoles, see Peter A. Roberts, *West Indians & Their Languages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 99-104.

²⁷ After the French schooner the *Prosperity* was seized in 1736, the Deputy Court Marshall of the Admiralty and the Montserrat Assembly agreed to auction a group of six “New Negroes” taken from a French “cargo.” Minutes of the Montserrat Assembly, October 19, 1736, CO 177/2/8-9.

between family members and friends. This was especially true for slaves like Nanny, Paro, and Frank who labored on plantations owned by the most well connected elite families in the Leewards. As was the case in other British colonies, elites and aspiring members of the colonial gentry gained power not only by securing land and labor, but also by incorporating themselves into social networks that could enable them to access cheaper credit, better ships, and safer contracts. Since enslaved folk were one of the most valuable pieces of elite property, the interisland slave trade was key to sustaining these networks in the islands.²⁸ This trade, however, had the parallel effect of extending the social networks of enslaved folk who labored in the constellation of islands that made up the Leeward archipelago.

Frank's Leeward Islands

In order to understand Frank, it is necessary to outline briefly some of the different family and island connections that helped make Jennings and Balls Range in Nevis one of the most important plantations on the island. The plantation was one of several controlled by one of the wealthiest and most connected families in the eastern Caribbean—the Stapletons. Governor-General William Stapleton acquired the estate from Major Charles Pym in 1678; it was one of *at least* four that he would own in each of the largest of the Leeward Islands by 1680.²⁹ He improved his family connections by

²⁸ Absentee Clement Tudway wrote from London to Edward Byam and Otto Bayer in Antigua in hopes to buy slaves from them. See Tudway to Thomas Grigg, London, February 28, 1718, Tudway Letterbook, DD/TD/15 and Tudway to Thomas Fenton, London, February 28, 1718, Tudway Letterbook, DD/TD/15.

²⁹ Keith Mason, "The World an Absentee Planter and His Slaves Made: Sir William Stapleton and His Nevis Sugar Estate, 1722-1740," *Bulletin of John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 75 (1993), Edwin F. Gay, "Letters from a Sugar Planter in Nevis, 1723-1732," *Journal of Economic and Business History* 1 (1928). I say at least because Stapleton seems to have purposely kept the Lords of Trade of learning about some of his land deals. See Akenson's cheeky description of how William Stapleton acquired his estates in the islands and did not report his landholding in his own 1678 census, Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World*, 98-99.

marrying into one of the wealthiest families in the region. In 1671, the Governor-General wed Anne Russell, a member of a gentry family that possessed land in the Leewards since the era of Thomas Warner. Their son married his first cousin, Frances Russell, to keep the wealth in the family. Frances was co-heir to *five* plantations in Nevis, all in St. James Parish—Pot Works, River, Fitzjames, Hog Valley, and Russell’s Rest.³⁰ Frances added to her family’s fortune by remarrying Walter Hamilton, Governor-General of the Leewards and St. Kitts landowner in 1711, who left his entire St. Kitts Fountain plantation and his enslaved laborers to his wife in 1724.³¹

By the year Hamilton died, the Russell-Stapleton network had amassed plantations and slaves in each of the four largest colonies in the Leeward Islands. The family owned at least three plantations in Nevis (Jennings and Balls Range (500+ acres), Russell’s Rest (507 acres), and the River Plantation (287 acres), one in Montserrat (Waterwork, perhaps the largest on the island at 573 acres in St. Peter’s Parish), two in St. Kitts (Fountain of 333 acres and one in Cayon Parish), as well as two plantations in Antigua (called Carleton, purchased in 1682 and totaling 1,025 acres).³² William gained complete ownership of Jennings and Balls Range following the death of his grandmother

³⁰ Johnston, “The Stapleton Sugar Plantations in the Leeward Islands,” 181.

³¹ Will of Walter Hamilton of the Island of St. Christophers, February 22, 1723, PROB 11/589. Fountain was the former plantation of Longvillier de Poincy when he ruled the French sectors of St. Kitts for the Knights of Malta, *Ibid.*: 183.

³² Miles Stapleton inherited the Carleton plantation in Antigua. Records for that property have not yet been uncovered. Will of Sir William Stapleton of the Island of Nevis, signed and delivered in Nevis, December 6, 1699, PROB 11/459, Will of Walter Hamilton of the Island of St. Christophers, proven February 22, 1723, PROB 11/589. Although compiled as a romantic history of the gentry, Vere Langford Oliver’s compiled genealogical record of elite Antiguans is useful in tracking interisland plantation networks. On the Stapleton family, see Oliver, *History of the Island of Antigua*, I:102-103. Johnston, “The Stapleton Sugar Plantations in the Leeward Islands,” 178-179. The Stapleton-Russells were not unique. There was an extended kin network that linked other plantations across the islands together as well; the Martins, Madans, Symonds, and the Tyrrells also had family connections to the Hamiltons, Russells, and the Stapletons.

in 1722; this is perhaps why Frank was known as “Mylady’s Frank,” since Frances, wife of Walter Hamilton, controlled the estate where Frank slaved until William came of age.

Frank may have never met young William before the 1720s. Following the Anglo-French conflicts of the 1690s, Anne and Frances abandoned the Leewards to become absentees. Frances took William with her. It is not clear whether the Nevis-born Stapleton ever returned to the isle of his birth; William was schooled in Europe and became M.P. for Oxfordshire in 1727. Frances did return to Nevis briefly after the Peace of Utrecht in 1713. Yet like so many elite families in the Caribbean, the Stapletons and Russells used local managers to impose efficiency on their plantations in the Leewards while they lived off the wealth produced by slaves on their private manors in England.³³ In turn, enslaved folk owned who labored on their plantations had to learn to negotiate with managers instead of their legal masters.

Plantation managers tended to be island-born men who lived in the big house as if it was their own. In some cases, however, the Stapletons enlisted managers who owned nearby plantations so that they could oversee their friend’s property when a resident manager was not available. Sometimes these managers sold enslaved men and women to the Stapletons, and in other cases, probably had sexual relationships with enslaved

³³ Several studies have touched on “absentee planters” sometimes called “absentee landlords,” but mostly on their economic motives and business connections. Few if any studies have explored in depth what it meant for people of African descent to labor for someone who they rarely if ever met on the plantation, or how absenteeism related to “master-slave relations” on the plantation. Most studies discuss absenteeism as a problem leading to slave dissent because of the lack resident white families, although one could deduce that even if every plantation had a white family present, enslaved folk would still far outnumber whites in most of the sugar producing islands. Gaspar, *Bondmen & Rebels*, 88,99, 218-219, Lowell J. Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763-1833: A Study in Social and Economic History* (New York: Octagon Books, 1963), Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, 385-387, Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World*, 156-157, Eric Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery, with a New Introduction by Colin Palmer* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 85-95. See also Gaspar, “A Dangerous Spirit of Liberty: Slave Rebellion in the West Indies During the 1730’s,” 15-19. The most important study of the relationship between absenteeism and slave resistance has been Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development, and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica*, particularly 38-45.

women owned by the Stapleton family. Several male slaves listed in the plantation inventories for the Stapleton estates in Nevis bore the names of Stapleton kin or friends.³⁴ A young boy who lived in Nevis in 1725 was named Richard Broadbelt, a name familiar to Nevisians. A member of another longstanding Leeward family with land in multiple islands, Cary Broadbelt lived on Jennings and Balls Range in 1721, but it is not clear whether he was Richard's father.³⁵ A 1725 inventory for Jennings and Balls Range lists one young boy named Timothy Tyrrell. On later lists he is simply noted as Tim, and in 1733 the manager described him as a "clever" 18 year-old boy.³⁶ Timothy Tyrrell was also the name of a Stapleton cousin and attorney who frequently visited Jennings and Balls Range in the 1720s. Members of his family also owned large plantations in southeast Antigua. Timothy, however, split his time between Nevis and St. Kitts. Like the enslaved boy named Richard Broadbelt and the elite plantation owner Richard Broadbelt, it is likely that the child named Tim Tyrrell was the son of the man who frequented Jennings and Balls Range. Whether he was born on the Stapleton plantation or was brought there by the slaveowner Tyrrell is unclear from the record. The last time enslaved Tim's name appears in the inventories is in 1736, when a plague of insects and massive droughts were causing widespread hunger and frustration throughout the archipelago. The manager David Stalker noted that Tim, who was probably 18 years old

³⁴ In 1724, a slave named Stapleton was noted in an inventory sent back to London; he was listed as 30 years old in 1733. Another man was known as Cuffee William, perhaps named after one of the William Stapletons, and a boy listed on inventories for 1733 and 1750 was named Russell.

³⁵ Timothy Tyrrell to Sir William Stapleton, Nevis, June 18, 1722, Stapleton MSS. 6/11.

³⁶ Some of the inventories that Tim's name appears on are: List of Negroes and Cattle, 1725, A List of Negroes Horses and Cattle, 1726, A List of Negroes Belonging to Sir William Stapleton's Estate, September 18, 1728, (he is listed as 10 years old), A List of Negroes belonging to the Estate of the honourable Sir William Stapleton Baronet taken May 17, 1731, A List of Negroes belonging to the Estate of Sir William Stapleton in Nevis taken this 30 of August 1732, and List of Negroes belonging to Sir William Stapleton, September 14, 1733, all written in Nevis and available in Box 8/3 of the Stapleton MSS. On A List of Negroes, 1734, he is listed as 16. He is also named on A List of Negroes Belonging to the Lady Stapleton and Sir William, n.d., probably 1724, also contained in Stapleton MSS., 8/3.

at the time, had been “killed by Mr. William Clark’s Negro’s” who found him in their “cassava piece of ground,” probably foraging for food.³⁷

It is unclear why names like “Tim Tyrrell” were used on the plantation: was it a way for enslaved parents to appeal to their master’s patriarchal ideology, or was it because they were actually the children of slaveowners and enslaved mothers? Did these naming patterns derive from both circumstances? These are important questions that can only be answered with sources that are broader in scope and cover a longer timeline of interest than the 1720s and 1730s in the Leewards. The names are nonetheless suggestive of these motivations for naming enslaved children after white Creoles and Britain-born white elites.

However, these names also suggest the role movement played in creating the cultural life on Jennings and Balls Range and elsewhere. As slaves moved from plantation to plantation, they brought with them stories and news from other plantations and other islands, ideas about power and powerlessness, notions about work and the sacred. Just as memories and experience linked people of African descent to homelands across the Atlantic, internal circuits of movement within the Leewards created overlapping diasporic mentalities that linked enslaved folk across the waterways separating the islands.

Many of the men, women and children who labored in Nevis on the Stapleton plantation had come to the island after slaving in Montserrat. Coromantee Maria, Billy Huggins, and Betty Montserrat had all come to Nevis after laboring at the Waterwork Plantation in St. Anthony’s Parish, near Plymouth, the major port of that island.

³⁷ A List of all the Negro’s Horse and Horned Cattle now being on Sir William Stapleton, his Plantation in the Island of Nevis, Taken by David Stalker Nevis, June 20, 1737, Stapleton MSS., 8/3.

Waterwork was the oldest plantation in the Leewards belonging to the Stapletons, but by the 1720s, William had decided to rent the land and the slaves who worked the plantation.³⁸ Renting the plantation did not sever it from Nevis, however. When Jennings and Balls Range needed more laborers, Stapleton requested some be sent from Montserrat.³⁹ William's mother made similar requests when she oversaw plantation affairs from abroad. A list compiled in 1706 notes a woman owned by Dame Anne and Lady Frances named Catarina Montserrat, valued at £35. Another name from the so-called "Irish colony" appears on the list: Frank Montserrat, listed as a boy valued at £20.⁴⁰

Was "Frank Montserrat" the boyhood name for "Daddy Frank?" Frank was a common name in the islands for men and women, boys and girls. Yet by comparing the list of 1706 with those compiled in the 1720s, the evidence is persuasive that they were the same person. It is important to note that the 1706 list is somewhat different from the plantation inventories of later years. Created after the French invasion of Nevis and St. Kitts in 1706, attorney compiled the list so that Frances and Anne could obtain recompense from Parliament.⁴¹ Since the French landed on the leeward side of the island

³⁸ Copy of Sir William Stapleton's Letter to Attorney Mr. Fenton, 1726, Stapleton MSS. 5/1, James Milliken to Sir William Stapleton, St. Kitts, June 28, 1726, Stapleton MSS. 5/8.

³⁹ A List of Negro's from Montserrat to Nevis, n.d., probably 1727, Stapleton MSS. 8/3.

⁴⁰ Account of the Losses Sustained by the Lady Ann & Lady Frances Stapleton in the Parish of St. Johns & St. Pauls by the late Invasion of the French, n.d., Stapleton MSS. 6/13.

⁴¹ Following the attacks, residents drafted claims of all of their goods, cattle, and slaves lost taken or destroyed by the French. They were later sent to the Council of Trade and Plantation to review. In 1711, Parliament paid 669 claimants a total of £103,000.11s.3p, about 1/5 of what they asked for. Although roughly the same number of people filed claims from both islands, Nevisians received nearly three times as much compensation, or £75,000. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 137. The Nevis claims are missing from the National Archives at Kew, but the list in the Stapleton Manuscripts at the John Rylands Library at the University of Manchester outlines what Frances and Anne claimed they lost during the invasion. As discussed in Chapter III, English colonists and French officials stated that some 3,187 enslaved folk had been taken during the siege. More than a thousand fled to the upper slopes of Mt. Nevis and kept the French at bay. Irked by his inability to bring them in, the French Commander D'Iberville forced Nevisian

and moved north to Charles Town, Jennings and Balls Range was particularly hard hit. The Stapletons lost sugar works, boiling and curing houses, and more than 70 acres of ripe cane. Some sources suggest that 147 of 183 slaves from the plantation were taken to Martinique or provided to the flibustiers that aided the French commander of the invasion.⁴² Russell's Rest, Frances Stapleton's plantation on the windward side in St. James Parish, only lost six slaves to French forces. The rest fled to the mountains and survived for months by killing cattle that were roaming the ruins of the once flourishing island.⁴³

The truthfulness of the list is questionable. There are several names of slaves on the list of 1706 that appear on lists compiled eighteen and nineteen years later.⁴⁴ Frank's name is one of them. Figuring this fact out from the plantation inventories requires some attention to detail and a bit of cross-referencing, but the evidence suggests that not all of the names listed on the 1706 were men, women, and children who were truly stolen by the French. In fact, many of the enslaved folk may have been rebels who remained in the hills after the French departed the island.

Although ages are not given on the 1706 list, the men, women, and children are assigned values. Since managers valued slaves on these lists according to productivity, higher values correlate roughly with age and health. Many of these were listed as boys

officers to agree to send 1,400 of the remaining slaves or £42,000 by October 4, 1706. Valuable details of the attack can be found in the packet of documents labeled Colonel Abbott to the Council of Trade Plantations, June 3, 1706, CO 152/6 and in CO 184/1.

⁴² Johnston notes that Jennings and Balls Range measured 600 acres and was worked by 183 men, women, and children in 1700, see Johnston, "The Stapleton Sugar Plantations in the Leeward Islands," 182. Mason states that the mansion-house was destroyed, but it is not listed on the claim. Mason, "World an Absentee Planter and His Slaves Made," 108. *Extrait des Negres provenant de La prise de Neive*, n.d., CO 184/1.

⁴³ Thomas Easom's Letter about the Invasion to Lady Frances, April 22, 1706, Stapleton MSS. 6/13.

⁴⁴ This may seem like a long period of time in the context of the harsh labor of plantation slavery. However, if the 1733 list and 1750 lists are compared, the lifespan of more than 35 individuals appears.

and girls in 1706 and as men and women in 1724 and 1725. While it is difficult to say for certain whether these were the same people because many of the names were commonly used, some stand out.

Twenty-eight names that appear on lists from the 1720s and 1730s appear on the 1706 list in a way that suggests they are the same individuals. For example, the name Abba appears on lists from 1706, 1724, 1725, 1726, and 1733. On the 1706 list, Abba is noted as a girl valued at £30—a high value for a child, which suggests she was neither an infant nor a toddler. On the lists of 1724, 1725, and 1726, Abba is listed as a “dutiable” or healthy “woman.” In 1733, she is listed as a “Good Slave” and estimated to be in her fifties. None of the women described as “new” or “from Montserrat” were given the name Abba. Hence, the name, value, and age description are correspond. Another example is Warner. On each of the lists only one slave named Warner appears—he is cited as a boy in 1706 and listed as a man in 1724, 1725, and 1726.

Perhaps the most interesting is the enslaved child named Billy on the 1706 petition. A boy named Billy is valued at £30 in 1706, a high value for a child—perhaps suggesting that he was in his teens when the French invaded Nevis. Three men named Billy are noted on later inventories. One is named Billy Huggins, but he is noted as coming from Montserrat after the French invasion. Another is a “dutiable” man but is otherwise not distinguished. The third was called Billy Cock. On the 1724 list, Cock is listed as “Billy French.” But it is the 1733 list that is most telling: next to Billy Cock’s name, the manager of Jennings and Balls Range noted that he had “been taken by the French but came back again.”⁴⁵

⁴⁵ List of Negroes belonging to Sir William Stapleton, September 14, 1733, Nevis, Stapleton MSS. 8/3. On slave escapes across imperial divides, see Chapter Three.

Why would the 1706 petition bear the names of so many enslaved folk who were working on Jennings and Balls Range decades later? There are several possible reasons. Some may have returned to the plantation from the mountains after the list was taken. Others, like Billy Cock, may have made their way back to Nevis after facing the pain and difficulty of laboring on a new plantation with men and women who spoke a French-inflected creole. Fraud, too, cannot be dismissed as a factor.⁴⁶

Before shifting to a discussion of internal networks and slave knowledge, it is important to conclude with one final note about how plantation inventories and the

⁴⁶ In 1707, the Board of Trade debated who would be responsible for overseeing the losses to slaveowners in St. Kitts and Nevis. They relied on the lobbying efforts of the agents for Nevis and St. Kitts, Joseph Jory and Stephen Duport, for advice and appointed sixteen commissioners.

All sixteen were members of the landed elite in the two islands; each island was to have its own commission comprised of eight members. In addition, members of the Board of Trade recommended to Charles Spencer, the Secretary of State of the Southern Department, that several “disinterested persons in the said losses” be appointed to help oversee the process since the commissioners “may be thought too much biased in their own behalf.” After consulting with Joseph Jory and Duport again, the Secretary of State and Board agreed that these “disinterested” individuals should come from Montserrat and Antigua. The men from the other two Leewards were *not* tasked with running the commissions. Instead, they were simply appointed to examine, upon oath, the losses of the other sixteen commissioners. Only two men from England were sent on behalf of the Board of Trade, and they served as secretaries. Jolt and Duport were both from families that had wealth in the two islands. For a list of agents for the Leewards and a discussion of the work of agent more generally, see Lillian Margery Penson, *The Colonial Agents of the British West Indies: A Study in Colonial Administration, Mainly in the Eighteenth Century* (London: F. Cass, 1971), 251-253. The commissions for Nevis can be found at CO 184/1/Red31; for St. Kitts, CO 239/1/Red21. Report from the Committee concerning the Commissioners for Nevis, etc., July 10, 1707, CO 184/1. Christopher Rhodes was assigned Secretary to the Commission for Nevis; Nathaniel Estwick for St. Kitts. CO 184/1/Red31, CO 239/1/Red21.

The Stapletons were close associates with at least three of the eight Nevis commissioners: Daniel Smith, Thomas Butler, and Joseph Symonds. Butler and his son served as resident attorneys for the Anne, Frances, and later William, and the Symonds family was linked to the Stapletons through kin. Without a doubt, if the manager of Jennings and Balls Range wanted to falsify the list of slaves taken by the French, the Stapleton family had more than enough influence to guarantee that commissioners did not press him for the truth. More than eighty percent of the claim was for men, women, and children supposedly taken by the French commanders and privateers. The total losses claimed by Anne and Frances amounted to more £10,292 Nevisian, which in London currency amounted to £6,862.16s.8p. For comparison sake, that is the equivalent of about £1,000,000 in 2008. The conversion into London money appears on the last page of Account of Losses Sustained by Lady Ann & Frances Stapleton in the Parish of St. Johns & St. Pauls by the late Invasion of the French, marked STP/2/1/13/2/1, found in Stapleton MSS. 6/13. Parliament paid petitioners 1/3 of their claims in the form of 6% debentures. For conversion into 2008 values, see MeasuringWorth, a website created by two University of Illinois at Chicago Economics Professors. Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, “Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1830 to Present,” MeasuringWorth, <http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare> (October 20, 2009).

people they represented. As on so many large-scale sugar plantations in the Leewards, people who came from a wide variety of places on both sides of the Atlantic labored on Jennings and Balls Range. These places of origin were not quickly forgotten, and often times, were emphasized in naming conventions. Torn apart from their families, enslaved folk, whether African or island-born, placed emphasis on remembering where they had come from. Enslaved folk held these memories dear. They were more than just names. They also served as a source of vernacular history and knowledge about where enslaved folk had come from, whether it was places in West Africa or nearby islands. These memories and the names that signified them reinforced for men, women, and children that their identity was always informed by a broader history of forced detachment from places of their birth and movement, whether it was because of the interisland slave trade or the wider, more sweeping Atlantic one.

Managers and overseers knew that slaves possessed this knowledge and relied upon it when drafting their letters to be sent back to England for absentee plantation owners. The case of Charles Pym in 1735 is particularly telling. Pym resided in St. Kitts and acted as a local liaison for the Stapletons. In 1735, Frances asked Pym to survey the Fountain plantation she had inherited from Walter Hamilton. She also enlisted Pym to figure out which slaves were bought for or born on the plantation since he assumed authority over it in 1722. To compile the list, Pym asked enslaved men and women who had been laboring on the plantation since the death of Governor-General Stapleton. From memory, they identified five men and four women brought to the plantation several years later by James Milliken, Frances's agent in St. Kitts. Residents also rattled off the names of sixteen boys and twenty girls who were born at Fountain over the years, including

young Jack Ebo, Cuffy, Quashy, and Black Hamilton.⁴⁷ As in Nevis, enslaved folk in St. Kitts understood their world as a dynamic one that was deeply connected to both local islands and distant homelands. They gave their children names to embody these living memories.

Internal Movement and Slave Knowledge

Frank lived in a world where knowledge about the environment was central to both labor and community belonging. Knowledge about people from different islands was one source of information that enslaved folk learned about and developed a vocabulary for as they labored in the Leewards. Knowledge about where to go was another. Through a combination of leisure and labor, enslaved folk learned how to travel between different places within the islands and carved new spaces somewhat distant from their owner or manager's reach. While the cane fields were the dominant feature of the landscape, they were but one of many places in the islands where enslaved folk developed skills and techniques for managing the work regime and their master's authority. Learning how to negotiate the landscape meant figuring out how to tend to the cane, where to fetch water, where to hide, how to make it to the market, and when it was the right time to flee to the mountains. For slaves like Frank, this knowledge could be used to help with the management of the plantation as much as it could be turned against the master or manager.

Knowledge acquisition and dissemination by enslaved persons was a major contradiction in any slave society. By definition slaves were supposed to be laborers who were to do as they were told. For the aspiring master, slave knowledge was anathema to

⁴⁷ A List of Negroes bought and born since the year 1722 and are living in 1735, St. Kitts, December 31, 1735, Stapleton MSS. 8/3; Charles Pym to Sir William, St. Kitts, November 16, 1735, Stapleton MSS. 6/9.

discipline and order as it ran counter to rules of dependency and consent. However, the reality was that white slaveowners viewed slave knowledge with ambivalence and ambiguity. Some forms of knowledge were accepted and even rewarded, other elements feared and forbidden. Of the former, slaveowners viewed skills involving production techniques or commercial know-how as the most valuable, whereas of the latter, slave literacy in their master's language was most widely prohibited and feared. Ultimately, the practice of allowing enslaved folk to take on social roles outside of the cane fields produced a contradiction in most slave societies. The more men and women engaged in skills like sewing, cooking, coopering, and carting, the more frequently they encountered their master's economy of paper and books like the Bible. This contradiction was most objectified in the form of the "ticket"—the written note that "privileged" slaves were expected to carry with them when they traveled off the plantation, presumably to do their master's work for him or her.

Yet even field laborers possessed knowledge about life outside of the cane fields. Plantations were porous places in the Leewards. Unlike in England, colonists in the islands typically did not use rock mounds, fences, walls, or build any other kind of crafted barrier to clearly demarcate property boundaries. Instead, cane fields and common paths usually demarcated boundary lines between plantations.⁴⁸ Properties were thus inevitably linked together even though their owners viewed them as bounded places. Just because a man or woman spent much of their time in the field did not mean that they were isolated from other plantations.

⁴⁸ Natural boundaries were far more important than man-made boundaries in the Leewards from the onset of colonization through the 1730s. When a surveyor mapped out Jennings and Balls Range in 1735, he relied on the "bounds that were always said to be" William Stapleton's. See Charles Pym to Sir William Stapleton, September 5, 1735, Stapleton MSS. 6/9. Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 21-26.

In fact, enslaved folk were integral to maintaining the island infrastructure in all of the islands, and as such, learned a great deal about how the parish roads connected the plantations together. In each of the largest Leewards, governments required that residents send slaves from the plantations to tend to these common paths and “highways” as export season picked up steam.⁴⁹ In Antigua, slaveowners were obligated to send 1/3 of their workforce to tend to the highways, and they were supposed to be the “the best and ablest workers” of the plantation.⁵⁰ Rain could be particularly destructive to the common roads, and when it was, local governments forced slaveowners to divert labor away from the fields to repair them. In Nevis in 1709, the Assembly and Council agreed that parish residents throughout the island should be prepared to send as many as 2/3 of their entire workforce to fix the decaying roadways.⁵¹

Knowledge gleaned from tending to the common paths and highways of the island was interwoven with the visual world available to many of the men, women, and children who labored in the Leewards. Slaves laboring at places like Bath Plain, Jennings and Balls Range, and Russell’s Rest had a clear view of other plantations, nearby towns, and other islands and empires. Sloping hills created stunning vistas of Atlantic modernity for island residents. The natural landscape in Nevis, St. Kitts, and Montserrat meant that

⁴⁹ For examples in St. Kitts see “An Act for Repairing Her Majesty’s Highways,” no. 14, 1711, and “An Act for the More Effectual Cleaning and Amending the Highways in this Island,” no. 11, 1740, in *Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of St. Christopher*, 173.

⁵⁰ “An Act for cleaning and amending the Highways in this Island and to Repeal an Act for cleaning and enlarging Common Paths and Highways within this Island,” no. 180, 1724, in *Acts of the Assembly Passed in the Charibee Leeward Islands, from 1690 to 1730*, (London: Printed, by Order of the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, by John Baskett, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1734), 224.

⁵¹ “An Additional Clause to the Act, entitled, An Act for the more easy Repairing the Highways,” no. 66, 1709, in *Acts of the Assembly Passed in the Island of Nevis, from 1664 to 1739, Inclusive*, (London: Printed, by Order of the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, by John Baskett, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1740), 61.

many of the enslaved folk and white managers who lived on the plantations could never truly feel cut off from the rest of the island, or even the archipelago.

Frank and his kin at the Stapleton plantation in St. John Figtree Parish probably had a view of the Caribbean that was very similar to the one slaves at Bath Plain could see from their houses.⁵² William Smith, who served St. Johns Parish as rector for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) from 1716 to 1721, recalled the view from the plantation in his *Natural History of Nevis*. Enslaved folk like Frank could look at Charles Fort and Charlestown to north, less than a mile away, and look up the mountain slopes, which hung over the sugar plantations below. Across the saltwater channel separating the Nevis from St. Kitts, slaves could see Mt. Misery erupting out of the water and see the marshy salt ponds. Residents could even see Dutch St. Eustatius and Saba in the distance. During moments of respite, folks could watch as ships from Europe and the “Northern Colonies” sailed between Charlestown and Basseterre in the distance, see the island sloops crisscrossing the waterways below, and gaze over the harbors as black and white sailors prepared rigs bound for St. Croix, St. Thomas, and Jamaica.⁵³

Enslaved folk in the Leewards not only learned about crisscrossing ships and competing empires by witnessing them from the cane fields, but also by word of mouth. Young men and boys who served as waiters and porters were some of the most knowledgeable about the different roads, paths, and networks in the islands. They were expected to accompany managers and owners everywhere they traveled—within the bounds of the plantation, to town, and to different islands. White colonists in the islands

⁵² It is possible that the Stapleton family owned the estate William Smith called Bath Plain—one of the estates listed as belonging to Governor-General William Stapleton in 1682 was “Bath Hill.” Johnston, “The Stapleton Sugar Plantations in the Leeward Islands,” 179.

⁵³ Smith, *Natural History of Nevis*, 88.

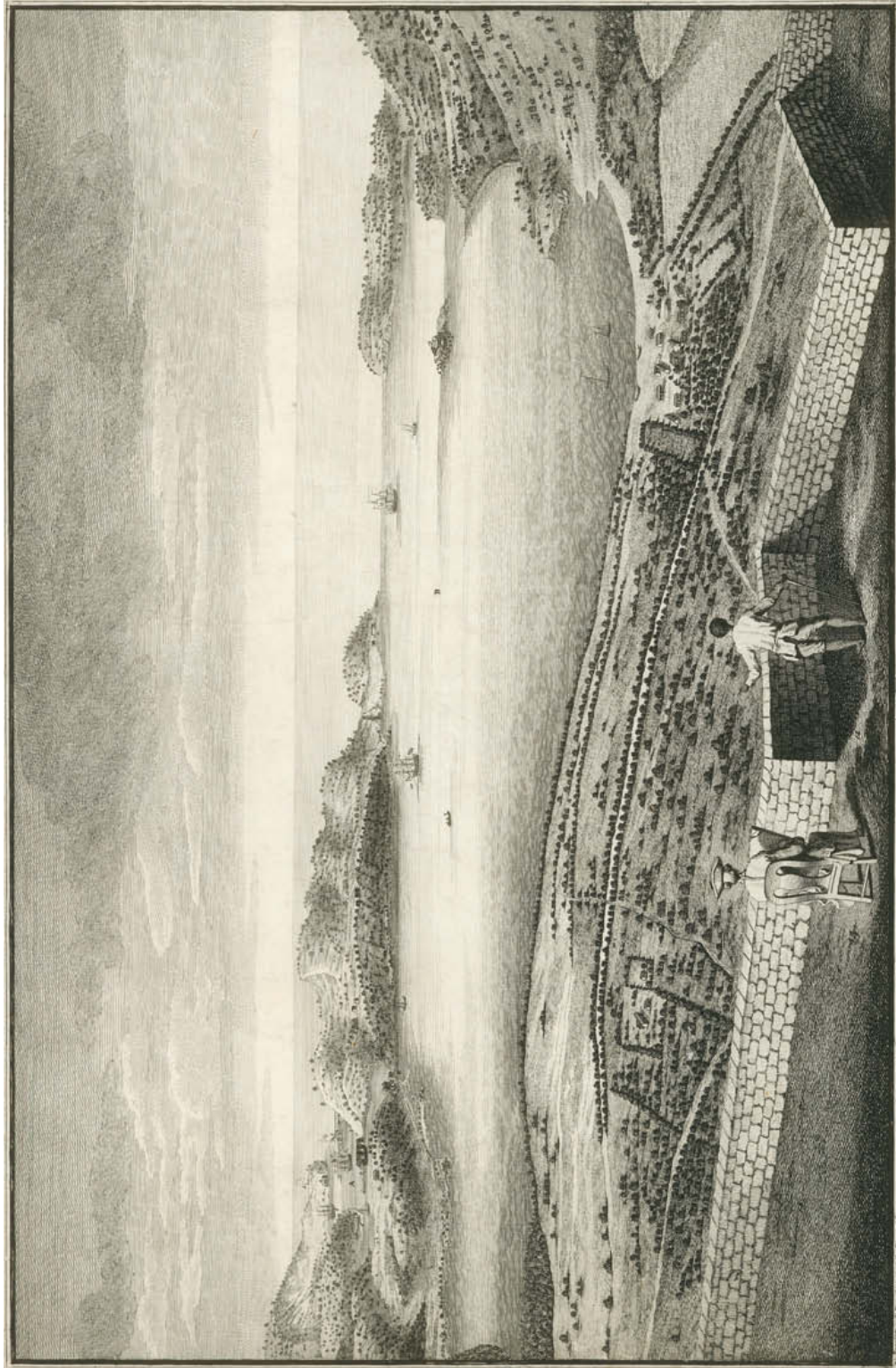


Figure 7:

**“A General View of the English Falmouth Harbour,” Antigua, by William Brasier, 1757.
Source: The John Carter Brown Library**

A man of African descent is pointing to the east of the island as an English surveyor draws.

remarked that porters and waiters developed keen memories about space and time from their frequent travels between the countryside and port towns. During his stay on St. Thomas, the Moravian missionary C.G.A. Oldendorp learned that black waiters from the plantations were typically “entrusted with fifty to sixty errands by ten different people” and “sent to town with the money for the purchase of a variety of items.” Skillful waiters were able to “order everything punctually, and then give everyone a proper accounting of his money without being off as much as a penny.”⁵⁴

Young children were sought out by merchants and managers to serve as “waiting boys.” On Jennings and Balls Range, Joseph Herbert always had a young boy by his side whose sole responsibility was to “run” with the manager as he traveled about.⁵⁵ Enslaved folk, too, relied on younger boys’ knowledge of the island paths and roads, and sent them to fetch supplies and news from acquaintances from the town and other plantations. Young apprentices to black coopers and carpenters were particularly helpful during busy times and kept artisans in touch with each other during the day.⁵⁶ In moments of crisis, enslaved folk relied upon young people familiar with the roads and paths to pass news across the island. When an elder slave named Court learned that he was going to be executed in St. John for his alleged role in the Antigua Conspiracy in 1736, he was rumored to have sent a “boy on a white horse to Old Queen to tell her they were going to

⁵⁴ C. G. A. Oldendorp and Johann Jakob Bossart, *C.G.A. Oldendorp's History of the Mission of the Evangelical Brethren on the Caribbean Islands of St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John*, trans. Arnold R. Highfield and Vladimir Barac (Ann Arbor: Karoma, 1987), 248.

⁵⁵ A List of Negroes belonging to the Estate of the honourable Sir William Stapleton Baronet taken May 17, 1731, Nevis, Stapleton MSS. 8/3.

⁵⁶ Examination of Emanuel, a Portuguese Slave Belonging to Edward Gregory a Cooper in the Town of St. John's, October 15, 1736, Antigua, CO 9/10/50.

put him to death.”⁵⁷ The journey from St. John to Parham would have taken the young rider halfway across the island, through three parishes and between dozens of plantations as he carried the message to Court’s female confidante.

Porters also accompanied white elites when they journeyed between the islands for business or leisure. The practice was so common that French and English military leaders viewed it as proper etiquette to permit military losers to keep at least a few slaves to serve as porters and waiters. When the French and English governors drafted the terms of the temporary French withdrawal from St. Kitts in 1702, landowners were expected to leave their slaves behind as booty for Walter Hamilton and his men. However, the governor agreed to let French military elites leave with a specified number of enslaved men to carry their baggage for them: French troop captains were allotted six, lieutenants four, and ensigns two “baggage Negroes.”⁵⁸ When a French force led by D’Iberville invaded Nevis in 1706, he demanded that every slave on the island be turned over to the men of his fleet, but he permitted Colonel Richard Abbot to keep twelve slaves, the president of the island eight, the lieutenant two, the ensign one, the colonels of the Nevis militia two, and the Queen’s commissioner two. Leaving slaves behind for elites was not simply a sign of respect. Each side firmly believed it was simply impossible for gentleman to accomplish their imperial business without the aid of slaves to run their errands and deliver messages.

Not all waiters or porters served at the heel of their owner. Many were rented in port towns to help white elites arriving to the islands unload their personal items and

⁵⁷ Trial of Quawcoo an Old Cormantee Negroe of Mr. John Pares, December 9, 1736, Antigua, CO 9/10/85.

⁵⁸ Articles Proposed for the Capitulation of the French Part of St. Christophers Island between Monsieur De Gennes Governor of the aforesaid part for the French King and Walter Hamilton Major General of the Leeward Islands and of Her Brittanic Majesty's Troops In The Said Islands, St. Kitts, 1702, CO 239/1/Red3i.

transport them to their inland destination. This enabled other enslaved folk who arrived in town to take the identity of a porter and blend in with the bustle of black activity. The practice was so common in St. John, Antigua that legislators decided to develop a system that visibly distinguished porters from other men working in one of the busiest ports in the eastern Caribbean. A law passed in 1757 obligated “Negro Men Slaves” who served as porters in St. John to wear a lead badge around their neck stamped with the word “Porter.” Porters were also obligated to carry a ticket stipulating that their master had agreed to send them to town to be rented. Left to their own devices, enslaved porters and other men looking for quick cash sometimes set the prices for their hire. Apparently, some set the price rather high in an effort to shirk the work. The 1757 law stipulated that white colonists could take their complaints about slave porters to the Justices of the Peace free of charge, and moreover, that no slave could “refuse to work by the day or by the job” or charge “any exorbitant price for such labour.”⁵⁹

Enslaved men also served as guides for white visitors to the islands who wanted to explore. While serving as rector of St. John’s Parish in Nevis, William Smith hired a boat to nearby St. Kitts to visit a friend. While there, he decided to journey up to the top of the volcanic mountain of Mt. Misery. Aware that the sharp cliffs were known to hurry “fool-hardy” persons to “Phaeton’s destiny,” Smith and his colleagues hired six black “baggage negroes” with knowledge of the paths to lead them up the mountain side. They led the Reverend and his friend up to the summit of the mountain, taking them along a narrow rim of several hundred yards bordered on both sides by a “frightful precipice.” As the group turned to the north, the group witnessed the wide open sea of the Atlantic

⁵⁹ “An Act for the further Prevention of Damages to the Harbours, and Abuses Carrying on the Inland Trade, of this Island; regulating the Hire and Manumission of Slaves; and for advertising Runaways committed to Gaol,” no. 31, 1757, *Laws of the Leeward Islands*, clause 9, 119-120.

and French St. Barts in the distance. Turning to the south, Nevis and Montserrat came into view. The wind blew Smith's hat from his head, causing it to tumble down the cliffs and giving the aspiring naturalist a fright. One of the guides chased the cap down, a feat Smith was too afraid to do himself.⁶⁰

One fascinating aspect about Smith's encounters with enslaved folk in the Leewards is how he frequently and casually he notes that his ability to scientifically analyze the island environment hinged on the knowledge and labor of enslaved folk. Slaves—particularly his “man” Oxford—led him to the topics he wrote about in his *Natural History of Nevis*. During his time on the island, Oxford helped lead Smith to new sites and collect specimens while Smith stood by and watched. One collection Smith was particularly proud of was his colorful collection of shells, some of which he thought would nicely decorate English snuffboxes. Enslaved divers in Nevis had developed a special technique to gather the creatures in bulk. Smith described how they were collected by a “Negro man” who “goes in at one of our sandy bays up to his knees, where stooping down he fills a basket with sand from the bottom which basket he dips into the water, as till the sand being washed cleaned away leaves the cockles behind.”⁶¹ In another case, Smith's described a technique used by enslaved fisherman in Nevis that was far more efficient than the common hook-and-line technique. Slaves discovered that the root bark of the Dagwood tree could be used to “intoxicate” the fish and make them easier to catch along the shoreline. After venturing to secret locations in the forest to collect the bark, the divers returned to the coast and soaked it thoroughly with salt water. The men then squeezed the concoction until water inlets turned a reddish hue. After

⁶⁰ Smith, *Natural History of Nevis*, 37-41.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

about an hour, the fish would begin to swim to top in great numbers, enabling the men to deftly catch them bare handed.⁶²

Sacred Spaces

The technique of fishing by poisoning is suggestive of a different type of slave knowledge about the landscape, one rooted as well in knowledge about the spectral world of spirits and ancestors—that of the black “pharmacosm.”⁶³ Learning about island plants and fruits was not only a practice reserved for enlightened men like Smith, but also for both island-born and newly arrived Africans who needed to learn how to cure, heal, and harm in the New World. Brother Oldendorp of the Moravian mission in nearby St. Thomas noted later in the century that “among the islands’ inhabitants, the Negroes seem to have the most extensive knowledge about the healing power of these plants.” “Even European physicians do not hesitate to learn as much as they can from them,” he wrote, “and then make use of that knowledge,” sometimes in return for payment.⁶⁴

Enslaved folk sometimes traveled to different plantations to meet with skilled men and women with knowledge about sacred cures or poisons derived from the island fauna. When Oxford developed a nutmeg sized growth on the bottom of his foot, he visited an “an old experienced mulatto woman” who used limes grown in Nevis to cure it.⁶⁵ Although Oxford had to travel to have his foot treated, larger plantations in the Leewards frequently had resident slave “doctors” or “doctresses” who possessed specialized knowledge about local plants and animals and the powers they wielded. Male

⁶² Ibid., 3-4.

⁶³ Sharla M. Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations*, Gender & American Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 38-40.

⁶⁴ Oldendorp and Bossart, *History of the Mission*, 115.

⁶⁵ Smith, *Natural History of Nevis*, 232-233.

specialists worked at the Parham and Betty Hope plantations.⁶⁶ Inventories from 1737 for Main Swete's plantation list a woman called "Old Nanny" as "the doctress."⁶⁷ Elders may have been more likely to be respected for their skills as many slave doctors and doctresses are described as "old," but it is impossible to verify this hypothesis with any statistical veracity.

Plantation healers were not simply skilled in the medicinal uses of plants, but in the positive and negative powers that flora and fauna on the island could bring. In all likelihood, Africans and island-born Creoles in the islands probably did not make the distinction between obeah practitioners and healers. Several "Obi" or Obeah men were implicated in the Antigua Conspiracy of 1736, one of whom was "Coromantee Quawcoo" an "old Oby man" and "physition" who slaved at William Hunt's plantation on the eastern side of the island in St. Philips Parish.⁶⁸ No one on Jennings and Balls Range was described as a doctor, doctress, or Obeah practitioner, but one of the accounts sent to William by Joseph Herbert lists that he paid seven shillings to "one of yor Negroes for cureing another of a foul distemper" in 1725.⁶⁹

Obeah knowledge points to some of the hidden dimensions of slave life in the islands. What most slaveowners viewed as poisons or cures administered by a murderer or healer, many enslaved folk viewed as sources of otherworldly power harnessed by a

⁶⁶ The Parham plantation in Antigua had one doctor in 1737 for 202 slaves and two doctors in 1772 for 348 slaves. Betty's Hope, the Codrington plantation in the middle of Antigua, had one "doctor's man" serving 277 men, women, and children in 1751, see Gaspar, *Bondmen & Rebels*, 105-107.

⁶⁷ A List of Negroes on the late Mr. Swete's plantation in Antigua, November 29, 1737, Swete Papers, 388 M/E2 and List of Negroes and their Value, November 29, 1737, Swete Papers, 388 M/E3. She was valued at £20.

⁶⁸ Trial of Quawcoo, an Old Oby Man & Physition & Coromantee belonging to Mr. William Hunt, Antigua, December 11, 1736, CO 9/10/89.

⁶⁹ Joseph Herbert to William Stapleton, Nevis, September 21, 1733, Stapleton MSS. 5/5, Joseph Herbert to William Stapleton, Nevis, May 4, 1724, Stapleton MSS. 5/5; Mason, "World an Absentee Planter and His Slaves Made," 127.

skillful healer or diviner. Enslaved doctors and doctresses used material items from the colonial setting as vectors for harnessing the unseen powers that influenced social life on the islands. Items like rum, cock's blood, roots, bottles, and especially grave dirt were used to influence the world of the living with power derived from realm of the spirits. Unfortunately for historians, slaveowners, managers, Anglican missionaries, and government officials have left very little record of what Obeah (or other Leeward slave ideas about the supernatural) meant to enslaved folk in the early eighteenth century. No laws passed in the Leewards directly outlawed Obeah or any other form of "slave religion" in the eighteenth century Leewards, although stipulations preventing gatherings, feasting, "exuberant" funerals, selling rum to slaves, and other aspects of the "laws governing Negroes" certainly were intended to limit the space and materials available to practitioners. In part this was because colonists and European visitors saw very little merit in detailing aspects of Afrodiasporic culture until later in the century when Methodist and Moravian missionaries turned their attention to converting black folk in the islands.

Yet the lack of detail about slave cosmologies in the Leewards during the early eighteenth century was not simply a function of the unwillingness of white writers to document them, but also inability. The social power enslaved folk derived from the supernatural was in part powerful precisely because white folk were not meant to understand its meaning. This is why authorities in Antigua in 1736 focused so intently on the cultural practices that were believed to have fed the plot. As I discuss in Chapter VI, the Antigua Conspiracy became a crisis in part because white elites lacked the ability to identify and explain the meaning behind the oaths, dances, and other rituals that informed

the plot. As the men and women who served the enslaved community as healers and diviners understood, slaveowners and white folk complicit in the slave regime could never control what they could not understand.

Hiding Places

The secret knowledge that some enslaved folk possessed about the sacred world was part of a larger body of knowledge that slaves could discuss, negotiate, and share within and across the islands. Another form of slave knowledge about the Leeward landscape involved secret hiding places, paths, and places to find fresh water. Sometimes white laborers accidentally discovered these secret places, as was the case in 1718 when a group of men were deforesting some land in Windward Parish, Nevis that was going to be planted in sugar cane. They discovered a hot spring that runaways used as a water source while hiding from pursuers. William Smith noted that it was “ever known by the Blacks, but not sooner by us White men.”⁷⁰ Forests, which were diminishing by the 1720s, provided runaways with cover in the islands. When Hans Sloane stopped in Nevis on his way to Jamaica in 1687, he learned from locals that the “runaway Negroes” typically harbored themselves in the woods that surrounded Mt. Nevis.⁷¹ Decades later, when Smith lived in Nevis, he too was aware that runaways hid themselves in the forests that formed a crown around the top of the mountain.⁷²

Enslaved folk used hidden paths in the forests and along the mountains in St. Kitts and Antigua to hide from slave catchers as well. White travelers feared what they might

⁷⁰ Smith, *Natural History of Nevis*, 58-59, 220.

⁷¹ Hans Sloane, *A Voyage to the Islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica, with the Natural History of the Herbs and Trees, Four-Footed Beasts, Fishes, Birds, Insects, Reptiles, Etc. Of the Last of Those Islands.*, II vols. (London: Printed by B. M. , 1707), I:42.

⁷² Smith, *Natural History of Nevis*, 220.

encounter and typically did not travel into the mountains alone or unarmed. When Smith set out to climb Mt. Misery in St. Kitts, his six slave guides carried pistols and cutlasses to defend Smith from “run-away slaves” who might surprise them during their journey up the peak.⁷³ The paths leading through the forests and across the mountain ridges probably served as routes for the illicit black economy as well. Smith related one of his encounters with the hidden spaces of Mt. Misery in his letter that is particularly telling:

Somewhat higher up we discovered at a little distance a hut that undoubtedly belonged to some run-away Negroes; there was a small gut or gully between it and us, but to speak truth we were too weary to go out of our way to visit it. We could plainly discern a few foot-steps of some cloven-hoofed beasts, and guessed them to be young heifers that had been stolen, and drove thither by the run-away Negroes; though by the by let me tell you, I can by no means conceive how heifers could possibly clamber up a precipice, where we ourselves were very hard put to it to ascend for steepness, even by helping up each other: In short, there must be some other and much easier way for them to clamber up, though unknown to us.⁷⁴

Most white colonists understood that slaves relied on a hidden communication networks like the ones that crisscrossed Mt. Misery. A year after Smith’s arrival, the Nevis legislature offered amnesty to runaways who turned themselves within thirty days of the publication of a new law meant to crack down on absconders. Presumably, the members of the council and assembly assumed that maroons would hear about the offer and return to their master after learning that they would be “free from any punishment.”⁷⁵

Colonial Leeward governments worked to drive runaways out of these hiding places in the 1720s. The years just prior to the Nevis conspiracy scare of 1725 were particularly chaotic for slaveowners in the islands. Each of the legislatures in Nevis,

⁷³ Ibid., 35.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 36.

⁷⁵ “An Act for the Good Government of Negroes, and other Slaves in this Island,” no. 81, 1717, in *Laws of Nevis*, 75-76.

Antigua, St. Kitts, and Montserrat passed laws aimed at curbing the social gathering of people of color and restricting their movement. Runaways who fled to the mountains and forest cover of the islands were of particular concern in St. Kitts and Antigua in the 1720s. But in addition to policing movement and runaways within the islands, slaveowners were also very concerned about the ability of men and women to take boats and other small vessels off the islands in an effort to run away. In 1700, the Nevis government passed a law that made running away with any “fishing or any other Boat, Canoe, Shallop, Sloop, Bark-log, or any other vessel whatsoever” a crime punishable with death, whether the offender was “slave or free.”⁷⁶ The law had to be revised in 1713, when the Nevis government passed a law specifically aimed at preventing enslaved runaways from taking boats, canoes, and barklogs.⁷⁷ Four years later, after William Smith had arrived, the legislature drafted a more comprehensive law governing slave movement. The issue of runaways seizing boats and canoes remained a problem, so to strengthen their efforts, the government offered a £12 reward to anyone who caught a boat runaway. The payment was split, £6 from the owner of the runaway, and £6 from the island treasury.⁷⁸ Stipulations against enslaved persons stealing canoes in Nevis were reissued in 1737 and again in 1749.⁷⁹

In 1722, lawmakers in Montserrat also tried to crack down on the “grievous and intolerable habit” of slaves “running off” with canoes. The law aimed to punish colonists who did not safely secure their vessels so that slaves could not take them. Canoe owners

⁷⁶ “An Act against Running Away with Boats and Canoes,” no. 27, October 22, 1700, *Ibid.*, 21.

⁷⁷ “An Act for the better Suppressing the Insolences of Negroes, and other Slaves; and the preventing their Running Away with Boats, Canoes, or Barklogs,” no. 74, 1713, *Ibid.*, 74.

⁷⁸ “An Act for the Good Government of Negroes, and other Slaves in this Island,” no. 81, 1717, in *Ibid.*, 75-76.

⁷⁹ “An Act to prevent Negroes from going off this Island without License of their Owners,” March 1, 1749, CO 185/1.

were obligated to sign a bond for £500 “payable to the Lieutenant-Governor, or President...for the paying such Person or Persons the Loss he or they shall sustain by means of” a slave runaway who used a unchained boat or canoe to get off the island. The Provost Marshall and his deputy were ordered to “burn, consume, or break into pieces” all unregistered canoes.⁸⁰ It is notable that legislators in St. Kitts and Antigua did not pass laws specifically targeting runaways who seized vessels until 1748.⁸¹ In the case of St. Kitts, this particularly surprising since it was common practice for men and women to travel to Nevis in boats and canoes on Sundays as well as to conduct trade. Legislators in Nevis complained that slaves from St. Kitts traveled to the smaller island to the south on Sundays and often landed “secretly in the night” during the week.⁸²

Although no laws against fleeing with canoes or other boats were passed in Antigua prior to 1750, people of color still managed to flee from the island by hiding on outgoing ships or passing as sailors. Escaping via a ship was a difficult task, as runaways not only needed to know what ships were safe, but also where they were going. Those willing to take the risk certainly did so with some preparation, probably with the help of trusted confidants who knew what ships were headed where and when. If runaways from the plantations and towns wanted to turn to anybody for word about departing ships, enslaved sugar draggers and sloop sailors were the ones to contact. Black sailors labored

⁸⁰ “An Act for the Preventing Keeping Canoes, unless sufficient Security be given; and to prevent Members of the Council and Assembly signing any Adjustments out of their respective Houses,” no. 82, 1722, *Acts of the Assembly Passed in the Island of Monsterrat, from 1668 to 1740, Inclusive*, (London: Printed, by Order of the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, by John Baskett, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1740), 79.

⁸¹ “An Act to Prevent & Discourage Negroes and other Slaves from making their escape from this Island in Coasting Sloops & Schooners, Shallops, Long Boats, Canoes, or other Vessels, and for sundry other Purposes therein particularly mention'd,” St. Kitts, April 14, 1748, CO 240/8.

⁸² “An Act to amend, explain, and make more effectual an Act made in the Fourth Year of the Reign of King George the First, intituled, An Act for the good Government of Negroes, and other Slaves in this Island,” no. 111, 1737, *Laws of Nevis*, 133, clause seven.

on 36 of the 58 vessels owned by white Antiguans in 1720 and were concentrated mostly on sloops and boats, the smaller but most crucial craft in the regional trade. Of these, 33 had crews that were majority black if not completely manned by people of color. Majority black crews sailed 34% of the Antigua's sloops and 100% of the boats.⁸³

Abettors who helped runaways get off the island faced considerable risk in doing so. If caught, they faced whippings, mutilation, and death. Antigua legislators made a point to punish abettors in public. Even if the suspected slave was from a plantation far away, custom stipulated that accusers needed to be whipped in front of the large public crowds that gathered at St. John, where the government met. This is what happened to an enslaved man named Stephen when he was accused of “attempting to assist a Negro of Mr. Dunbar's to get off the island” in 1738.⁸⁴ He was publically whipped in the island's principal port town after being caught trying to help a fellow slave from a neighboring plantation escape, a measure surely aimed at instilling fear in other enslaved men and women throughout the island who contemplated assisting future runaways.

Frank's Travels

Plantations in the Leewards were like stars in a wider cosmos. For Frank, Jennings and Balls Range was the place where his family stayed, but not the only place he knew. The Range was a place where agricultural sugarcane fields abutted commercially defined ports and open seas, a world where a constellation of islands interacted because of the social dynamism and movement of enslaved folk. Whether or not Frank was born into this world or raised in it is unclear—in the numerous letters and

⁸³ Governor General Hamilton to the Board of Trade, Antigua, August 22, 1720, CO 152/13/Q51.

⁸⁴ The Trustees of Maine Swete Deceased their Account Currant with Richard Oliver, 1738-1739, Swete Papers, 388M/E4.

government sources that mention him, he is simply referred to as a Negro and a slave. No matter his place of birth, he had developed both a keen sense of how to engage with the white managers of the estate as well as how to get around Nevis. As his owner and managers eventually discovered, he also knew how to get out of the island, around St. Kitts, and out of the Leewards completely.

The years leading up to 1725 were particularly chaotic in the Nevis and on Jennings and Balls Range in particular. When William Stapleton gained full control over the estate in 1722 after the death of his grandmother, the plantation was in rough shape. He learned from his mother that the plantation had “suffered much” from the French wars and was “at present under slavery being every respect in a decaying condition.” On July 10, he wrote to his attorney to instruct them on how to handle his affairs. Stapleton was eager to turn the plantation that his grandfather had made famous into a thriving sugar producer again. While his grandmother had an “utter aversion” to repairing the plantation after the French invasion, Stapleton felt that with her death he was “now at liberty to make what improvements are necessary.” Despite his interests in rebuilding the plantation, the young heir was not eager to travel to Nevis to see the mess himself. “I cannot prevail upon my mother as yet to permit me to go out myself,” he explained to his attorneys. “You are better judges of my affairs,” he noted, and “I trust that you will continue you will still continue your goodness.”⁸⁵

Stapleton showed his lack of knowledge about the slave regime in Nevis from the beginning. Despite having no first hand experience of how to run the plantation machine, he tried to prove his new authority by acting swiftly from abroad. His first effort was to

⁸⁵ William Stapleton to Attorneys, England, July 10, 1722, Stapleton MSS. 5/1.

find a manager who he could trust to be efficient and honest. Acquaintances in England told him he should find a someone who had experience in Barbados, but his cousin and attorney Timothy Tyrrell (manager of Russell's Rest, on the other side of the island) and his attorney Joseph Symonds recommend that he choose between three locals—Joseph Kit, William Fenton, or Joseph Herbert, all of Nevis.⁸⁶ Kit had already been serving as manager on the estate; Symonds appointed him after the previous manager, Richard Broadbelt, left the plantation. However, after consulting his mother about Kit's management style and salary, William began leaning toward Herbert. Hearing that Kit only had 50 acres of cane planted for the next year, Stapleton clamped down hard on what he interpreted as efficiency problems (in reality, the plantation was undercapitalized and the enslaved folk lacked clothing and substantial foodstuffs from abroad).⁸⁷ On August 16, he sent a letter to Tyrrell instructing him to pass along several new restrictions that Kit and the men and women who slaved on the plantation had to follow. "I would have no Negroes of mine allowed for the garden," he instructed his cousin, and "no more corn to be planted then for the use of the house." He also forbid his slaves from raising any more sheep and wanted them to raise no "more poultry then for the use of the house."⁸⁸

Trying to squeeze blood from a stone dry plantation was Stapleton's first mistake. Limiting access to the domestic economy without substituting food needs from abroad simply meant that the men, women, and children on the plantation were expected to do with even less. To make matters worse, Stapleton's demands came on the eve of several

⁸⁶ William Stapleton to Timothy Tyrrell, England, August 16, 1722, Stapleton MSS. 5/1.

⁸⁷ On William's business decisions, see Mason, "World an Absentee Planter and His Slaves Made," 110-111.

⁸⁸ William Stapleton to Timothy Tyrrell, England, August 16, 1722, Stapleton MSS. 5/1.

environmental catastrophes that struck the island from 1723 through 1726. Four hurricanes ravished the island in 1723 and another severe storm destroyed cane fields at the Range and Russell's Rest in 1724.⁸⁹ The storms came in the middle of a drought, which meant large amounts of rain fell on considerably dry soil—a recipe for standing pools of water, which in turn fostered mosquitoes and severely damaged provision crops like potatoes. Already by 1723, white Nevisians were in a heightened state of anxiety about the rising number of runaways on the island, not to mention the stories about notorious men like Antego Quamina in St. Kitts and Africa, Papa Will, and Sharper in Antigua.⁹⁰ In September of 1724, the council admitted that the number of black bandits committing “thefts and robberys” against white folk in Nevis had reached a crisis point. The Assembly suggested that the government pay each slave catcher two pistoles out of the public expense, and the Council concurred.⁹¹

Rumors of the possible changes in management at Jennings and Balls Range soon reached Frank and the others. But instead of running away en masse, slaves from the plantation agreed to attempt to send word about their concerns back to England. In March of 1723, a group from Jennings and Balls Range marched across Nevis to make an appeal to Timothy Tyrrell at Russell's Rest. In a letter dated March 23, Tyrrell wrote to Frances (his employer and William's mother) to tell her about what happened and his response to the situation:

All the Negros came in a body to me at Russell's Rest & swore if Mr. Fenton or Mr. Herbert came to live on the plantation they would all run away. But if

⁸⁹ Timothy Tyrrell to William Stapleton, Nevis, October 2, 1723, Stapleton MSS. 6/11, Timothy Tyrrell to Frances Stapleton, Nevis, April, 1724, Stapleton MSS. 6/11.

⁹⁰ “An Act Attainting Several Slaves now run away from their Master's Service, and for the better Government of Slaves,” no. 176, 1723, *Laws of the Leeward Islands*, 206, clause two.

⁹¹ Nevis Minutes of Assembly, September 10, 1724, CO 186/1, Nevis Minutes of Council, September 10, 1724, CO 186/1.

Negroes were to be humoured that way there would be little good expected from them. I would not let them know who we thought to put on; but assured them I would see they were not ill used, but at the same time told them they should obey whoever we put on as Manager or else be severely punished.⁹²

When Tyrrell said “all the Negros,” did he really mean all 130-plus men, women, and children and Jennings and Balls Range visited him? It has hard to imagine that old and young alike made the hike, which at its most direct would have been almost six miles including a trek across the mountain. It is possible that Tyrrell was exaggerating, and moreover, that Kit had encouraged the appeal in an effort to secure his position on the estate. Unfortunately, the exact motivations of Tyrrell’s visitors are unclear, although it is safe to say that the issue of treatment was certainly a large part of their concern.

The group’s long journey from Russell’s Rest suggests they had some idea of the networks of power that influenced their well-being in Nevis. According to Tyrrell, men and women from Jennings and Balls Range looked upon him to “be sort of a master to them.” When William began to hear from David Stalker that Joseph Herbert was abusing them, Tyrrell downplayed the possibility, noting that “if they had been ill used” the men and women from William’s plantation would have told him so.⁹³ In addition to knowing Tyrrell from his frequent visits, many of the slaves laboring at Jennings and Balls Range probably met Stapleton’s mother personally. Lady Frances had been on the island only five years earlier, and she certainly would have met some of the enslaved men and women owned by her family face-to-face.⁹⁴

⁹² Timothy Tyrrell to Lady Frances, Nevis, March 23, 1723, Stapleton MSS. 9/1.

⁹³ Timothy Tyrrell to William Stapleton, Nevis, June 5, 1727, Stapleton MSS. 6/11.

⁹⁴ Frances returned to Nevis with Walter Hamilton when he took up his post as Governor-General in 1716 and left in 1718, Johnston, “The Stapleton Sugar Plantations in the Leeward Islands,” 183.

If the visit to Russell's Rest was the only example of direct slave appeals to circuits of power outside of the plantation in the letters, we might be left with a simple conjecture about what slaves did and did not know about their absentee owners. Yet there are numerous fragments in the letters that suggest at least some of the slaves owned by William and Frances understood that the absentees were supposed to be responsible for their welfare. On Russell's Rest, for example, Cuffee seems to have been particularly eager to get Frances to send him some shoes to protect his lame feet. "They must be pretty large and long," Tyrrell related to Frances in one letter, "I hope you will not forget Cuffee," Tyrrell wrote in the last line of another.⁹⁵ Frank seems to have wanted a hat—"I believe if you were pleased to send him a hat or some such thing for his encouragement, it would be of service," Herbert related to Stapleton.⁹⁶

Mothers who desired to protect their newborns often wanted cloth to wrap their children in, and knowing that they could only get ozenbrig and flannel from abroad, many made direct appeals to the white servant David Stalker to tell Stapleton about their condition. Sometimes they appealed to Lady Frances instead of her son. In one letter Stalker noted, "The Negro women desire to be remembered to there Lady, and hopes that her Ladyship will be so good as to send them some corse flanning to wrap their young ones in."⁹⁷ In another, Stalker wrote, "Your Negroes give their service to you and there Lady and the women give their many thanks for their flanning for the children."⁹⁸ In a letter written just before the onset of the hurricane season, Stalker related the concerns of

⁹⁵ Timothy Tyrrell to Frances Stapleton, Nevis, July 8, 1724, Stapleton MSS. 9/1, Timothy Tyrrell to Frances Stapleton, Nevis, September 10, 1725, Stapleton MSS. 9/1

⁹⁶ Joseph Herbert to William Stapleton, Nevis, July 27, 1725, Stapleton MSS. 5/5.

⁹⁷ David Stalker to William Stapleton, Nevis, June 27, 1729, Stapleton MSS. 6/10.

⁹⁸ David Stalker to William Stapleton, Nevis, May 5, 1730, Stapleton MSS. 6/10.

the slaves whose tattered ozenbrig were insufficient. “Pray send your Negroes some clothing,” Stalker asked William, “for they want them much. They all give their service to you but thinks you have forgot of them.”⁹⁹

Slave appeals for just managers and cloth shipments from England complicate the issue of “master-slave relations” in the context of absenteeism. While the power of the manager (and the broader colonial state) to commit physical acts of violence against the men, women, and children of the plantation was the most critical in shaping acquiescence to the inherent inequality of the labor regime, slave appeals to attorneys and absentees point to their knowledge about the way the absentee system worked.¹⁰⁰ Ideas about cloth and just treatment by their owner’s employees touch on the ways enslaved folk viewed moral entitlements owed to them by the absentees. They also highlight how enslaved folk had some knowledge about the social pressures that shaped white patron-client relationships in the British Atlantic. Jennings and Balls Range and Russell’s Rest were not just any plantations—they were properties owned by one of the most powerful and elite families with ties to the Leewards. Appealing to Tyrrell and Lady Frances was a way to check local exploitation by tugging at the aristocratic sensibilities of unseen owners. Even if their pleas went unanswered, the men and women on Jennings and Balls Range believed that efforts to influence their owners who lived in England might have an effect on their well being in Nevis. The technique of appealing to their absentees not to forget them may have had direct consequences for Frank, for when he was accused of being involved in the plot, he was quickly sent to England to stay with Sir William.

⁹⁹ David Stalker to William Stapleton, Nevis, August 3, 1730, Stapleton MSS. 6/10.

¹⁰⁰ In this sense, the men and women who labored on Jennings and Balls Range shared much in common with those who labored on Monk Lewis’s plantation in Jamaica at the beginning of the nineteenth century. See Burton, *Afro-Creole*, 52-60.

The first letter mentioning Frank was written by Joseph Herbert only two months before rumors of the Nevis conspiracy began to surface. It was July, on the verge of the hurricane season. Herbert had just finished managing his second harvest, during which he was able to increase the number of hogsheads of sugar from 76 to 100—not a considerable total, but a major improvement over the meager exports from the days of Kit.¹⁰¹ Herbert was writing to tell William about his plans to begin distilling the left over molasses into rum. After signing the letter, the manager realized he had something to add. Quickly scribbling a postscript at the cramped space left at the bottom of the page, we wrote, “p.s. You have an extraordinary good Negro call’d Frank, which I have made an overseer.” After asking for a hat, noting that it would be for “his encouragement” and a matter “of service” to Herbert, he asked that Stapleton order a “couple of pairs of coarse shoes for ye Old Overseer, who is very tender footed; he’s a good slave.”¹⁰²

The idea that Frank was a “good slave” lasted for several years, until he ran away whereupon he became an “ungrateful rogue.” News that a conspiracy was afoot reached the Council and Assembly on September 17, 1725. The President of the Council immediately issued orders that “all evidence concerning the Negro affair be sent for and examined and that all Negroes suspected be secured.”¹⁰³ Ten days later, Governor-General John Hart (former governor of Maryland and replacement of Walter Hamilton) sailed from St. Kitts to Nevis after he learned of the “confusion and disorder” there. He brought one hundred armed men with him.¹⁰⁴ Although the Council appears to have

¹⁰¹ See Mason, “World an Absentee Planter and His Slaves Made,” 112-113.

¹⁰² Joseph Herbert to William Stapleton, Nevis, July 27, 1725, Stapleton MSS. 5/5.

¹⁰³ Nevis Minutes of Council, September 17, 1725, CO 186/1/32.

¹⁰⁴ Nevis Minutes of Council, September 27, 1725, CO 186/1/33; Governor General Hart to the Board of Trade, St. Kitts, January 6, 1726, CO 152/15/R158.

taken depositions on September 18, none were recorded in the minutes until after Hart's arrival. A total of five were recorded on September 27—one from a white man named William Clifton, three from white women, and one from a “Negro named Great Billey,” who stated he knew nothing at all about the affair.

The depositions were riddled with speculation and rumor. Sarah Burke, the wife of a mason who was hired by James Symonds (attorney for the Stapletons) testified that she heard rumors of a feast but had no direct knowledge of one. Sarah Lytton stated that “she heard Samuel Bayley say that he heard Brother John Bayley say that a Negro man called Tom Cheverly belonging to Colonel Jorey knew as much or more of the matter...than the Negroes that were already brought in upon that account.” William Clifton's deposition was more provocative. He stated that he heard a woman named Judy “talking with some other Negroes that she was starved and could not go to Market for the men's guarding and further told the said Negroes that the thing they were going to do let them do at one time.”¹⁰⁵

Mary Combs implicated Frank in the affair. She was the wife of a tailor who happened to be in the jail in Charlestown when justices of the peace began detaining suspected conspirators. Combs testified that she overheard James Symond's slave Saco speaking to Mrs. Symonds before he was condemned to be burnt. According to Combs, Saco told Mrs. Symonds that while running an errand for her in town he heard Sargent's Johnny and Sambo talking about him. Hiding behind a house, Saco lit his pipe and listened while the two men discussed their plans and the role of “My Lady's Frank.” Combs claimed to have heard Saco say that he heard Frank was “to be our Captain but

¹⁰⁵ Nevis Minutes of Council and Assembly, September 27, 1725, CO 186/1/37-38.

we are afraid he has told too much to Saco,” but when Mrs. Symonds heard his accusation against Frank, she replied that he should not lie because it would not save his life. Saco persisted, and noted that Johnny, Sambo, and Frank had “as much a hand in it as he.”¹⁰⁶

Two days after Combs’s testimony, Joseph Herbert wrote to William Stapleton to inform him of the ensuing crisis. He informed his employer that there was a “report of an insurrection of the Negroes in order to cut off all the whites, and to take the island for themselves, which has put the people in general in the greatest confusion.” Hebert was skeptical of the veracity of the testimony. He explained that he did not think the evidence was enough to convict “so many as are suspected to be in the plot, amongst whom your chief Negro Frank is accused and committed.” Hebert warned Stapleton that Frank was facing certain death, as two slaves had already been executed “without any confession material.”¹⁰⁷

What transpired next is unclear, but somehow Frank’s life was spared. Hebert testified on his behalf during his trial, of which there is no record. A letter from Tyrrell abstracted in Stapleton’s letterbook states that Frank was tried. When no direct evidence against Frank surfaced, his prosecutors ordered him to be banished from the Leewards. Stapleton’s attorneys (both of whom held positions on the Assembly and Council) believed that Frank’s accuser implicated him because of a past quarrel. Tyrrell suggested in a letter written in November that the trustworthy old overseer should be sent to England to join his absentee owner. Frank made the first move. After hearing a rumor that he was going to be sold out of the Leewards, he somehow he made it out of Nevis

¹⁰⁶ Nevis Minutes of Council and Assembly, September 27, 1725, CO 186/1/39-40.

¹⁰⁷ Joseph Herbert to William Stapleton, Nevis, September 29, 1725, Stapleton MSS. 5/5.

and joined his absentee owner William Stapleton at his estate across the Atlantic. A letter from James Milliken (France's manager for the Fountain estate in St. Kitts) dated in December of 1725 explained that he believed Frank had runaway "upon a report that he was to be sold to Captain Condey" and that Milliken "wished him safe" to Sir William.¹⁰⁸

While he was in England, Stapleton, Herbert, and several of William's associates in the Leewards worked to obtain a pardon for Frank from the new Governor-General.¹⁰⁹ Frank did not return to the Leewards until September of 1727, almost two years to the day he was accused of his role in Nevis conspiracy. When he did, he remained fearful that poorer white folk on the island were going to try and kill him.

With Frank gone, Herbert faced the difficult task of trying to run the plantation without his trusted overseer. Slave dissent got worse after the two men were burnt for their alleged plot, not better. Herbert complained to William in one letter that he had to use the little rum he produced at Jennings and Balls Range to pay for "catching run away Negroes that have plagued every one this year."¹¹⁰ On June 12, 1726, Herbert relayed his frustrations about life at Jennings and Balls Range without Frank in the following remarkable letter:

I am sorry poor Frank suffered such hardships in his voyage, but he acknowledges in a letter to me, that his good living with you makes him ample amends. I ever had a good opinion of him, but never so great as since I've known the want of him, and as you've determined to return him, my good will towards him suggests this hint, to have him baptized and a certificate send of it, because there are several persons here that has laid themselves under the strongest obligations to destroy him whenever they shall see him. Which reason I humbly pray may excuse my freedom in advising. When he arrives, I assure you nothing shall be wanting in me to protect him as far as

¹⁰⁸ The abstracts from letters not appearing in the Stapleton Manuscripts cited here appear in Gay, "Letters from a Sugar Planter," 155-156.

¹⁰⁹ Joseph Herbert to William Stapleton, Nevis, June 1, 1726, Stapleton MSS. 5/5.

¹¹⁰ Joseph Herbert to William Stapleton, Nevis, June 24, 1726, Stapleton MSS. 5/5.

the law will justify, notwithstanding I got more enemies by appearing on his behalf at his trial than every I had in my life. I pray (after my humble service to yourself and spouse) I may be remembered to Frank whose affairs I have minded since he left 'em.¹¹¹

This letter is remarkable for several reasons. First, it suggests that Frank kept correspondence with Herbert about his “affairs” in Nevis while he was on the other side of the Atlantic. Second, Herbert asks Stapleton to baptize Frank as a way to protect him. Third, the letter is almost an inversion of the appeals from slaves to absentees mentioned above. Instead of slaves on the plantation asking for fair treatment, it is an account of a desperate manager eager to have his employer return a slave who has experienced the “good living” of life in England.

Unfortunately Frank’s letters with Herbert were never sent back to Stapleton, so assessing his letters directly is impossible. Yet there are references to the types of things they contained in some of Frank’s letters to his overseer. While away from Nevis, Frank was mostly concerned about his house, his sheep, and the well-being of his “wives and children.” On June 24, 1726, Herbert wrote to Stapleton and mentioned, “I have taken due care of Frank’s houses & stock afterwhich have wrote him per this opportunity.”¹¹² Herbert even set aside some money that he collected from selling some of Frank’s sheep. When Frank finally returned to Nevis in the summer of 1729, Herbert wrote that he “paid him £9.14s. for sheep I disposed of for him.”¹¹³

What Frank experienced during his two years in England is unclear. He did meet a woman whom he married while abroad. The two traveled back to the Leewards together, along with David Stalker, Stapleton’s white servant. Herbert later discovered

¹¹¹ Joseph Herbert to William Stapleton, Nevis, June 12, 1726, Stapleton MSS. 5/5.

¹¹² Joseph Herbert to William Stapleton, Nevis, June 24, 1726, Stapleton MSS. 5/5.

¹¹³ Joseph Herbert to William Stapleton, Nevis, August 1, 1729, Stapleton MSS. 5/5.

that the anonymous woman who married Frank in England in fact “belonged to a gentlewoman of St. Christophers, which he very well knew” but Frank kept this fact hidden from his white overseer.¹¹⁴ When Herbert discovered that Frank was missing, he also discovered that Frank had sent his new wife back to England when rumors began to surface about her connections to St. Kitts. Unfortunately, there are only a few lines about Frank’s Kittsian wife. Herbert’s suggestion that Frank kept her ties to St. Kitts hidden are provocative, for they illustrate the ways enslaved folk in the Leewards relied upon their knowledge of extended kin networks in the islands for assistance. Of course, it is also thought provoking that Frank got married in England, continued to stay concerned about his “wives and children” at Jennings and Balls Range, and had some say over the sheep he formally tended to at the plantation in Nevis.

Herbert requested more than once that Stapleton have Frank baptized while he was in England, sighting the rumors that locals were going to have Daddy Frank murdered as soon as he stepped foot in Nevis. “I think it is very proper to have him Christened,” Herbert wrote in the summer of 1726, and “to send out an attestation of the same. I am told there are several persons in this Island who swear they will kill him when ever they see him.” Herbert noted that it was “very probable they may be as good as their word in that, if they can do it privately without being seen, but if it can be done we will oblige those persons to give in security for having threatened his life.”¹¹⁵

Herbert’s requests to have Frank baptized are notable for several reasons. First, it is unclear why Herbert believed christening Frank would have protected him from the people in Nevis who wanted him dead. If Frank had been freed, having him baptized

¹¹⁴ Joseph Herbert to William Stapleton, Nevis, August 1, 1729, Stapleton MSS. 5/5.

¹¹⁵ Joseph Herbert to William Stapleton, June 1, 1726, Stapleton MSS. 5/5.

may have made it easier for Herbert and Tyrrell to have the perpetrators punished. Whites—rich and poor—were rarely prosecuted for crimes against people of color in Nevis, but proof of baptism might enable Herbert or Tyrrell to protect him under the guise that he was a Christian and not a heathen. Then again, Frank was free, Stapleton would have received no compensation for his murder. Herbert did not ask to have Frank freed, just baptized.

It is also surprising that Herbert believed Frank should be baptized since most white slaveowners in the Leewards viewed slave baptisms as subversive. The phrase “no Negroes baptized” was a standard line in accounts sent from parish rectors to island governors as well as from S.P.G. missionaries to their English supervisors during the 1720s and 1730s.¹¹⁶ The Anglican rector William Smith discouraged the practice, which he called a “mad” endeavor that some “mistaken zealots” began to promote from abroad in the 1720s. Smith believed that Christian instruction did not make slaves better workers, but instead, more apt to resist their masters. “When a Slave is once Christened,” Smith related in his history, “he conceits that he ought to be upon a level with his Master...and that if his Master corrects him, for ever so great a Fault, he is at full liberty to fend him out of the World, by a Dose of Poison.”¹¹⁷

Herbert’s appeals to have Frank baptized had nothing to do with making him more loyal or a better worker; the manager already believed that Frank was dedicated to his master and to making Jennings and Balls Range a thriving plantation. The manager

¹¹⁶ See Queries to be answered by every Minister, 1724-1726, Fulham Papers 19/117-119, Parochia Sancti Georgi Vulgo Vocato Gingerland Parish in Insula Nevi Apuct Americanos, 1716-1717, Fulham Papers, 19/(submitted in 1723), A True Abstract from the Register Book of the Parish of St. George in the Island of Nevis, 1723, Fulham Papers 19/67-68, Number of Christinings and Burials in St. Pauls Parish, Nevis, from May 16, 1721 to Dec 12, 1729, October 13, 1730, CO 152/18/T72, Account of Baptisms and Burials in Several Parishes at Nevis in 1733 & 1734, September 10, 1735, CO 152/21/V103.

¹¹⁷ Smith, *Natural History of Nevis*, 229-230.

suggests that baptizing Frank would enable him to bring charges against the white folk on the island who wanted him dead, but nothing in the laws of Nevis suggest that such threats against Christianized slaves would have been treated differently from threats against enslaved people of color generally. Whatever the case, Herbert certainly believed that baptizing Frank would have made his transition back to Nevis easier. Exactly why requires a study about the intersection of religion and slavery in the 1720s that simply cannot be discussed here, although it is worth noting that these debates clearly influenced the way Herbert imagined Frank's security in the Leewards.

The ship carrying Frank, his new wife, and David Stalker arrived at Nevis on September 19, 1727. They were all horribly sick—Stalker called their journey across the Atlantic a “wicked passing.” After regaining their health, Frank and Stalker tried to get off the ship, but Frank was not allowed to leave. A man Stalker calls “Mr. Smith” (probably Michael) kept Frank “close” and decided that it was best to appeal to the interim Governor-General at St. Kitts to inform him of Frank's circumstances. Lacking any information about Stalker, the Governor refused to hear the matter and let Frank enter Nevis. Although Stalker was allowed to proceed to the plantation, Frank had to travel with his new wife to Antigua, probably to St. John's. From Antigua, Frank kept in touch with Stalker, letting him know that “Mr. Smith takes notice of him but lets him shift for himself. He sent me a request to sell some sheep...to supply his present Head Lady.”¹¹⁸ Smith apparently rented Frank out and took his wages, but forced him to fend for himself by providing him few provisions. This frustrated the old overseer, and he

¹¹⁸ David Stalker to William Stapleton, January 8, 1728, Stapleton MSS. 6/10.

informed Joseph Herbert of the troubles he faced in Antigua. In a letter sent to William on May 25, 1728, Joseph Herbert related,

I receive letters frequently from Frank, which are full of complaints of Mr. Smith's using him not so well as he expected, and of his being in want of the necessaries of life, upon which I have sent him some money; indeed your attorneys have thought it a little strange that Mr. Smith should never impart the least little of Frank's affairs to them, and been several times in this Island.¹¹⁹

Frank remained in Antigua with his new wife for more than a year. Herbert was unsuccessful in trying to obtain a pardon for Frank from the interim Governor-General and believed it was best to wait until Lord Londonderry arrived to take his seat as head of the Leeward federation, noting that the authority of the Governor-General "can never be of greater influence than at his first arrival."¹²⁰ Luckily for Herbert, Londonderry came to Nevis to celebrate Christmas and invited Herbert to a "private dinner" with "select company." Herbert took the opportunity to remind Londonderry about Frank, whereupon the new Governor-General took a "perfect account of the whole process" and "determined to issue a pardon for him" at the next council meeting.¹²¹

Whether or not Londonderry pardoned Frank in December is unclear, but Frank did not make his way back toward Nevis until May of 1729. He arrived via St. Kitts, where Timothy Tyrrell met him. When Frank arrived, Tyrrell had "his pardon publically read" in an effort to quash the gossip about him. The pardon did not make Frank safer. Rumors swirled that he was going to be murdered, either by white folk or by other slaves hired to do the work for them. Tyrrell was skeptical that anything was going to happen. "I am told some people here give out they will kill him where ever they see him," Tyrrell

¹¹⁹ Joseph Herbert to William Stapleton, Nevis, May 25, 1728, Stapleton MSS. 5/5.

¹²⁰ Joseph Herbert to William Stapleton, Nevis, September 13, 1728, Stapleton MSS. 5/5.

¹²¹ Joseph Herbert to William Stapleton, Nevis, December 23, 1728, Stapleton MSS. 5/5.

wrote to his cousin, “but some of them have seen him and he is still living.”¹²² Herbert was a bit more worrisome. He wrote that Frank’s return to Jennings and Balls Range caused “reflections” to “run very severe against all that are supposed to be instrumental in his return, and consequently, myself, My Lord, and Mr. Tyrrell and your manager have liberal shares.”¹²³ Frank suspected that slaves working alongside of him at Jennings and Balls Range might try to kill him. In late July, Tyrrell sat down to write William about Frank’s continuing troubles at Nevis. “Poor Frank is at present at your plantation,” he scribbled, “but under the greatest uneasiness imaginable, being apprehensive of some of your Negroes being bribed to make away with, which I cannot say is very unlikely.” Tyrrell informed his cousin that Frank’s best shot might be to move Frank from Nevis for St. Kitts, where he could labor on one of Frances’s plantations.¹²⁴ Frank beat him to it.

Just as Tyrrell began to finish his letter, he received word from Herbert that Frank “was gone off to St. Kitts.” Tyrrell was convinced that he was going to try and return to England. In order to prevent him from gaining passage on an outward ship, Tyrrell ordered some men to travel to the island to tell James Milliken to keep an eye out for him. “Your Negro Frank has proved a very ungrateful rogue,” Herbert wrote in another letter. “He has run off this island to St. Christophers, ordering his wife to tell me he has gone to Lady Stapleton’s estate, for fear of his life.” Herbert believed that Frank was going to use the contacts he made from his other wife, the “woman he married in England” who was owned by “a gentlewoman of St. Christophers” to get back to England, since it turned out that she recently left the island to cross the Atlantic. Herbert

¹²² Timothy Tyrrell to William Stapleton, Nevis, May 7, 1729, Stapleton MSS. 6/11.

¹²³ Joseph Herbert to William Stapleton, Nevis, April 29, 1729, Stapleton MSS. 5/5.

¹²⁴ Timothy Tyrrell to William Stapleton, Nevis, July 28, 1729, Stapleton MSS. 6/11/

suggested that William inform the proper authorities in England. “It may be proper to engage some active person to attend the arrival of the St. Kitts vessels to secure him in case he gets home,” Herbert penned.¹²⁵

It soon dawned on Herbert and Stalker that Frank had been planning his departure for some time. Looking backward, the two men could see that Frank had been amassing currency and preparing to leave his family some of the wealth he had managed to hide from Smith and his other managers. Stalker discovered that Frank had sold all of his sheep clandestinely, which led the servant to think that “he designs no longer to be a slave but that he wants to get home to England.”¹²⁶ Frank also left some of his possessions to his family members before he had to leave Jennings and Balls Range. Herbert frustratingly noted that he had willingly paid Frank for some of the sheep he sold while in England, and that he also “gave away seven by request to his wives and children, and delivered him 19 since he was pardoned, which he has since sold.” Herbert believed the flexibility he showed the man he once called an “extraordinary Negro” had fed his desire to leave. “Such extraordinary privileges induce some negroes to think they are above their fellow slaves,” Herbert wrote to his employer, “and consequently puts ‘em upon suitable attempts.”¹²⁷

It was virtually unthinkable to Herbert, Tyrrell, and Stalker that Frank would have gone anywhere else but England. What else had he known but the plantation of Jennings and Balls Range and the world of his absentee owner, the M.P. for Oxfordshire? If given the chance, wouldn’t any man searching for freedom naturally end up back in England,

¹²⁵ Joseph Herbert to William Stapleton, Nevis, August 1, 1729, Stapleton MSS. 5/5.

¹²⁶ David Stalker to William Stapleton, Nevis, August 1, 1729, Stapleton MSS. 6/10.

¹²⁷ Joseph Herbert to William Stapleton, Nevis, August 1, 1729, Stapleton MSS. 5/5.

for Britons were never slaves? What the men failed to recognize was that Frank had been schooled in the ways of blending in, moving about, and obtaining information from his experiences in the Leeward Islands. The culture of movement in the Leewards made Frank's travels possible and eventual escape from Nevis less risky. He had learned how to interact with people of color—"Negroes"—from a wide variety of backgrounds and occupations, he knew who he could turn to when he needed to find out what boat to take to St. Kitts and what ship to take to get off the island. He also used the knowledge he acquired as "trusted" enslaved man to convince Herbert and the rest that he was accommodative to their needs and that he was not a threat, and to convince his absentee owner that he was worthy of a pardon. He used the knowledge he gleaned from watching his various managers negotiate, and learned how to appeal to white ideas of responsibility and obligation so that he could deflect some of their authority over him. And finally, Frank used his knowledge about space and power in the Leewards to escape what he believed was certain death.

Frank disappeared. Stalker, who once called Frank his friend, wrote to William nearly a year later asking if Frank had shown up in England. He had not heard anything about him since he left Jennings and Balls Range at the end of the shipping season the year before. William had not seen him. The last mention of him is in a letter dated June 20, 1730. Frank departs the historical record much as he entered it: in a postscript written from the quill of Joseph Herbert. "P.S.," Herbert penned in the lower left corner of the tattered and saltwater stained sheet of paper, "I have been lately informed by a person that had it from Captain Cundy that he saw Frank at Jamaica."¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Joseph Herbert to William Stapleton, June 20, 1730, Stapleton MSS. 5/5.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the culture of movement and its relationship to slave knowledge and black identity in the Leewards largely in an effort to understand a unique subaltern of Leeward history. When I discovered Frank in the historical record, I was magnetically drawn to try to understand him. His journeys through the islands, his possible involvement in a conspiracy, his name “Daddy,” his stay in England, his multiple wives, and his penchant for playing his overseer against his absentee owner convinced me that he could not be understood without understanding the world where he labored.

Certainly, Frank’s story is atypical. Most enslaved folk laboring in the Leewards did not make it across the Atlantic to England or escape to Jamaica. Yet Frank’s journeys were not possible simply because he was intelligent or crafty. His ability to move through the islands, to blend in with other enslaved folk, and to save his own life were products of the environment—cultural and physical—that he grew up in. Though a “plantation slave,” Frank had a keen understanding of a wider world beyond his plantation, one that stretched across the Atlantic to Britain and Africa, and one that reached in the other direction, to Jamaica, where, in the 1720s and 1730s, slaveowners feared that “rebel Negroes” were on the verge of taking over the island. Whether or not Frank knew of the maroons is unknowable, but his choice to flee to Jamaica rather than England is certainly telling of what he thought British liberty meant for people who looked like him in the 1720s.

Chapter V

On the Verge of Some Terrible Happening

Seventeen thirty-three began in the eastern Caribbean just as it had in years previous. Women and men were busy laboring in the fields and along the ports, preparing for the planting season to begin. Sweat dripped down the foreheads of field hands as they tilled the charred remains of last season's crop into the soil. Separate gangs weeded and holed rows for the soon-to-be planted sugarcane. In the mature fields, enslaved folk were busy attacking the cane with their machetes, bending the giant reeds, hacking them at the base, and topping them all in one synchronized movement. Young boys and girls policed the fields for rodents and birds. Ships from nearby islands and the distant Northern Colonies tilted back and forth in the shallow waters as canoes paddled to them from rickety wooden docks. Enslaved carters and sailors worked side-by-side to haul ship cargoes to land—lumber, foodstuffs, and horses from places as close as the Virgin Islands and as distant as Boston. Work in the Leewards proceeded as it usually did—with the rhythms of night and day, by the pace of the gang leader and overseer, and with the course of the winds.

Yet as the season progressed, 1733 proved to be a very different year. Several events—some of environmental, others political—converged in the Lesser Antilles,

precipitating a cascade of panic and fear about slave uprisings that gripped colonists across imperial divides in cycles for the next decade.¹

Perhaps the most important event to affect the lives of enslaved folk living in the islands was a massive hurricane that slammed the islands in late June, leaving a path of destruction behind. The storm—widely covered in the British imperial press—sent shockwaves through the British Empire, for the storm not only leveled buildings and sugar works, but also demolished shipping and more. The Spanish Crown was also particularly hard hit by the hurricane. The tempest destroyed Philip V’s treasure fleet off the coast of Florida, sinking half a year’s imperial taxes to the bottom of the ocean—horrible news for a state readying itself for a Pan-Atlantic war. Widespread disease outbreaks of malaria and the “mal de siam” followed the storm, as did the arrival of a new and uncontrollable insect that ravished the cane fields.

Increased political tensions appeared against the backdrop of these ecological disasters. Rumors of a new Bourbon alliance of France and Spain against England fueled concerns that a new era of Pan-Atlantic war was on the horizon.² To make matters worse, colonists learned in 1733 that the Board of Trade finally passed the Molasses Act, which targeted illicit trade responsible for draining the metropolitan state of much needed specie. The act infuriated small traders in the Leewards who used the tiny Virgins to the northwest of St. Kitts to smuggle provisions, molasses, and slaves with the French, Dutch, and Danes. In late November of 1733, newly appointed Governor-General

¹ Describing the air of fear, anxiety, and conflict as a “cycle of rebellion,” Linebaugh and Rediker counted upwards of eighty separate cases of arson, mutiny, conspiracy, and revolt in the 1730s and 1740s, see Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Buford Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 193-198, Philip D. Morgan, “Conspiracy Scares,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2002).

² By February of 1734, Governor-General Mathew ordered Kittsians to prepare for a “warr now threatening.” See Minutes of St. Kitts Council, Basseterre, February 9, 1734, CO 241/3.

William Mathew returned to his childhood home in the Leewards hell bent on closing the circuits of contraband trade that pulsed between islands. His orders to seize French ships sailing to close to the shores of Montserrat and St. Kitts ended up with colonists in Basseterre burning him in effigy.

Only days after the new Governor-General arrived in the Leewards, these crises converged to lay the stage for a dramatic episode previously unheard of in the islands. Facing wide spread starvation and racial violence, enslaved men and women took control of the Danish Virgin Island colony of St. John on November 23, 1733. Led by a group of experienced war veterans from the Gold Coast, the rebellion marked the first time that slaves took control of an entire colony in the history of the Caribbean. The rebels seized the local Danish fort and captured several plantations before they fled to the interior of the island. Counterattacks staged from St. Thomas and Tortola proved futile, as did the efforts of a force that sailed from St. Kitts against Mathew's orders. The rebels even repelled a British Royal Navy crew, ultimately holding out in the rough interior for more than six months. The image haunted the imagination of colonists from St. Thomas to St. Kitts and Martinique, who feared that the St. John revolt was inspiring their own slaves to rise against their masters. As one contemporary noted, St. John and its nearby island neighbors seemed to be "on the verge of some terrible happening."

Historians have touched upon the St. John revolt in several studies, usually emphasizing the rebellion as a particularly Danish problem or an example of African ethnic solidarity in the New World.³ Yet few scholars have placed the event within the

³ Kea, relying on sources from the Danish WIC, compares names offered in work of historical fiction to names of slaves on a ship manifest who were traded to St. Thomas in the years prior to the revolt to argue about the ethnic dimensions of the rebellion. He argues persuasively that many of the leaders of the revolt were probably enslaved during the collapse of the Akwamu state, which fell to Asante in 1730. Ray A.

broader context of regional geopolitics and ecological crisis converging in the Leewards in the 1720s and early 1730s.⁴ While it is true that the St. John revolt can be read as a particularly colonial problem—as a conflict between enslaved Akwamu elites from the Gold Coast and European slave masters residing on St. John—analyzing the revolt from this perspective rhetorically separates the event from the regional society in which it took place. Moreover, this approach glosses over the way the local conflict circulated out of the island and blended with a regional discourse about “white” fears about “Negro rebels.” In contrast to an island-centered approach, this chapter elaborates on the social connections that tied the Leewards to Virgin Islands while highlighting the differences that existed between the British sugar islands and their cotton and beef-producing neighbors. This framework underscores how despite differences in labor regimes, enslaved folk in the Virgins shared much in common with slaves who labored in St. Kitts and Antigua. In turn, it becomes easier to see why black and white settlers in the Virgins and the neighboring Leewards believed that the rebellion in St. John spoke to their condition and had threatened their way of life.

Kea, “‘When I Die, I Shall Return to My Own Land’: An ‘Amina’ Slave Rebellion in the Danish West Indies, 1733-1734,” in *The Cloth of Many Colored Silks: Papers on History and Society, Ghanaian and Islamic in Honor of Ivor Wilks* ed. John Hunwick and Nancy Lawler (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996).

⁴ Westergaard’s work, though dated, does situate the revolt against the backdrop of changing Danish-French relations transpiring in Europe, but does not fully consider the archipelagic context of the event and its effects in Guadeloupe, Tortola, and other islands outside of the Danish sphere, see Waldemar Westergaard, *The Danish West Indies under Company Rule (1671-1754) with a Supplementary Chapter, 1755-1917* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 165, 173. Sensbach opens his study of the Moravian convert Rebecca with a discussion of the revolt and the rapid acceleration of sugar cultivation in St. John, but the connections between St. John and the English and French islands are not a focus of his work; Jon F. Sensbach, *Rebecca’s Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), Chapter 1, 22-26. Other studies that mention 1733 crisis are Gaspar, *Bondmen & Rebels*, 221-222, Armstrong, *Creole Transformation from Slavery to Freedom: Historical Archaeology of the East End Community, St. John, Virgin Islands*, 29-31, and Sandra E. Greene, “From Whence They Came: A Note on the Influence of West African Ethnic and Gender Relations on the Organizational Character of the 1733 St. John Slave Rebellion,” in *The Danish West Indian Slave Trade: Virgin Islands Perspectives*, ed. George F. Tyson and Arnold R. Highfield (St. Croix: The Virgin Islands Humanities Council in cooperation with The Antilles Press, 1994).

More specifically, this chapter argues that the prospect of a regional black awakening in the eastern Caribbean erupted within the context of interisland migration from the Leewards to the Virgins, increased policing of slave activity, and ecological catastrophe. More specifically, it argues that the “contagious” nature of slave dissent following the St. John revolt occurred because enslaved folk living in the Virgin Islands were connected to the Leewards not only by way of communication and interisland migration, but also because they lived in a shared economic and ecological zone that rendered the islands interdependent, especially in times of crisis. Not coincidentally, the crises of 1733 and 1734 erupted in the region after a decade of British efforts to rein in illicit trade, piracy, and designs aimed at limiting black market activity. The hurricane of 1733 was thus a trigger that produced a cascade of problems for islanders, for the storm exacerbated the need for locals to trade between the islands at the same time that imperial officials were struggling to stop slaves from marketing desperately needed commodities like wood, locally produced foodstuffs, and other goods. Enslaved folk were central to the sinews of trade, migration, and communication that connected the Virgin Islands to the sugar producing Leewards to the southeast. Only by exploring these connections is it possible to understand why a local event became a regional, transimperial problem that ultimately revealed the joint collusion of white islanders to sustain the slave regime in the Caribbean.

Ecology and Environment

It is not a coincidence that the cluster of islands called the Virgins not only mark an environmental boundary between the Greater Antilles to the west and the Leewards to the southeast, but also a cultural borderland that attracted runaways and “renegade” debtors

who were driven out of the sugar-producing Leewards.⁵ The Virgins sit at both an intersection of wind currents as well as a crossroads of empire. In contrast to St. Kitts, Antigua, Nevis, and Montserrat, where the volcanic settlement made for rich soil perfect for sugar cane, the Virgins are mostly characterized by hard-to-cultivate pebbly earth, which meant that wealthy elites found few reasons to try settle them for sugar cultivation. Colonists looking to escape the colonial state, however, viewed their unique status as an imperial crossroads as an exploitable resource that they could manipulate to their advantage.

Although Dutch, Danish, Spanish, and English authorities divided the Virgins into imperial territories, the calm waters between the islands made regional travel, trade, and migration between islands like Tortola and St. Thomas relatively easy. Robert Dinwiddie, who visited the Virgins by orders of the Board of Trade in 1739, noted the “finest basin of water” he had ever seen linked the islets and islands together in a single chain. So many islands dotted the spaces between Spanish Town, Tortola, and St. John that they appeared to be “landlocked, having but narrow passages betwixt some of the islands to come in and go out.”⁶ According to Christopher Codrington, St. Thomas, St. John, Spanish Town, and Tortola were “so thick together that the people row to St.

⁵ Columbus supposedly named the islands after Saint Ursula and her 11,000 virgins that drowned at sea. Isaac Dookhan, *The History of the Virgin Islands of the United States*, 6th ed. (Kingston: Canoe Press, 1994), 3. As reflected in C. Mortimer’s 1739 Hydrographical Chart of the Virgin Islands (Figure 8 below), sailors and cartographers categorized St. Barts, St. Martin, Anguilla, and the small rocky island of Sombrero as part of the Virgin chain. However, the Virgins are actually divided into two clusters by an underwater tectonic fracture called the Anegada Trench, which separates Sombrero from Anegada by a little more than fifty miles. The largest islands appear in the western cluster, which is comprised of (from east to west) Spanish Town (also known as Virgin Gorda), Anegada, Tortola, St. John, St. Thomas, and Vieques—called Crabb Island in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Closer to St. Kitts are Anguilla, St. Martin, and St. Bartholomew.

⁶ An Account of the British Virgin Islands, Delivered to the Board of Trade on April 29, 1740, CO 152/23/X77/269b.

Thomas's, ten leagues distant, as in a river."⁷ It only took twenty minutes for colonists from Danish St. John's Coral Bay to row a boat east to English Tortola. The opposite route—a journey from Coral Bay to St. Thomas—took about an hour.⁸ The calm waters connecting the islands meant that news and rumors (such as about a slave revolt) could easily traverse imperial divides in the Virgins within minutes.

News and goods not only crisscrossed the Virgins with ease, but also between the Virgins and the Leewards, where British governors viewed the islands as important suppliers of necessary goods like beef, water, slaves, and wood. Famous in the region for its rich timber reserves, poor woodcutters regularly sailed to St. Croix with their slaves from the English sugar islands, where local forests had been decimated by the 1720s. Wood from St. Croix was essential for building projects in the sugar islands, especially after bad storms. St. Thomas, St. John, Spanish Town, and Tortola were not far from the Leewards either, but far enough that ship masters had to make sure their ship was well supplied in case of bad weather. Governor-Generals setting sail from Basseterre, St. Kitts could easily reach Spanish Town in less than a day and a half. The journey for woodcutters from Nevis, St. Kitts, and St. Eustatius heading to St. Croix took about the same time depending on the weather. Sailing back against the currents added to the length of the journey.

Linked by trade, interisland migration, and imperial connections, the Virgin Islands were also linked to the Leewards by way of a common ecology that influenced

⁷ Christopher Codrington to the Council of Trade and Plantations, Antigua, September 27, 1697, CO 152/2/56. Seaman used the tiny islands that rose above the sea as resting and refueling stations. Sailors named many of these tiny anchoring places after the commodities they provided to sailors—Beef Island, Cooper's Island, and Ginger Island were all too small for widespread sugar cultivation, but small enough for artisans and small planters to carve out niche markets for freebooters, sailors, and sometimes pirates.

⁸ Westergaard, *Danish West Indies*, 3.

these very sinews that connected them across the ocean waters. The Virgins reside on the northern border of the Intertropical Convergence Zone and are subject to the easterlies, and thus experience many of the same weather patterns that influenced shipping and cultivation seasons in the nearby British Leewards. As a result, hurricanes that strike Antigua and St. Kitts almost always bear down on the Virgins as well. While the chain of islands share a common climate, unlike St. Kitts, Nevis, and Antigua, their soils are mostly comprised of limestone and metamorphic and sedimentary rock rather than volcanic sediment, and thus tend to have rocky coasts and noticeably fewer stretches of arable land.⁹ In addition to the soil composition, the lack of fresh spring water on the islands made establishing large settlements difficult. As in Antigua, colonists found cisterns essential for gathering freshwater. Few natural sources existed on the rocky Virgin Islands.¹⁰ One resident of St. Thomas described the ground water there as “lukewarm” and “sulfurous white in color” such that it looked like “milk whey” in addition to “being muddy and mixed with clay.” Poorer residents who could not afford to keep cisterns boiled the brackish water with cinnamon and then skimmed off the cloudy residue that boiled to the top.¹¹ During droughts and other ecological catastrophes, colonists sailed to surrounding islands to fetch water—especially Tortola, which benefitted from the presence of several natural creeks that provided them with fresh water.¹²

⁹ Watts, *West Indies*, 12-22.

¹⁰ Christopher Codrington to the Council of Trade and Plantations, Antigua, September 27, 1697, CO 152/2/56.

¹¹ Carstens, *St. Thomas*, 122-1233.

¹² An Account of the British Virgin Islands, April 29, 1740, CO 152/23/X77/269b.

While the rocky, hard to cultivate soil in many of the Virgins made them less desirable to elite sugar planters, the harbors at St. Thomas and St. John made the two Danish islands particularly attractive to merchants who hoped to exploit the crossroads as a key trading ground for slaves, sugar, and other supplies to plantation owners in the Leewards. In his two-volume study of the British West Indies, Bryan Edwards noted that St. John's Coral Bay was the second best harbor in the northern Caribbean—second only to English Harbor in Antigua.¹³ In 1724, Governor-General John Hart of the British Leewards remarked to the Board of Trade that Coral Bay was the “finest harbour in the West Indies.”¹⁴ The security sailors found at Coral Bay, St. John rivaled the natural safety offered by St. Thomas's major port at Long Bay. Jean-Baptiste Labat reported to his readers in France that St. Thomas Harbor was “very nice and very convenient.”¹⁵ Johann Lorentz Carstens, who was born and lived in St. Thomas until 1739, argued that the small island's port was “one of the finest harbors in all of the American islands.”¹⁶ In the 1720s, when the Virgins became a major focus for governors charged with securing slave and sugar routes, Governor-General John Hart did not exaggerate the significance of St. Thomas and St. John to imperial shipping. Remarking on the recent and disputed Danish colonization of St. John, Hart called the Danish settlement of St. John “a matter of so great Consequence.” “These two Islands,” Hart explained, were as important to the

¹³ Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (Philadelphia: Printed and sold by James Humphreys, 1806), I:500.

¹⁴ Governor General John Hart to Lord Carteret, Secretary of State, St. Kitts, May 24, 1722, CO 152/14/R96/303.

¹⁵ Labat, *Nouveau Voyage*, VI:313-314.

¹⁶ Carstens, *St. Thomas*, 21. This work is a translation from a formerly unpublished manuscript written by Carstens (1705-1747) after his retirement to Denmark in the 1739. It was first published in 1981 under the title *En Almindelig Beskrivelse om alle Danske, Americanske, eller West-Indiske Ey-Lande*.

“preservation of the West India Trade as the Town of Gibraltar and Port Mahon are to that of the Levant.”¹⁷

Creole Borderlands and Local Diasporas

Hart’s description of St. Thomas and St. John points to the increased problems that the Virgin borderland posed to Leeward colonial officials in the 1720s. Although white and enslaved folk in the Virgin Islands were linked to the Leewards by way of environment, migration, and trade for necessary goods like beef, cattle, water, and wood, they were officially divided by imperial rule. Maintaining this authority in a region tied together by family connections and commerce was in turn a difficult task, especially for British officials in the Leewards, who knew that their colonists depended on access to the Virgins for commodities, commerce, and news. Royal commissions issued to Governor-Generals of “His Majesty’s Leeward Islands” stated that the Virgins belonging to the Crown fell under their domain, and thus English governors frequently called Anguilla, Tortola, and Spanish Town the “Leeward Virgin Islands,” a signifier of their ambiguous place in the British imperial cartographic psyche.¹⁸ In the minds of imperial officials who visited them, however, the Virgin Islands were far from English. They were backward places where imperial loyalty was always in doubt. Whereas the Leewards were rapidly becoming islands where aspiring slaveowners could learn to become masters of men and land, the Virgins were places where the disaffected and detached could flee to escape the clutches of the colonial state. As early as 1682, Governor-General Stapleton complained to the Lords of Trade that the “Dutch and the Danes” in

¹⁷ Hart to Board of Trade, St. Kitts, May 24, 1722, CO 314/1/39-40b.

¹⁸ Governor John Hart to the Right Honourable Lords Commissioners for Trade and Plantations, July 12, 1724, CO 152/14/R96/302.

the Virgin Islands allowed “fugitive servants, black and white” as well as “seaman and other debtors” to flock to St. Thomas.¹⁹ In 1697, Christopher Codrington informed the Council of Trade that “deserters” sparsely populated the “innumerable small islands” of the “Virgins Leewards.”²⁰

After 1713, when peace returned to the Caribbean, Leeward Governor-Generals began to pay more attention to the role the Virgin Islands played in both local and imperial affairs. The growth of St. Thomas as a free port during the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1713) triggered new attention to the region. First settled in 1672, by 1700 Danish St. Thomas had become one of the most cosmopolitan ports in the northern Caribbean. Citing neutrality during moments of imperial conflict, the Danish West India Company allowed vessels from all nations to anchor at the island to trade for provisions and slaves.²¹ Commerce swelled during wartime. As island born Johan Carstens noted, when war “waged in America, all contending parties go there for provisioning.”²² Carstens, who lived on the island during the War of Spanish Succession, recalled the amazing view from above the harbor in his memoir. The port “received over 50 sailing ships” daily from all over the Caribbean. Canoes, sloops, and other locally owned watercraft cluttered the harbor, and during the peak of the island’s rise to fame, nearly 200 ships might anchor in the bay at one time. “On such occasions the harbor was the

¹⁹ Governor-General William Stapleton to the Lords of Trade, Nevis, November 11, 1682, CO 1/49/95, extracted in *CSPCO* 11/777/323.

²⁰ Christopher Codrington to the Council of Trade and Plantations, Antigua, September 27, 1697, CO 152/2/56.

²¹ Labat, *Nouveau Voyage*, VI:323.

²² Carstens, *St. Thomas*, 25.

scene of quite a sight,” Carstens recalled, “with all the ships flying their colors and booming their cannons all day long.”²³

Although the government of St. Thomas was officially Danish, the Danish WIC encouraged settlers from all over to come and settle the island. By the 1720s, the majority of white colonists living on St. Thomas were not even Danish, but rather island-born Creoles.²⁴ Dutch-speaking families driven out of St. Eustatius, St. Martin, and Tortola lived alongside English speakers from the British Leewards and French settlers who left St. Croix and St. Barts during wartime. Planters and merchants were welcomed regardless of their religion (as long as it was Judeo-Christian). Unlike the British Leewards, where Protestants sought to marginalize Quakers and Jews and isolate Catholics to Montserrat, St. Thomas was a place where people of “any faith” were allowed to practice their religion “without fear of coercion” as long as they showed themselves to be “decent people in the eyes of God.”²⁵ All Christian residents of St. Thomas were buried in the same ground, but Jewish residents and enslaved “heathens” were buried separately.²⁶ Dutch families with ties to St. Eustatius held considerable sway on the island. Jean-Baptiste Labat, who visited St. Thomas several times while crisscrossing the islands between Martinique and Saint-Domingue, noted that the “Hollanders” of the island controlled the island’s regional trade “under the name” of being Danish.²⁷

²³ Ibid., 21-22.

²⁴ As early as 1686, West Indian-born colonists comprised the majority of adult white inhabitants living on St. Thomas. Neville A.T. Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies: St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix*, ed. B.W. Higman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 10, Westergaard, *Danish West Indies*, 122-123.

²⁵ Carstens, *St. Thomas*, 45.

²⁶ Ibid., 39.

²⁷ Labat, *Nouveau Voyage*, V:314.

When the Danish WIC moved to colonize St. John in 1718, they relied on a similar open-door policy to attract settlers to the island. News of the new settlement reached the Leewards to the east in less than a week. Colonists in Antigua learned that aspiring planters who moved to the island and naturalized as Danes would be guaranteed access to the WIC slave trade at St. Thomas. The Danish government also exempted new plantation owners from paying taxes for eight years. Absentees were even allowed to buy up plantation land on St. John, as long as they paid a white servant to oversee their affairs.²⁸

Apparently settlers in St. John were aware that England had long claimed rights to the island, which sits less than three miles from the eastern tip of St. Thomas. When Danish governor Bredal published the rules of settlement, colonists asked him if it was their responsibility to defend St. John from the English if a Royal Navy ship appeared. Potential colonists also wanted to know if the Danish WIC would reimburse them for any slaves taken during an English attack.²⁹ Fears about English reprisals did not deter planters from buying land plots from the Danish Company, however. By 1721, Dutch-speaking families owned 25 of the 39 plantations on St. John.³⁰ Most of the plantations in St. John were actually owned by white absentees who lived across the channel in St. Thomas—36 of 64 estates were managed by *mesterknecht* in 1728.³¹

²⁸ At a Meeting of His Excellency, Council, & Assembly held at the town of St. Johns on Monday the 31st day of March, Anno dom. 1718, Antigua, CO 314/1/13-15.

²⁹ At a Meeting of His Excellency, Council, & Assembly held at the town of St. Johns on Monday the 31st day of March, Anno dom. 1718, Antigua, CO 314/1/15-15b.

³⁰ Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies*, 11.

³¹ Westergaard, *Danish West Indies*, 319.

By 1733, African and island-born Creoles in St. John outnumbered white folk 1,087 to 208.³² Black and white sailors used schooners and barks to transship cotton, sugar, and other goods across the channel to St. Thomas for sale or finishing, where it was then gathered and sent to the larger sugar islands for sale.³³ St. Thomas, too, was a black majority. Enslaved folk outnumbered the white population on St. Thomas by 1688. By 1725, nearly 4,500 people of African descent labored at the entrepôt as opposed to only 356 white adults.³⁴ In contrast to the British Leewards, where freedom was essentially synonymous with whiteness by the 1720s, St. Thomas had a sizeable free community of African descent. Carstens believed that nearly 500 “free men” and “free slaves” lived on the island where he grew up. Many lived in the “Negro town” on the island in homes their “ancestors built,” but some also worked outside of town as washers, sewers, coopers, tailors, and bakers.³⁵ On Sundays, freed people in St. Thomas worked alongside enslaved folk at the marketplace, where they sold bread, fish, sugar cakes, pork, meat, butter, and kitchen spices to sailors and colonists from Tortola and St. John.³⁶

The populations of the largest “English” Virgins were also considerably diverse. Census lists reflect the web of social relationships that linked white and enslaved folk in Spanish Town and Tortola to other islands in the region, including St. Thomas and the British Leewards. Partly in an effort to gain insight into the borderland islands under his government, Governor-General Walter Hamilton collected census data about Anguilla, Spanish Town, Tortola, and Crabb Island in 1717. The lists not only highlight the

³² Ibid., 318-319.

³³ Carstens, *St. Thomas*, 31-32.

³⁴ Westergaard, *Danish West Indies*, 318-319.

³⁵ Carstens, *St. Thomas*, 61-63, 47-48.

³⁶ Ibid., 48.

preponderance of small-scale slave owning in the Virgin frontier, but also the ways colonists and slaves on the islands were socially connected to Dutch St. Eustatius, English St. Kitts, French St. Barts, and Danish St. Thomas.³⁷ Settlers in the English Virgins were remarkably diverse. Most white colonists on the islands were born and raised in the Caribbean, not Europe. Nearly 72% of the 64 households on Spanish Town moved to the island from other islands in the Lesser Antilles, including St. Martins and St. Barts. Eight families came from Nevis, Antigua, Montserrat, and St. Kitts. Only five of the families living on the island in 1717 identified Spanish Town as their birthplace. Most of the inhabitants had come to the island from Anguilla and Dutch St. Eustatius; together, colonists from these two islands accounted for nearly 50% of the households. Europeans only headed ten of the households: three were English, three Irish, two Welsh, and two French. One family—the Croskes—was from Bermuda.³⁸ Without a doubt, when these families moved, they brought their most valuable property with them—enslaved people of color. These migrations underscored for slaves that being a “Negro”—being black—was an experience that transcended island boundaries, an

³⁷ Hamilton’s men recorded names for 96 households on Anguilla. Some of the households had multiple adult males living together and many of the families were female headed. In fact, women comprised 61% of the adult white population on the long, flat island, where they outnumbered males 154 to 97. “Negroes” in the households were not classified by gender or age-grade, but totaled 824 people, or nearly 63% of the island’s inhabitants. Forty-one men, women, and children labored for the “Captain” of Anguilla, who owned more slaves than any other colonists on the island. Only one other landowner on the island had more than 30 laborers of color. Sixty of the ninety-six households (nearly 87%) had fewer than ten people of African descent living with them; but only three families had no black laborers at all. Two hundred and thirty four children resided on Anguilla. A List of the Inhabitants of Anguilla, with their Negroes, November 22, 1717, CO 152/12/P68/red67iv. When he visited Anguilla 22 years later, Robert Dinwiddie believed 160 white men capable of bearing arms and 800 enslaved folk lived on the island. An Account of the British Virgin Islands, April 29, 1740, CO 152/23/X77/270b. A List of the Inhabitants of Tortola, November 14, 1717, CO 152/12/P72/red67viii, A List of Men Able to Bear Arms, and of Negroes on Crabb Island, n.d., CO 152/12/P73/red67ix.

³⁸ A List of the Inhabitants of Spanish Town, November 18, 1717, CO 152/12/P70/red67vii. Children comprised 30% of the population.

A List of the Inhabitants of Spanish Town taken the 18 day of November 1717.

Children	Men	Women	Children	Men	Women
1	1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5	5	5
6	6	6	6	6	6
7	7	7	7	7	7
8	8	8	8	8	8
9	9	9	9	9	9
10	10	10	10	10	10
11	11	11	11	11	11
12	12	12	12	12	12
13	13	13	13	13	13
14	14	14	14	14	14
15	15	15	15	15	15
16	16	16	16	16	16
17	17	17	17	17	17
18	18	18	18	18	18
19	19	19	19	19	19
20	20	20	20	20	20
21	21	21	21	21	21
22	22	22	22	22	22
23	23	23	23	23	23
24	24	24	24	24	24
25	25	25	25	25	25
26	26	26	26	26	26
27	27	27	27	27	27
28	28	28	28	28	28
29	29	29	29	29	29
30	30	30	30	30	30
31	31	31	31	31	31
32	32	32	32	32	32
33	33	33	33	33	33
34	34	34	34	34	34
35	35	35	35	35	35
36	36	36	36	36	36
37	37	37	37	37	37
38	38	38	38	38	38
39	39	39	39	39	39
40	40	40	40	40	40
41	41	41	41	41	41
42	42	42	42	42	42
43	43	43	43	43	43
44	44	44	44	44	44
45	45	45	45	45	45
46	46	46	46	46	46
47	47	47	47	47	47
48	48	48	48	48	48
49	49	49	49	49	49
50	50	50	50	50	50

Figure 9:

Excerpt of "A List of the Inhabitants of Spanish Town," November 18, 1717. CO 152/12/P70/67vii.

understanding that was reaffirmed as enslaved folk participated more actively in the regional economy.

Even on small Spanish Town, racial slavery was standard practice for white families. Just fewer than 50% of the inhabitants of Spanish Town were listed as “Negro.” Eighty-two percent of the households had black laborers. Yet 69 of the 308 people of African descent living on the island labored for three masters, probably small-scale sugar producers who sold molasses and other cane products to nearby St. Thomas. The rest of the households on Spanish Town raised a mixture of subsistence crops, cotton, and hides for the local interisland trade. A few settlers living on Spanish Town shipped cotton and small amounts of indigo to St. Kitts.³⁹ Cotton production increased in the 1720s and 1730s. By 1739 the island exported 150,000 pounds of the fluffy crop but only 100 casks of sugar. Unlike Anguilla, the size of the slave population in Spanish Town increased in the 1720s and 1730s instead of remaining stagnant. By 1740, 1,000 enslaved folk labored on Spanish Town.⁴⁰

Tortola was even smaller than Spanish Town in 1717 yet also had a diverse set of colonists. Settlers from Barbados, Curaçao, and South Carolina lived alongside colonists who were born in England, Ireland, Scotland, Holland, and France. Thirteen of the forty households were comprised of people who fled the larger British Leewards—six families had come from St. Kitts and five from Antigua. Three families settled after fleeing St. Eustatius and five had previously lived on Anguilla to the east. Nine families owned no slaves at all; 79 of the 176 inhabitants listed as “Negro” on the list worked on five estates, three of which were owned by settlers who moved to the island from Antigua. The other

³⁹ Captain Candler of the H.M.S. Winchelsea to Mr. Secretary Burchett, May 12, 1717, CO 152/12/10i.

⁴⁰ An Account of the British Virgin Islands, April 29, 1740, CO 152/23/X77/269b.

two largest slaveowners were Francis Pagea from St. Eustatius and Benjamin Hodge from Anguilla. Elizabeth Hossom was the only woman on the island identified as a landowner. She kept fifteen people of African descent as slaves—the second most of any other white settlers living on the island. Tortola’s domestic economy grew considerably between 1717 and 1739, as did the size of the slave labor force. In 1740, Robert Dinwiddie estimated that islanders produced upwards of 600,000 pounds of cotton the previous year and that residents might soon begin to grow coffee. He also estimated that nearly 1,500 slaves labored on Tortola in 1739, an increase of 752% in less than a quarter century.⁴¹

Both Hamilton’s and Dinwiddie’s reports highlight major differences between the sugar islands of St. Kitts, Antigua, Nevis, and Montserrat and their Virgin cousins. Cotton—not sugar—was the most important crop in the Virgins.⁴² As the censuses indicate, only two or three colonists in the islands controlled enough labor to run a plantation with refining works for turning the cane into sugar, molasses, or rum.⁴³ Unlike sugar, cotton can be picked, stored, and then sent an extended distance for processing elsewhere. Cotton farms also required less capital—perfect for aspiring planters.

Even if they did raise crops for export, most farming families in the Virgins also raised subsistence crops like yams while cattle for hides and meat. Captain Candler,

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Even in St. Thomas and St. John, cotton was a widely produced crop. Cotton farms also required less capital—perfect for aspiring planters. None of the 48 cotton farms in St. John had ginning operations in 1728, whereas 21 of the 30 sugar estates had boilers for making sugar and molasses. Cotton works were common in St. Thomas—slaves skilled in the art of cotton refining worked on 74 out of 87 cotton plantations with ginning operations there in 1725. Westergaard, *Danish West Indies*, 319.

⁴³ Given the small size of the islands, however, it is possible that farms worked by 10-20 enslaved folk grew cane that was then carted to a central processor, much in the way that small farmers did in Brazil in the early seventeenth century. Stuart B. Schwartz, “A Commonwealth within Itself: The Early Brazilian Sugar Industry, 1550-1670,” in *Tropical Babels: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 182-186.

appointed by the Admiralty to survey the West Indies in 1717, related to Secretary Burchett that residents in Spanish Town mostly produced “Indian corn, yams, and potatoes.” The cane raised on the island never grew tall enough to make muscavado, but owners produced a “little rum of them” which they sold to other colonists on the island. Settlers on Tortola also raised corn, yams, potatoes, and a “little cotton,” while producing small casks of dark rum that they sold to sailors. Tortolans raised cattle and goats for meat and hides, which they also provided to seaman who anchored there for respite.⁴⁴

Ultimately, St. Thomas proved to be the most important regional market for settlers on Spanish Town and Tortola. Black and white colonists from the two islands carried their goods to St. Thomas in small canoes along the calm waterway that linked the islands together.⁴⁵ These connections only accelerated as cotton production increased in the Virgins in the 1720s and 1730s.

Whether or not the power relationships between owners and enslaved folk in the Virgins bore qualities of the “paternalistic” cotton regime of the 19th century U.S. South is difficult to assess, but the character of labor and treatment of enslaved folk who labored on cotton farms and in cattle pastures in the rocky Virgins certainly differed from the sugar regimes that dominated the Leewards to the southeast. Although the slave regime hinged on the ability of white colonists to monopolize violent force against enslaved folk, such small-scale farms depended on maintaining interpersonal relationships with people of African descent. Black laborers in the Virgins kept their masters alive by working in domestic production and as interisland traders, and poor white slaveowners labored alongside enslaved folk in the provision grounds, cotton

⁴⁴ Captain Candler of the H.M.S. Winchelsea to Mr. Secretary Burchett, May 12, 1717, CO 152/12/10i.

⁴⁵ Governor-General Codrington to the Council of Trade and Plantations, Antigua, September 1697, CO 152/2/56.

fields, and cooper's quarters. In short, white folk who grew cotton, raised cattle or goats, and sold these provisions to sailors or to merchants at St. Thomas and St. Eustatius lived on more equal footing with their slaves in contrast to the sugar plantations in the Leewards, where white managers and attorneys kept a distance from hands-on labor in the sugar fields and rum house.

The small nature of the Virgins and their rocky soil thus shaped the character of agricultural production, and, in turn, the character of labor and power relations in the small islands that rest to the northwest of St. Kitts. Since white families depended on slave labor to transport goods to nearby islands and anchored ships, enslaved men and women in the Virgins had greater access to the passing ships that crisscrossed the archipelago. Such small numbers of enslaved folk per household meant that enslaved folk in the Virgins had to be able to work in the cotton fields and provision grounds as well as on the shoreline as fisherman and turtle catchers. Even in comparably large St. Thomas, where the Danish WIC established laws and a hierarchy of commissioned officers to police slave activity, people of color were deeply connected to the circuits of trade and communication that linked the major port to the other islands nearby. Slaves made canoes out of the island's large trees, which they used for fishing around the island and "bringing news to people about arriving ships."⁴⁶ Carstens noted only 16 white sailors worked permanently on the ships owned by the Danish Company at St. Thomas; the rest of the sailing crews that plied between and around the island were comprised of enslaved men. Sloops and schooners owned by private traders in St. Thomas also had majority black crews. However, unlike Tortola, Spanish Town, and Anguilla, private

⁴⁶ Carstens, *St. Thomas*, 28-29.

traders in St. Thomas had to abide by legal restrictions stipulating the number of white sailors that plied the local waters with enslaved interisland carters. To guard against slaves stealing boats and sloops and fleeing the island for Puerto Rico, the governor issued a proclamation that private vessels had to be manned by at least two white sailors while larger ships had to keep at least six.⁴⁷ In the English Virgins, where there were no formal governments of any kind, restrictions on black access to the sea was determined by custom and trust, not law.

Finally, landowners in the Virgins could not rely on the Atlantic slave trade in the same way as sugar plantation owners in St. Thomas and the Leewards. Most white families in the Virgins were comparatively poor thus excluded from buying enslaved Africans on credit or bills of exchange. As a result, enslaved folk residing in Tortola, Spanish Town, and Anguilla probably shared similar roots with their owners and were part of a regional Creole diaspora even though white colonists viewed themselves as possessing a superior status that placed them above their slaves. In turn, the commercial and migratory ties that linked enslaved folk personally to other nearby islands underscored for them that the islands that stretched between Guadeloupe and St. Thomas were all linked together by the common practice of racial slavery, regardless of the kinds of agricultural labor they were forced to engage in. As slaves who were sold between the islands or forced to migrate between them knew well, perceptions of racial superiority determined social status from St. Kitts to St. Thomas, regardless of imperial affiliation. Blackness was a regional marker of social status, whether the slave experiencing life in the region was born in Africa or the islands.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 29.

Tightening the Noose on Black Markets

In 1717, after anchoring at Crabb Island, Tortola, Spanish Town, and Anguilla, Royal Navy Captain Candler wrote back to his the Secretary of State in England to let him know the islands were “barren,” “wretched,” “poor,” “not worth while” to England’s imperial economy. In Candler’s view, the Virgins were simply a “nest for pirates,” islands where criminals like the villainous pirate Sam Bellamy “lurkt about the creeks and islands.”⁴⁸ Even St. Thomas—perhaps the most cosmopolitan port in the Lesser Antilles—was a “neuter upon the seas” where smugglers, pirates, and French privateers could victual before “infesting” His Majesty’s Leewards.⁴⁹

While Candler believed that the Virgins were not worth integrating into the empire, both Leeward governors and imperial officials believed otherwise. By 1713, several changes had transformed the Atlantic economy in ways that made the Virgins more important than ever to British (and French) imperial commerce. The rapid acceleration of the slave trade throughout the West Indies was central among them. Although they were not key markets, safe crossing through the Virgins was vital to slave and sugar merchants. Ships passing between Barbados and the Leewards and the Northern Colonies had to pass near the Virgins, as did ships trading between Africa and Jamaica. Yet, because the islands were not firmly under the control of imperial power—functioning more like borderlands rather than legitimate colonies tied to the metropole—the Virgins proved to be a troublesome imperial space in the 1720s. Not only did colonists in the islands seem to welcome freebooters and pirates, their place in the trade

⁴⁸ Captain Candler of the H.M.S. Winchelsea to Mr. Secretary Burchett, May 12, 1717, CO 152/12/10i.

⁴⁹ Extract of a Letter from Colonel John Hart, Governor of the Leeward Islands, St. Kitts, July 10, 1724, CO 314/1/red6i/44, Governor-General John Hart to Secretary Lord Carteret, St. Kitts, May 24, 1722, CO 314/1/red5/39.

circuits meant they were also excellent smuggling routes, and thus places that drained the imperial state of customs duties.

Both smuggling and piracy were major issues for the British imperial state after the War of Spanish Succession. Unredeemed public debt in England reached £16.7 million, an all time high, following the war. By 1721, following the South Sea Bubble, public debt nearly tripled to £50 million.⁵⁰ During the same time, piracy reached its apogee. Formerly impressed sailors were left to fend for themselves following the Peace of Utrecht. In 1713, the British state employed some 49,860 sailors, but by 1715 the number stood at a mere 13,475. A decade later the Royal Navy consisted of only 6,298 seamen. Wages also fell. Sailors who stayed with the Royal Navy faced a precipitous drop of nearly 50% in their pay between 1707 and 1713 as state officials sought to rein in swelling wartime debt.⁵¹ Estimates place the number of pirates plying the Atlantic around 2,200 between 1718 and 1722.

Although their numbers were comparatively small, the impact of piracy on imperial shipping—particularly the slave trade—was immense during the decade after 1716. One contemporary suggested that pirates were responsible for more losses to British ships and cargo than the combined naval and privateering campaigns of France and Spain during the previous decade of war. Markus Rediker has argued this statement was on the mark, estimating that pirates sacked nearly 2,400 vessels during the period spanning 1716 to 1726.⁵² In 1717 and 1718, state officials issued pardons in an effort to

⁵⁰ John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688-1783* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 114.

⁵¹ Marcus Buford Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 282-283.

⁵² Marcus Buford Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 32-33.

rein in pirates, but thereafter, royal officials intensified their efforts to eradicate sea robbers by way of the gallows.⁵³ Following the War of Spanish Succession, imperial officials in Britain (and France) embarked on a multi-tiered effort to tighten state power over commerce in the Lesser Antilles.⁵⁴ In the Leewards, this meant tightening the noose around the Virgin Islands and bringing the islands more firmly under imperial control.

Leeward governors firmly believed that many of the settlers in Tortola and Spanish Town were former freebooters who sheltered pirates and traded foodstuffs with them. In part, these trading relationships resulted from the fact that many of the islands' white settlers were former sailors who had decided to settle in the islands because they fell outside of the immediate reach of the Leeward colonial state. When Governor-General John Hart visited Tortola and Spanish Town to announce his royal commission over the islands in 1724, he found a motley group of colonists who possessed a "posterity" for "not knowing the world." Asking the colonists where they came from, the settlers living on the two islands told him that they had lately been increased "by pirates, who have come in upon acts of Grace" and married with Creole women. Later, Hart reported back to the Board of Trade that while he "cou'd gett no possitive proof" he firmly believed the colonists at Spanish Town and Tortola did "aid and assist the pirates." Hart maintained that the sea robbers "frequently" anchored at the islands to trade plunder

⁵³ Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750*, 283. In the Leewards, tradition dictated that pirates were tried and executed at Nevis even though Governor-Generals, who also presided as Vice-Admiral, had long ceased governing the federation from the island, see Smith, *Natural History of Nevis*, 225.

⁵⁴ Frank Wesley Pitman, *The Development of the British West Indies, 1700-1763*, Yale Historical Publications. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917), 271-278, Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 60-64. For a discussion of French efforts to curb illicit trade in the 1720s, see Pritchard, *Search of Empire*, 206-208.

for provisions and that settlers at the two islands provided news to pirates and other sailors about sailing routes.⁵⁵

By the time Hart visited the Virgins under his government, imperial law already forbid trading with pirates. In 1721, following the disaster of the South Seas Bubble and a rash of pirate attacks on slaving ships, Parliament passed “An Act for the More Effectual Suppressing of Piracy.” The law rendered permanent many features of a temporary act passed during the Nine Years War, but the new law stipulated that colonists who helped pirates were also “pirates, felons, and robbers.” Accessories—namely persons who harbored or knowingly traded goods with pirates—thus faced the penalty of death by noose.⁵⁶

Enforcing the imperial law in the Virgins, however, was next to impossible. Not only did the residents in the islands benefit from commerce with freebooters, but the colonists living on the tiny islands also lacked anything akin to a government. In Hart’s opinion, the Virgins had “no form of justice.” Instead, the folk culture of the ship and the cottage shaped the ways colonists policed social behavior. Despite their lack of government, Hart believed that the landowners he met at Spanish Town in 1724 held a “fierce contention for property,” which indicated to him that the islands could be integrated more firmly into the Leeward government. So during his visit, Hart appointed several men as justices of the peace, a literate man as secretary, and a provost martial. He

⁵⁵ Governor-General John Hart to the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, July 12, 1724, CO 152/14/R96/302b.

⁵⁶ A reprint of the laws appears in William David Evans, Anthony Hammond, and Thomas Colpitts Granger, eds., *A Collection of Statutes Connected with the General Administration of the Law*, 3rd ed., 10 vols. (London: Thomas Blenkarn, Edward Lumley, and W.H. Bond, 1836), VI: 126-133, quoted from page 131. See also Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750*, 283.

also commissioned several men into a militia to put the island under some “military discipline.”⁵⁷

Efforts by Leeward Governors to drive a wedge between colonists in the Virgins and pirates were effective in Anguilla. In 1720, crewmembers from the *Royal Rover*, a pirate ship that captured several slaving vessels on the Gold Coast and was headed to St. Thomas, anchored off Anguilla to victual. When six of the crew decided to go ashore to spend some of their loot on rum, colonists detained the sailors and informed Governor-General Hamilton of their capture. Anguillans sent the pirates to Nevis in chains, where they were subsequently tried and hanged.⁵⁸ News of their capture and murder sparked a cycle of revenge, but pirates directed their payback to the colonial state rather than the poor colonists in the Virgins. The September following the episode, pirate Bartholomew Roberts sailed into Basseterre at St. Kitts, fired canons at the fort, and burnt several ships. Roberts even sent a letter to Lieutenant-Governor Mathew to notify him that if the winds had been more favorable that day the pirate would have personally stormed the island and confronted the imperial plantation owner face to face.⁵⁹ Such acts of revenge may have temporarily given colonists who colluded with imperial governors pause, but in the end, the power of the Royal Navy and the display of imperial violence in the colonies trumped such audacious acts against the colonial state. Between 1716 and 1726, the number of pirates believed to be careening in the West Indies dropped precipitously. After Hart’s

⁵⁷ Governor-General John Hart to the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, July 12, 1724, CO 152/14/R96/302b.

⁵⁸ Governor-General Hamilton to the Council of Trade and Plantations, Nevis, March 28, 1720, CO 152/13/67-72.

⁵⁹ Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age*, 97, 101-102.

tenure as Governor-General, the number of pirates believed to be plying the Atlantic fell to some 200 sailors.⁶⁰

Legislative efforts in the larger Leewards to curb trade by people of color in port towns followed imperial efforts to eradicate piracy and illicit trade in the Virgins. The year after Bartholomew Roberts burned ships at St. Kitts, colonists on the island faced a rise in black banditry and marooning. In 1722, legislators revamped their laws governing slave movement and activity. The Kittsian government authorized white dragoons to capture the “armed bands” and “companies” of runaways led by Antego Quamina, Johnny Congo, and Christopher. Although most of the new act focused on policing black bandits, the law also established heavy penalties on white folk who purchased goods from enslaved blacks. Seaman and colonists caught buying sugar, rum, molasses, syrup, cotton, wine, strong liquors, plate, clothing, or any “household goods” from enslaved folk faced six months imprisonment. If the value of the sale exceeded twenty shillings, white colonists could be convicted of a felony and “punished accordingly.”⁶¹ Facing increased desertions, the Antiguan legislature passed a similar law governing slave activity less than a year later, in 1723.⁶²

In part, the new laws in St. Kitts and Antigua were designed to protect planter property, but they also drove a wedge between enslaved island laborers and sailors. Montserratian lawmakers passed similar laws targeting black markets in the 1720s. In 1724, legislators on the island passed an act that fined white colonists who traded liquor

⁶⁰ Ibid., 30.

⁶¹ An Act for Attainting several Negroes therein Mentioned; and for the more effectual preventing Negroes from Running Away from their Master’s Service; and for explaining and rendering more effectual an Act entitled, An Act for the Better Government of Negroes, and other Slaves, no. 52, 1722, *Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of St. Christopher*, 69-60, 73.

⁶² An Act for attainting several Slaves now run away from their Master’s Service, and for the better Government of Slaves, no. 176, 1723, *Laws of the Leeward Islands*, 211-212.

with “Negroes and other slaves” at Montserrat’s ports of Plymouth and Kinsale. White colonists who purchased rum from black hucksters faced a fine of twenty shillings; if the accused could not afford the fine, constables were authorized to whip the slave on “his or her bare back.” The 1724 Montserrat law also targeted seamen. Sailors were obligated to carry tickets signed by their shipmasters if they wanted to remain on the island after eight in the evening. The law ordered colonists to turn in unlicensed sailors to the constable so that they could be thrown in jail.⁶³

While colonial efforts to restrict black markets in the 1720s and 1730s were direct, other legislative and imperial efforts not specifically directed at slaves and sailors also produced unforeseen effects on the flow of regional trade. After bad weather in September of 1722, a black sailor and his master from Montserrat were thrown in jail in Martinique when they were found trading farina and grass for a barrel of herring at Trois-Riviers, Guadeloupe. French officials accused the two men of violating an embargo in place in the French Islands, which, unbeknownst to the crew, was put in place while naval officials at Martinique prepared to blockade Admiral Uring’s move to settle St. Lucia and St. Vincent.⁶⁴ Efforts to increase domestic access to gunpowder also worked to depress interisland trade in the late 1720s. The meat trade between the Virgins and St. Kitts was particularly influenced by a law that was not specifically legislated with either in mind. In an effort to increase the colonial state’s supply of gunpowder, ships trading to St. Kitts were obligated to pay customs officers a powder duty when they anchored at

⁶³ An Act to Prevent the frequenting of Taverns, Alehouses, and other Tippling-houses by Seaman; and for the preventing the selling of Run, Rum Punch, or other Liquors to Negroes on Sundays, no. 85, 1724, *Laws of Montserrat*, 81. The law did not ban people of color from working in tippling houses and taverns or even gathering there with sailors.

⁶⁴ Governor-General John Hart to the General at Martinique, Antigua, CO 152/14/R53/184-185.

the island. Virgin Islanders, however, refused to give up some of their gunpowder, in turn redirecting their ships carry cattle and meat to the French islands and St. Eustatius.⁶⁵

Interisland trade was essential to preserving the sugar islands in the Leewards even though it frustrated imperial officials. In places like Nevis and Antigua, where enslaved folk only had small provisioning grounds to raise crops, food imports were essential. This was especially true when droughts or hurricanes befell the islands, as provision grounds were ruined, cisterns dried up or were smashed apart, and cattle and guinea hens died from hunger. Supplies from absentee masters were never enough during moments of ecological chaos—they simply took too long to arrive. The loss of domestic provisions thus put more pressure on locals to depend on interisland trade and regional markets like St. Thomas for goods they could not access from slave provision grounds.⁶⁶ Meat supplies from the Virgins were particularly important in the short term, as were flour and corn supplies from Pennsylvania and New York, since planters did not have to wait several months for Irish salted beef from abroad.⁶⁷ Water—the most essential of all colonial goods—was particularly important after storms and during droughts. During a period of extensive drought in 1725, sailors from the Leewards were taking small sloops to Guadeloupe to fetch fresh water and selling it for fifteen shillings a hogshead upon their return to the dry English sugar islands.⁶⁸

Internally, the response of planters and merchants to environmental catastrophes typically involved tightening their grasp on property and specie by targeting enslaved

⁶⁵ Governor-General John Hart to the Lords of Trade, St. Kitts, May 20, 1726, CO 152/15/R166/265.

⁶⁶ Alford to Thomas Grigg, October 16, 1717, Tudway Papers, DD/TD/15, Alford to Thomas Fenton, October 16, 1717, Tudway Papers, DD/TD/15, Timothy Tyrrell to Lady Stapleton, St. Kitts, September 25, 1725, Stapleton MSS. 9/1, Governor-General Hart to the Lords of Trade, August 8, 1725, CO 152/15/R174/292b.

⁶⁷ Governor-General John Hart to the Lords of Trade, St. Kitts, May 20, 1726, CO 152/15/R166/265.

⁶⁸ Governor-General John Hart to the Lords of Trade, St. Kitts, May 20, 1726, CO 152/15/R166/268-268b.

folks who used local marketing to stay alive. Several months after the hurricane of 1733 and early 1734, colonial legislators sought to prevent enslaved folk from selling meat and other goods in local markets. In Antigua, the legislature worked to hash out an agreement about limiting blacks sales of meat in late November of 1733. The following February, a few months after the St. John revolt, the legislature in St. Kitts was also busy rewriting laws against black marketers. Nevisians wrestled with a law modeled on Antigua's in June of 1734.⁶⁹

While the local custom of allowing slave marketers to sell goods appears to have trumped legal decisions in the long run, evidence does suggest that legislative efforts to define legitimate trade and to control the flow of goods both within the islands and between them aggravated social tensions between islanders. From the point of view of enslaved folk, however, marketing goods was a social right as well as a necessity. Colonists were certainly aware that driving enslaved folks out of the marketplace in times of want and need could push already tense relationships between black and white islanders to the edge. As discussed in Chapter IV, colonists in Nevis believed that black access to the marketplace was a major cause for the Nevis Conspiracy of 1725. William Clifton claimed in court that he heard the enslaved woman Judy voice her support for the plot because “she was starved and could not go to Market for the Men’s Guarding.”⁷⁰

The conspiracy in Nevis was a sign of things yet to come. The tightening noose of state power around His Majesty’s Leewards in the 1720s set the stage for the crisis of 1733. By 1730, islanders in the large sugar producing islands to the east of the Virgins

⁶⁹ Minutes of Antigua Assembly and Council, November 29, 1733, CO 9/7/76b-78, Minutes of St. Kitts Council, February 20, 1734, CO 241/3, Minutes of Nevis Council, June 7, 1734, CO 186/2/(handwritten 9 written at bottom).

⁷⁰ Nevis Minutes of Council and Assembly, September 27, 1725, CO 186/1/37-38.

depended on the small islands for access to commodities like wood, cattle, food stuffs, cotton, and even slaves. Sugar had taken over the landscape in the Leewards, thereby depressing internal production of food surpluses. In turn, colonial efforts to police movement and trade between the Virgins and the Leewards rendered the region more fragile. Colonists and enslaved folk in each island depended on the regional economy; events in one island could in turn produce a chain reaction that could have unforeseen consequences. Events that befell the entire region, however, had the potential to be much more devastating to the livelihood of the inhabitants throughout the chain of islands.

The Hurricane

When Robert Robertson fell asleep at his estate on Nevis on June 29, 1733, he probably closed his eyes thinking about his intellectual work. The Anglican rector wondered whether his pamphlets on the sugar trade were enough to convince the House of Lords to limit the illicit slave and molasses trades between French plantation owners and shippers from the Northern Colonies. As he fell asleep, Robertson likely thought of his friends—the merchants, overseers, and plantation owners who worried about the state of the sugar trade. Low prices and excessive debt had pushed many of them to crisis. The lack of hard currency circulating in the empire coupled with the tightening of credit signaled the possibility of financial disaster. Poorer white families were already fleeing to the Northern Colonies to escape their debts.

To make matters worse, droughts had arrived yet again, and the sugar crop for 1734 looked as though it might be bleak. There had not been substantial rainfall in months. As Robertson knew well, droughts were “generally followed by an Army of Worms, flies, and other Insects which eat up what little green things are left on Earth,” in

turn triggering the scarcity of yams and “Guinea-corn,” the chief sources of locally produced food in the islands. If the impact on local subsistence was not terrifying enough, rumors of disease and low sugar yields could cause merchants who provided beef and biscuit flour to the islands to steer their ships away from the islands.⁷¹ All of these matters were probably on the Anglican rector’s mind as he closed his eyes in Nevis in the summer of 1733.

Robertson awoke to more immediate concerns the next morning. “It began on the 30th of last month, about the break of day,” he related to his readership in London. The winds stirred from the northeast, from the direction of St. Kitts, pounding Nevis in the early morning with heavy gusts and rain. The sight of his neighbors “nailing up their doors and windows in a hurry” finally persuaded Robertson that he needed to do the same. The storm continued to blow to the southwest until about ten, when the hurricane reached its most intense point, leveling fields and smashing cisterns, ships, and houses. “It suddenly passed with prodigious force to the southeast, from whence it raged most furiously until twelve.” Booms of thunder began, a sound Robertson believed was “a sure sign of the breaking up of a storm.” He was wrong. The tempest continued to pound the Leewards for almost six hours; the gusts and pouring rain did not cease until about four in the afternoon. Robertson did not believe what was happening. Storms were supposed to come in late July and August, not June.⁷²

⁷¹ Robertson, *A Detection of the State and Situation of the Present Sugar Planters of Barbadoes and the Leeward Islands*, 39.

⁷² Robert Robertson, *A Short Account of the Hurricane, That Pass'd Thro' the English Leeward Caribbee Islands, on Saturday the 30th of June 1733. With Remarks. In a Letter from an Inhabitant of His Majesty's Island of Nevis, to a Gentleman in London* (London: printed for the author, and sold by the booksellers of London and Westminster, 1735), 3-4. Robertson maintained that the storm was “the most violent Hurricane that has been in these parts since August, 1707.”

ber of His Majesty's Subjects, and give for her Emloyment to our Poor at home; and that the Petitioners (notwithstanding the Benefactions of many well disposed and charitable People) find themselves unable to send over any Number of the said distressed Protestants without the Assistance of Parliament; and therefore praying the House to take the Premises into Consideration, and grant such Relief therein, as this House shall think meet.

Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer acquainted the House, that His Majesty being informed of the Contents of the said Petition, had been pleased to command him to acquaint this House, that His Majesty recommends it to their Consideration, to make such Provision in the Premises, as the House shall think fit.

Ordered,

That the said Petition be referred to the Consideration of a Committee of the whole House.

Resolved,

That this House will, upon Wednesday Morning next, resolve itself into a Committee of the whole House, to consider of the said Petition. The Order of the Day, for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the whole House upon the Bill for the better Regulating the Proceedings of Ecclesiastical Courts within that Part of Great Britain called England, Dominion of Wales, & Town of Berwick upon Tweed, was read; But it appearing, that there were not forty Members present; The House adjourn'd 'till to Morrow Morning Nine of the Clock.

St. Christophers, June 30. 1733.

This Morning about 5 o' Clock the Wind came at NE with Squalls of Rain, increasing to a Hurricane, or very Violent Gale of Wind, veering to the Eastward about 10 o'Clock, putting several Vessels from their Anchors to Sea, and driving others on shore; about One in the Afternoon the Wind shifting to the Southward, brought in a Prodigious Sea, by which all the Vessels left Riding in *Basseterre Road*, was drove on shore, and Bilg'd, except Capt. *Brown* who came on shore the next day, and the *Paddington*, Capt. *Bedgood* who rode out the Gale. A list of which Vessels, those at *Sandy Point*, *Old Road*, and *Deep Bay*, with their Circumstances, and the Conditions they were in; as also an Account from some other Ports; from the best Intelligence we yet have to this Day, July 10. 1733. as followeth,

Ship *Fane* Triquet of London, Capt. *Samuel Marshall*, Shifting with Sugars, Bound for *London*, Parted his Cable, about 10 o' Clock drove out to Sea; Overfet, cut away his Masts, drove down to *Leward* of *Sabia*; himself and Men taken up by a Dutch Man and carried in to *St. Eustatia* 2 days after, and thence came Passengers to *St. Kitts*.

Sloop *Mary* of Rhode-Island, Capt. *Nathanael Peter*, Loading Molasses, for *Rhode-Island*, Parted his Cables, drove out to Sea, Clear'd his Decks of Molasses, drove down 10 Leagues to *Leward* of *Salina*, and turn'd up to *St. Kitts* 4 Days after the Gale.

Snow of *Liverpool*, Capt. *Parr*, Loading Sugars, for *Liverpool*, Parted his Cables, drove out to Sea, but 3 hands on Board, down to *Leward* of *St. Eustatia*, sustain'd but little Damage and came up to *St. Kitts* about 7 Days after.

Sloop *Mary*, of Rhode-Island, Capt. *Joseph Sanford*, Loading Molasses, for Rhode-Island, Slip'd his Cables went to Sea, Return'd with little Damage 2 days after to *St. Kitts*.

Brigantine *Robert* of Boston, Capt. *William Detrick*, Shifting Molasses, Parted his Cables about 11 o'Clock, drove ashore, cut away his Masts, Bilg'd, and sav'd about 2 Thirds of what Molasses he had on Board, with his Sails, Rigging, &c.

Brigantine *Chemming Sally* of Philadelphia, Capt. *David Burch*, Loading Rum and Molasses, for Philadelphia, Parted his Cables, about 12 o'Clock drove on shore, Bilg'd, but sav'd his Sails, Rigging, Masts, &c. and some of his Cargo.

Ship *Friendship* of Boston, Capt. *Moses Prince*, Laden with Molasses, for Boston, Parted his Cables about 2 o' Clock, after the Wind shifted to the Southward, drove on shore, Bilg'd, cut away his Masts, lost all his Cargo, but sav'd his Sails and Rigging, and had one Man Drowned.

Snow *Honest Endeavour* of London, Capt. *John Levitt*, in Ballast, from *Ginny* with Negroes, for London, Parted his Cables, drove ashore, stove to pieces, sav'd his Negroes and what Cargo he had in, the Negroes being chiefly Landed before.

Brigantine *Disput*, of Boston, Capt. *Nathanael Hewland*, Loading Molasses, for Boston, Parted his Cables, drove on shore, cut away his Masts, sav'd his Boats, Sails, Rigging, and about 2 thirds of what Molasses he had in.

Ship *Nassau* of Bristol, Capt. *Samuel Tennant*, Shifting with Sugars, for London, Drove on shore and Bilg'd, lost what Sugars he had in, but sav'd his Sails, Rigging, and some small Stores.

Ship *Station* of Bristol, Capt. *Thomas Estlin*, Laden with Sugars, for London, Drove on shore, stove and lost all his Cargo, sav'd the Sails, Rigging, &c. and one Man Drowned.

Ship *Mary* of London, Capt. *John Gray*, Shifting Flower, for London, Drove on shore, Bilg'd, lost most of his Inward Bound Goods on board, sav'd his Sails, Rigging, Boats, and most of the small Stores.

Ship *Destiny* of London, Capt. *Arthur Ellis*, from *Cork* Laden with Beef, for Jamaica, Struck at an Anchor, had 6 foot Water in his hold, cut his Cables, ran on shore, Bilg'd, but sav'd the most of his Cargo, Sails, Rigging and Boats.

Ship *Prince* of *Wales* of Liverpool, Capt. *Joseph Davis*, Laden with Sugars, for London, Drove ashore, Bilg'd, lost most of his Sugars,

but sav'd his Sails, Rigging, small Stores, Tackle, and hopes to get off again.

Brigantine *Ancient British* of Bristol, Capt. *Thomas Tomatt*, Loading Sugars, for Bristol, Drove on shore, Bilg'd, lost most of his Cargo with the Sails, Rigging, & other Ships Tackle.

Ship *St. Andrew* of Scotland, Capt. *John Brown*, Loading Sugars, for Scotland, Rode out the Storm, had but one Cable left that much worried with the Rocks, so that he drove ashore next Day light'n'd, got off to an Anchor the day after, without much Damage.

Snow *Paddington* of Bristol, Capt. *Bedgood*, Loaden with Sugars, for London, Rode out the Gale and sail'd for London 4 Days after.

About 12 or 14 other small Sloops, Schooners, Shallops, & Long-boats, drove out to Sea, and on shore, some Stove, others Sunk, and but few that Drove to Sea, yet heard of.

The Vessels at OLD ROAD.

Capt. *Conway* in the Ship --- with Sugars, for Hull Laden.
Capt. *Williams* in the Sloop --- for the Spanish Coast. And
Capt. *Garruthers* in the Sloop *St. May*, Loaded for Boston, Put out to Sea, receiv'd some damage in the Gall, and returned 3 or 4 Days after in order to Refit, Water, and Clear out at the Offices.

AT SANDY POINT.

Capt. *James Wright* in the *Eagle* of Rhode-Island, Laden for London, drove from his Anchors on *Beltage* point, the Vessel stove all to pieces, the Captain and Men all Drowned, except the Mate and Boy, who swam ashore at *White-Flag Bay* 3 Miles to *Leward*.

Capt. *Ciffin* in a Sloop of *St. Kitts*, for Rhode-Island, Laden with Molasses, drove out to Sea under bad Circumstances with no Water on Board, and suppos'd to be Lost.

Capt. *Durbar* in a Sloop and for Rhode-Island, in Ballast, drove out to Sea, and suppos'd to be Lost.

Capt. *Benson* in a Snow for London with Sugars, and
Capt. *Richardson* in a Ship for London with Sugars, both put out, and Return'd 2 or 3 Days after without much Damage.

AT DEEP BAY.

Capt. *Richardson* in a Brigantine of North-Carolina, with Sugars, for London, drove on shore, lost all her Cargo, but the Men, Sails, and Tackle sav'd.

Capt. *Mathews* in the *Potomack* of Boston, with Molasses, drove on shore, but got off without much Damage.

Capt. *Kinslow* in a Brigantine of *St. Kitts*, with Molasses for Boston, Loading, cut away all his Masts and Rode out the Gale.

Note, These 5 Vessels being to *Leward* of the Island were not so much expos'd to the S E Wind and Sea, as were the other Roads. Several Shallops lying at *Old Road*, *Sandy Point*, and *Deep Bay* were put to Sea, and some stove on shore, and many lost with the Men in them, so far as we can yet Learn.

AT MOUNTERRAT.

Capt. *Bellier* of Boston, drove out to Sea, Overfet and suppos'd to be Lost with all his Company.

Capt. *Starr* of *Conneticut*, drove cut to Sea, fell on the back of *Nevis*, the Vessel stove all to shivers, the Captain and one Man only sav'd.

Capt. --- in a Ship from *Liverpool*, drove out to Sea with only 2 or 3 Men on Board, lost all their Masts, drove by *St. Christophers*, and was tow'd into *St. Eustatia* 2 or 3 Days after the Gale was over.

Several other Vessels drove out to Sea, and others on shore (stove to pieces, a more particular account of which we have not yet heard.

AT NEVIS.

Capt. *Payne* in a Snow from *Ginny* for London, drove out, founderd at Sea, and but 2 Men sav'd, one of which swam to a Shallop which Founderd in the Road, before the Snow drove out, who with the other sav'd Man, after the Snow sunk, swam to another Wreck, about a Mile off, above Water, and hung to her till they were taken up two Days after and carried into *St. Eustatia*.

Capt. *Nicholas Cuffens* in a Brigantine from Boston for London, drove out to Sea, cut away his Mainmast, and was seen the next Day under a Forefall only scudding to the Westward as is suppos'd for Jamaica.

Several other small Craft drove out, some Overfet in sight, and others never yet heard of, and a great many Men Lost.

AT ST. EUSTATIA.

Several Vessels put & drove out to Sea, but all return'd again except a large Sloop that stove to pieces on the *Angelades*, one milling, and a *Bermudian* who Founderd, and had 2 of his Men taken up at Sea, after they had been 29 Hours, one on the Fore-scuttle, and the other on a Cabin Door in the Sea, one a Man, the other a Boy the Captains Son, about 13 Years old.

The whole Sea to *Leward* of this Island, and *Sabia* seem to be, as it were cover'd with Wrecks.

AT SPANISH TOWN.

Capt. *Phenix* of *New-York*, for *Holland*, drove on shore, his Mate was Drowned, himself and Men all sav'd.

TO LEWARD OF SABIA.

Capt. *Wingfield* of Boston for London, lost all his Masts, for Jury Masts, in their stead, and at Sea in the Lat. 29 Long 67, July 22, was met by Capt. *Petter* of Rhode-Island from *St. Christophers*, wanting nothing, but under short Sail, bound for London.

Two Days after Capt. *Petter* met a very large Ship a little to the Southward of *Bermudas*, who had lost all her Masts, and was standing to the Eastward under Jury Masts with Reefed Courses and Top-gallant-sails in stead of her Top-sails did not speak with her, but took her to be a French or Dutch Built Vessel.

Petter

Figure 10:
Account of Ships Damaged by the Hurricane near St. Kitts
August 13, 1733, *The New England Weekly Journal*

The hurricane created an economic catastrophe that stretched beyond the Leeward shores. From sailors carrying news from St. Kitts, Robertson heard that the damage to the windmills and houses was extensive. On Nevis, the Reverend noted that “here, blessed be God,” the damage to the windmills was “but small,” but trees were torn up entirely from the roots. The “Negro-Huts,” “Mayors-Houses,” and “slighter Sugar Works” were “beat down.” Robertson’s absentee friend in London suffered major damage to the plantation he rented, and the house on his other plantation was “much shatter’d on the side next the Mountain.” The rector related that several “Negro Houses” on the absentee’s plantation were destroyed, as were his cane fields.⁷³ Two years of cane crops were wrecked, as the infant stalks were “almost everywhere stript and twisted, or blown out of the Ground, and the old ones laid flat upon it.” Robertson calculated that the loss in sugar *alone* in St. Christopher and Nevis at “about Two Thousand Hogsheads.” With no ships to put the cargo on, the sugar was “left expos’d to the Weather on the Several Bays” as a year of labor literally washed away with the blowing rain and wind.⁷⁴

The storm destroyed thirty out of thirty-six windmills on Montserrat. The other six were “shatter’d, having lost their Veins and Roundhouses.” In the principal port town of Plymouth, the winds destroyed at least twenty houses. In the countryside the aftermath of the storm was even greater—“the boiling houses, and the Sugar in them, which was considerable” were wrecked by the gales. Many residents lost their lives in the storm when their fragile stone houses collapsed on top of them. Colonel William Lyddel was “so bruised with the Fall of his House” that he died two days after the storm passed.

⁷³ Ibid., 11.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 12.

Slaves suffered more than white colonists—Robertson reported that “more of the Blacks are hurted” than white residents.⁷⁵ The rector reported that survivors were in “so miserable a Condition” that he recommended “their Case to the publick Favour and Compassion.” He hoped officials in London would consider providing merchants and planters financial support to overcome their losses, especially if metropolitans considered their value to the Crown. The importance of the Leewards could be measured by statistics in the “Custom House Books,” where Brits would find evidence of the four islands’ “Usefulness to the Nation.”⁷⁶

The impact of the hurricane on Leeward shipping was tremendous. When the wind shifted southward at about one in the afternoon, it “brought in a Prodigious Sea bywhich all the Vessels left Riding in Bassaterre Road” were driven ashore and “bilg’d.” The winds and waves were so harsh they ripped ships and boats from their anchors and tossed them upside-down into the sea. One report suggested that the “whole sea” between St. Eustatius and Saba was “cover’d with Wrecks.”⁷⁷ When the wind started blowing to the southeast, ten or twelve “Top-sails,” including the *Stapleton*, the *Ancient Briton* and the *Prince of Wales* were pulled from their anchors and driven into Basseterre, where they were “bulg’d or stav’d” against the rocks. The hurricane gales drove *The Wright*, a ship inbound from Philadelphia, against the boulders and “beat it to pieces.” The entire crew drowned, save a young boy.

⁷⁵ It is unclear whether the disparity was because black and brown people were a greater percentage of the population in Montserrat or because their shelters were subject to easier destruction. In 1733, slaves may have still constructed their sleeping-places as they had in the seventeenth century. In 1666, Rochefort commented that “the Negroes” made their “little huts” in “imitation of those of the Caribbians.” They were round with an open door and had “rafters” to support the arched structure. This, he believed, enabled them to be “commonly spared” even when the largest houses were “overthrown by the impetuous agitation of the winds raising this tempest. *History of the Caribby-Islands*, 145-146.

⁷⁶ Robertson, *A Short Account of the Hurricane*, 12.

⁷⁷ *The New England Weekly Journal*, Boston, Monday August 13th, 1733, 3.

Other crews were more fortunate. Three enslaved seaman who sailed the “Castle-Shallop” of the Stapleton estate—probably Jennings and Balls Range—were relatively lucky; they “ventur’d out in the Storm, and, to the wonder of many, kept the Sea, till they reach’d Anguilla, where they were glad to run her ashore to save themselves.”⁷⁸ *The Fane*, a massive frigate registered at New England and named after the chief Leeward agent in London, left Basseterre, St. Kitts just before the storm hit the islands. Predicting the storm, the captain decided to lift anchor with only a quarter of its sugar cargo onboard. The early departure proved less than helpful. The frigate wrecked at Spanish Town, loosing some 600 hogsheads of sugar. Merchants learned of the wreck after a Dutch captain of a sloop passing between St. Eustatius and Anguilla found the boathands clinging to floating timber.

With so many ships damaged and destroyed, news about the hurricane did not arrive in Boston until July 10, 1733. Nearly a month and a half after the storm hit, *The New England Weekly Journal* printed a full-page account of the ships damaged or destroyed by the hurricane using the “best intelligence” available. The paper listed more than thirty ships by name, not including the destroyed “small sloops, schooners, shallops, and long-boats” that provided quick interisland travel. Of those commercial ships listed with a port of registry, more than half came from the Northern Colonies, with the bulk of the ships sailing from Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Boston. About twelve vessels were registered in Great Britain, including Scotland and Wales. Some of the ships were headed north, to Boston and Bristol, while others, such as an unnamed ship captained by one Williams were headed “for the Spanish Coast.” The degree of damage varied—some

⁷⁸ Robertson, *A Short Account of the Hurricane*, 6-8.

ships lost entire cargoes of rum, molasses, and sugar, while others suffered broken masts, cracked hulls, shredded cables, and torn sails. Entire slave ships sunk to the bottom of the ocean, killing the crew and human cargo.⁷⁹

Environmental catastrophes are no respecters of persons, nations, or classes. They befall everyone in their grasp. In 1733, the storm precipitated the spread of diseases that attacked man and plant, compounding the food and health situation that already existed in the islands. Following the storm, a new disease attacking the cane plants began to appear in the islands. Nicknamed “the blast,” the disease became so famous that James Grainger later immortalized the crisis in his famous poem *The Sugar Cane*:⁸⁰

pity the poor planter; when the blast,
Fell plague of Heaven! perdition of the isles!
 Attacks his waving gold...
 ...By microscopic arts, small eggs appear,
 Dire fraught with reptile-life; alas, too soon
 They burst their filmy jail, and crawl abroad,
Bugs of uncommon shape; thrice hideous show!
 Innumerable as the painted shells, that load
 The wave-worn margin of the Virgin-isles!⁸¹

Readers in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia learned that the blast destroyed the canes “wholly wherever it comes.” Charles Hamilton, a plantation surgeon in Nevis, explained

⁷⁹ *The New England Weekly Journal*, Boston, Monday August 13th, 1733, 3. In his essay on the hurricane, Robertson seized the crisis to advocate for increased support for the Royal African Company. Citing the debt of the planters in the islands due to the dismal price of sugar, he argued that the free trade in human cargo proved detrimental to the islands. The rector estimated that seven hogsheads would not cover the cost of a “Slave of 28£,” whereas “less than three would have done it before” the RAC gained the Spanish Asiento. “To this Pass has the Ignorance or Neglects of former Times brought the Sugar Trade of England!” exclaimed Robertson. “Thus are her Sugar Colonies served, now that the African Company has left off serving them with Slaves.” *Ibid.*, 10.

⁸⁰ Grainger had lived in St. Kitts where he worked as a tutor and eventually married into the family of a wealthy plantation owner. Richard B. Sheridan, “Mortality and the Medical Treatment of Slaves in the British West Indies,” in *Caribbean Slave Society and Economy: A Student Reader*, ed. Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd (New York: New Press, 1991), 201.

⁸¹ James Grainger, *The Sugar-Cane: A Poem in Four Books, with Notes*. (London: Printed for R. and J. Dodsley in Pall-Mall, 1764), Book II.

that the intruders were never seen in the Leewards “before the Hurricane.” By January, “many hundreds of Acres where wholly lost” in Antigua.⁸²

Plantation owners and overseers did not know how to treat the plant disease. Some overseers ordered enslaved people to “strip the younger Canes of all their Leaves or Blades.” Slaves used machetes to hack through the fields to carve out large segments of the infected sections in attempt to prevent the bug from spreading to the healthy crop that remained. Slaves then placed the cane, Indian corn, and whatever other plants revealed the white egg-sacks into large piles and set them aflame in “hopes to save the rest” of the crops in the islands. According to Hamilton, however, the slash and burn approach to the blast had no effect. He believed that the blast destroyed upwards of fifty percent of the sugar crop in Nevis and Antigua, where the aphis was most prevalent.

The insect plague crippled the local island economies. British absentee plantation owners, however, hoped that the hurricane and blast had equally descended upon French plantations at Guadeloupe and Martinique. Fearing that the storm destroyed several years of planting, surgeon Charles Hamilton sent word to an associate in London. “If the French Sugar Islands are equally pester’d with this Vermin, we shall be where we were,” Hamilton explained. “If not, and the Vermin continue to spread,” he continued, “I see not what the Power of Man can do for our Preservation.”⁸³

Hamilton’s estimate that plantations in the Leewards were going to lose upwards of half their sugar harvests was accurate. The blast led to the smallest sugar crop in Antigua since the draught of 1725—the island exported less than half of the sugar in

⁸² Extract of a Letter from St. Christopher’s, dated January 1733-4, *The American Weekly Mercury*, July 4, 1734, Extract of a Letter from Antigua, dated Jan. 11, *New England Weekly Journal*, Monday, March 11, 1734.

⁸³ Extract of a Letter from St. Christopher’s, dated January 1733-4, *The American Weekly Mercury*, July 4, 1734.

1734 than the previous year. Nevis suffered the second greatest loss in crop, followed by Montserrat.⁸⁴ For planters and merchants whose wealth was premised on bills of exchange and not hard currency, the hurricane and subsequent blast no doubt had a major impact on their willingness to ship substantial provisions to the islands. For enslaved folk and poorer white colonists, the blast devoured months of their labor as it attacked their garden plots.

Human pathogens followed plant diseases in 1733 and 1734. Plantation owners noted a “dreadful mortality” befell enslaved people in the wake of the draught, deluge, and loss in trade.⁸⁵ Several diseases probably befell the islands following the storm, for extensive rain in a time of drought creates pools of standing water that provide breeding grounds for parasites. Standing water allows the rapid reproduction of the parasitic amoeba *E. histolytica* and aids in the transmission of the bacteria causing shigellosis and campylobacteriosis. The amoeba and the bacteria are both causes of what contemporaries called “fluxes”—or dysentery—one of the most pervasive contagions in the plantation community.⁸⁶ The various forms of dysentery produce severe intestinal diarrhea and even bleeding, problems that in turn lead folks to continue to drink polluted water because of the dehydration and thirst that accompany the diseases.

Malaria and yellow fever were also on the rise in the islands after 1733. While in the very short-term pools of rainwater provided residents with a quick source of water, in hot climates they also provide the conditions necessary for sustaining mosquito larvae.

Female mosquitoes of the genus *Anopheles* and the *Aedes aegypti* are vectors for the

⁸⁴ Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, 490-491. Cane was planted, harvested, and processed in a fifteen-month cycle. Hence, destroyed cane fields translated into decreased exports for the following year.

⁸⁵ Reprinted in Gaspar, *Bondmen & Rebels*, 143.

⁸⁶ Dirks, *The Black Saturnalia: Conflict and Its Ritual Expression on British West Indian Slave Plantations*, 85-88.

diseases we call malaria and yellow fever, which islanders and colonists in the northern colonies neither understood, identified, or distinguished clearly. Both diseases are destructive, but the viral nature of yellow fever attacks the body quickly, producing sore throats followed by internal hemorrhaging. As a result, colonists typically called yellow fever the “black vomit” or “chocolate fever.”⁸⁷

By the end of 1733, a pathogen was making the Leeward Islands “very sickly.” People were perishing in Antigua at an alarming rate. Even newly arrived Governor-General Mathew was sick and unable to pursue his orders to crack down on illicit slave trading and molasses smuggling. Although reports of the illness from the islands are vague, one piece of news suggested that people were experiencing high fevers and sore throats. “They die of a Fever in Two Days time,” the letter related to a reader in Boston. The author suggested that residents in Antigua were dying of “an unusual sore Throat” within “three hours” of showing symptoms of the disease. The letter was widely circulated in the papers of the Northern Colonies, appearing first in Boston, followed by Philadelphia and New York. Surely, this contributed to fears of sailing to the islands for what was left of the dismal sugar harvest. News of the disease even caused authorities in the Northern Colonies to consider embargos on ships coming to northern ports for provisions.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ For a discussion of mosquitoes, malaria, and yellow fever as well as questions of adaptations, see Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Norton, 1975), 85-91. See also <http://www.cdc.gov>. For an excellent insight into contemporary views of disease in the Leeward Archipelago, see C. G. A. Oldendorp and Johann Jakob Bossart, *C.G.A. Oldendorp's History of the Mission of the Evangelical Brethren on the Caribbean Islands of St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John*, trans. Arnold R. Highfield and Vladimir Barac (Ann Arbor: Karoma, 1987), 137-143.

⁸⁸ *The Boston Weekly News Letter*, March 7, 1734, *The New England Weekly Journal*, Monday, March 11, 1734, *American Weekly Mercury*, March 28, 1734, *The New-York Weekly Journal*, Monday, April 8, 1734.

Disease precipitated by the hurricane assaulted other islands as well, and even spread to places that were not directly in the storm's path. Even before the storm hit, rumors that small pox was "raging" in Barbados forced the Montserrat legislature to forbid ship masters from landing any "person or goods" without the ship being inspected by a doctor first.⁸⁹ A major yellow fever epidemic seems to have gripped the Bahamas at the same time that diseases were raging in the Leewards. Newly arrived Governor Fitzwilliam wrote to the Duke of Newcastle on December 4, 1733: "In July last there was a hurricane that destroyed all the corn and fruits of this island, which has made all sorts of provisions much scarcer than usual, and this scarcity, I imagine, has occasioned a sickness that has carried off a great number of the inhabitants."⁹⁰ Several councilmen were already dead. By September 1734, Fitzwilliam related that the fever "Still rages to Such a Degree, that unless it please God to abate this Contagion, these Islands will Soon be depopulated."⁹¹ Doctor Henry Warren reported from Barbados that after a fifteen-year hiatus, the black vomit returned to Barbados in late 1733 "about the Christmas Holy-Days."⁹²

It is unclear whether or not malaria or yellow fever reached the Virgins, but the hurricane certainly destroyed sugar cane, provision grounds, and wrecked many of the schooners and sloops instrumental to the survival of the colonists. Danish Company officials reported home that they lost two ships and two two-masted boats in addition to

⁸⁹ Minutes of the Montserrat Council, May 26, 1733, CO 177/2/

⁹⁰ Governor Fitzwilliam to the Duke of Newcastle, New Providence, Bahamas, December 4, 1733, CO 23/14/223-224.

⁹¹ Extract of a Letter from Mr. Fitzwilliam, Governor of the Bahama Islands, to the Lords Commissioner for Trade, dated at New Providence, September 7, 1734, CO 23/15.

⁹² Henry Warren, *A Treatise Concerning the Malignant Fever in Barbados and the Neighbouring Islands: With an Account of the Seasons There, from the Year 1734 to 1738. In a Letter to Dr. Mead.* (London: Printed for Fletcher Gyles against Grays Inn in Holborn, 1740), 4.

the many canoes and sloops that had been smashed and overturned during the storm. One resident noted that in the months just prior to the St. John revolt, trade in the Danish islands had been “ruined” and that few vessels remained for transportation between St. Thomas and St. John.⁹³ As in Antigua, Nevis, and St. Kitts, the blast also began attacking crops in the two Danish Virgin Island colonies. To make matters worse, a smaller storm crashed into the Virgins in November, destroying much of the Indian corn provisions that enslaved folk relied upon for food in St. Thomas and St. John.⁹⁴

Revolt and the Specter of a Black Awakening

The hurricane of 1733 caused a regional cataclysm that had direct effects on the very sinews that tied the islands together. Without regard to nation, empire, or island, the hurricane dropped massive amounts of rain on stone dry soil, turning yam and cane fields into mosquito havens. Instead of filling cisterns, the hurricane leveled them. The storm destroyed ships vital to the provision trade at the same time that it put pressure on islanders to obtain more food, fresh water, and timber for reconstruction. All of these events transpired against intensified efforts to cut off black market activity and increased policing of people of color, the very people who made domestic economies thrive. In 1733 and 1734, the convergence of environmental catastrophe and imperial restraints on regional trade converged to strangle islanders as if they were subject to a common grip.

Soon after the hurricane smashed into the Virgin Islands, slaves began running away in St. John and St. Thomas in considerable numbers. The Danish governor

⁹³ Pierre J. Pannet, *Report on the Execrable Conspiracy Carried out by the Amina Negroes on the Danish Island of St. Jan in America, 1733*, trans. Aimery Caron and Arnold R. Highfield (Christiansted, St. Croix: Antilles Press, 1984), 15.

⁹⁴ Westergaard, *Danish West Indies*, 166, Aimery Caron and Arnold R. Highfield, “The French Intervention in the St. John Slave Revolt of 1733-34,” *The Bureau of Libraries, Museums and Archaeological Services Department of Conservation and Cultural Affairs, Occasional Paper*, no. 7 (1981): 14.

responded on September 5, 1733 by issuing one of the most violent laws governing slave mobility in the region. The central goal of the law was to stamp out the growing spirit of dissent. Planters used mutilations to turn slave bodies into examples of state power and to instill fear in others—fifteen of the eighteen articles specified mutilation or execution for activities deemed dangerous to the plantation order. Runaways who were absent from their owners for three months or more had a leg amputated. Masters could pardon their slaves, but the state still obligated owners to cut the ears off of runaways. To stamp out slave access to the power of their ancestors, the Danish governors ordered colonists to flog suspected slave “witches,” and men or women accused of poisoning a white person were tortured with “red-hot pincers” before they were broken on the wheel. Any free person of African descent caught harboring a runaway “or a thief” was re-enslaved or banished from the island. Enslaved folks who threatened any white person on the island were ordered to be hanged or have one hand cut off. The new code also cracked down on aspects of slave culture that were used to buttress the collective well-being of enslaved folk during times of want—slaves were forbidden from having feasts, dances, and plays without permission.⁹⁵

Legislating violent responses to slave acts of dissent and protest during a period of ecological crisis may have caused many enslaved men and women to think twice before fleeing their masters, even for a few weeks. Yet the law also increased the probability for direct conflict. Although small scale running away signaled a lack of collective white discipline, running away also served as a vent for slave frustration.

Legislative efforts placing greater constraints on slave behavior during a period of

⁹⁵ The law is reprinted in Pannet, *Report on the Excusable Conspiracy*, 15, and Stanley L. Engerman, Seymour Drescher, and Robert L. Paquette, eds., *Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 124-125.

ecological catastrophe and diminished access to local trade were thus a gamble. Governor Gardelin took the risk; as a former bookkeeper for the Danish WIC appointed to rein in debts, the newly appointed governor believed that the costs of having mass indiscipline on St. John and St. Thomas outweighed the probability of insurrection.⁹⁶ His gamble proved disastrous. By late October men and women—particularly those who labored on plantations owned by the Danish WIC—began fleeing to the woods in large numbers. The sugar and cotton fields near Coral Bay, the natural harbor facing Tortola, were hardest hit by the mass desertions. In the weeks just before the revolt, all of the men and women laboring on former governor Henry Suhm’s plantation fled to the rocky interior of St. John and went “maroon.” Efforts to capture them proved fruitless. What happened next was—in the words of one French resident—unimaginable.⁹⁷

On the morning of November 23, 1733, a group of men carrying bundles of wood marched up to Fort Fortsberg with its view of Coral Bay and Tortola. They knocked on the door and waited for a member of the garrison stationed in the fort to answer. “Werdae?,” one soldier reportedly answered in the local Dutch creole. “Company Negroes with wood,” the men replied, knowing that the guards were expecting their daily supply of fuel. The sentry unlocked the door. The slaves laid their bundles down on the floor, untied them, and took out the machetes they had hid between the logs. After killing the corporal and his soldiers stationed at the fort, the rebels loaded a canon and fired three shots to signal to the men and women below that they had captured their masters’ symbol of military strength.⁹⁸ The rebellion had begun.

⁹⁶ Pannet, *Report on the Excerable Conspiracy*, 22, n.21.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 12-13, Westergaard, *Danish West Indies*, 168.

After firing the canon, men and women sacked several plantations throughout the island, seizing guns, powder, lead for making bullets, and provisions. Early reports put the number of rebels near 300, or about 1/3 of the total slave population, but this number appears to have dwindled to around 80 or 90 as the insurrection became more difficult to sustain.⁹⁹ Aware that they might face counterattacks from Tortola to the east and St. Thomas to the west, the rebels moved to capture vital outlooks on both ends of St. John. At least two groups seized key plantations near Coral Bay and Hogsness Bay, a testament to the fact that the rebels had a good idea of where their opposition would try to land.¹⁰⁰

The rebels murdered close to 40 white colonists, including men, women, and children. In some cases white settlers were taken as hostages, supposedly because the rebels planned to make them servants. Some enslaved folk seized the opportunity to humiliate their former masters. In one case, a group of armed men broke down the door of their old owner in the early morning, woke him up, forced him to strip, and then ordered him to sing and dance before they murdered him.¹⁰¹ In contrast, some slaves put up a resistance to the rebels and elected to protect white families and plantation property. In the midst of the chaos, militia captain Johannes van Beverhout gathered a group of white and black colonists together at a plantation near Hogsness Bay on the west end of the island where they were able to stave off an attack and save colonists who had heard of the safe haven.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Highfield and Caron place the number of rebels who “fully” joined the rebellion neared 90, but Pannet stated that nearly 300 were believed to be in open rebellion a week after news arrived in St. Thomas, see Pannet, *Report on the Excerable Conspiracy*, 2, 14. Many of the unaccounted for men and women may have simply fled to the interior and elected to wait out the conflict, or perhaps they came in as resources became scarce.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 14.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 12.

¹⁰² Ibid., 13-14, Westergaard, *Danish West Indies*, 169-170.

News of the rebellion on St. John trickled out of the island, filling the neighboring islands with rumors and stoking panic. First news of the capture of Fortsberg reached St. Thomas by way of John Gabriel, a soldier at the fort who had managed to hide beneath his bed before sneaking out at daybreak. He found a canoe onshore and paddled to St. Thomas, probably shaking from the scene he had witnessed hours earlier.¹⁰³ After several enslaved folk on his plantation told him that the rebels were coming for him, Commandant Froeling fled St. John in his boat with another plantation owner.¹⁰⁴ Several men and women rowed to Tortola via canoe. Mackiel Hendricks secured a canoe and fled to the nearby island, while a man named Castan was able to get passage to Tortola from a passing fisherman who saw his emergency signal rising from a cotton field.¹⁰⁵ On November 29, 1733—six days after the takeover of the fort—Governor Gardelin formally appealed to residents at Spanish Town and Tortola for assistance.¹⁰⁶

News about the Danish governor's appeal to the English Virgins reached St. Kitts and Nevis within a few days. Widespread rumors that the entire white population of St. John had been slaughtered spread through the Leewards, and sailors then shared these reports in North American ports. John Davies, a ship master who plied frequently between New York and St. Kitts, reported on the "deplorable news" about St. John when he arrived at port on December 13, 1733. According to Davies, "the Negroes on the island of St. John's" had "entirely massacred all the white people on that island; consisting of 200 families with great cruelty." Davies told New Yorkers that some 400 loyal "Negroes were sent from St. Thomas," but were "beaten off," forcing the governor

¹⁰³ Westergaard, *Danish West Indies*, 168, Pannet.

¹⁰⁴ Pannet, *Report on the Excerable Conspiracy*, 12.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Westergaard, *Danish West Indies*, 172, n. 149.

of the island to appeal to St. Kitts for help. Davies's account exaggerated the number of white colonists killed as well of the size of the black counteroffensive sent by Gardelin. The Danish governor could only amass a company of 33 slaves to try to take back the fort; apparently, other enslaved folk on St. Thomas refused to help. While Davies's account painted a picture of an entire island colony controlled by "rebel Negroes," readers in New York had no idea that his information was not altogether accurate. The report was subsequently reprinted in the *Boston Weekly Newsletter* and the *Pennsylvania Gazette* the last week of December.¹⁰⁷ Leeward Governor-General Mathew heard a more accurate account of white deaths a week after Davies arrived in New York, but he also received false news that the rebellion had been contained. On December 20, Mathew informed the Board of Trade that "the Negroes on St. Johns rose upon their masters & have murdered about forty Christians." Incorrectly, however, Mathew believed that the rebels on St. John were "pretty well reduced, not without much bloodshed."¹⁰⁸

It took upwards of a month before newspapers in the Northern Colonies printed a story about the St. John revolt that accurately spoke to the number of murdered white inhabitants. A Bermuda sloop sailing back from the Virgins informed the printer of *The Boston Weekly Rehearsal* that the "number of Whites destroyed by the Negroes did not exceed 60." The sailor also accurately reported that the fort had been retaken, but added that the "Ringleader or Captain of the Black Gentry" had been captured, causing his fellow rebels to "scatter about the island." Importantly, the Bermuda sailor explained that many of the fleeing rebels "took all the canoes and small craft they could find and quitted the place." According to the sailor, the runaways were going to try to sail to Cap

¹⁰⁷ December 31, 1733, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, December 27, 1733, *The Boston Weekly News Letter*.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from General Mathew, with an Act of Antego Settling an Additional Salary on him and Transmitting other Publick Papers, December 20, 1733, CO 152/20/V1.

François in Saint-Domingue.¹⁰⁹ The story was reprinted in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* three weeks later, about the same time colonists along the Raritan River in New Jersey believed they had discovered a slave plot wherein a group of rebels plotted to flee to “some new country.”¹¹⁰

News that the rebellion was spreading to nearby islands continued to dot merchants’ papers. Three Boston papers printed an excerpt of a letter from a resident of Antigua in early February that explained how a Royal Navy ship of 60 guns sailed to St. John to help put down the rebellion, but that the “Negroes” were “holding the island still.” “This encouraged the Negroes at St. Kitts,” the letter continued, “and the week before last they attempted the same in that island by setting six houses on fire.” According to the story, the arsonists plotted to take over the island, but their scheme was foiled by a “Negro that had a peculiar regard for his master.”¹¹¹ Ben Franklin printed the story of the St. Kitts plot in *The Pennsylvania Gazette* in April, several months after the supposed conspiracy had already been discovered.¹¹²

White colonists in islands close to St John believed that the rebellion had direct consequences for their own security. According to one report, the “rising of the Negroes at St. John's so alarmed” the British Leewards “that they keep 30 or 40 men every night upon the watch upon each island, to prevent surprise.”¹¹³ Colonists believed that—either directly or indirectly—news of the St. John revolt encouraged other enslaved folk to

¹⁰⁹ January 21, 1734, *The Boston Weekly Rehearsal*.

¹¹⁰ Details of the Raritan River conspiracy remain murky, as no court documents from New Jersey appear to have been uncovered about the plot. Details of the conspiracy were printed in *The American Weekly Mercury* on February 26, 1734, thirteen days after the story about rebels fleeing St. John were printed in the February 13 issue of *The Pennsylvania Gazette*.

¹¹¹ Extract of a Letter from Antigua, dated January 11, 1734, March 7, 1734, *The Boston News Letter*, March 11, *The New England Weekly Journal*, and March 11, *The Boston Weekly Rehearsal*.

¹¹² Extract of a Letter from Antigua, dated January 11, 1734, April 4, 1734, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*.

¹¹³ January 21, 1734, *The Boston Weekly Rehearsal*.

rebel. In the Virgins, some colonists believed that the Gold Coast rebels in St. John had directly plotted beforehand with slaves in Danish St. Thomas and English Tortola to rise together. These rumors were exacerbated after several captured rebels admitted to a regional plot while being tortured.¹¹⁴ The scheme of a conspiracy hatched by the local Gold Coast diaspora is not so far fetched. As noted above, white planters in Tortola and St. John not only depended on the St. Thomas as a market for cotton and sugar products, but also for access to newly enslaved men and women sold into slavery by the Danish West India Company. More likely than not, shipmates and co-countrymen had a degree of correspondence across the three islands.

When slaves in St. Thomas refused to help their masters put down the rebellion in St. John, white colonists from the two islands grew even more fearful that the revolt was going to spread across the waterway. Gardelin, perhaps opportunistically, blamed his inability to quash the rebellion on St. Thomas slaves who did not want to fight on their masters' behalf. In a letter to the French Governor-General at Martinique, Gardelin noted, "our Negroes on this island, witnesses to our visible weakness, refuse tacitly their fruitless assistance and seem to aspire only to occasions on which to express themselves."¹¹⁵ The Danish governor was slightly overstating the unwillingness of slaves at St. Thomas to help. Soon after the revolt, armed Afro-Creoles aided white colonists to drive the rebels out of Fort Fortsberg. Later, when the French Governor responded to

¹¹⁴ Pannet, *Report on the Excerable Conspiracy*, 17.

¹¹⁵ Monsieur Gardelin, Governor of the Isle of St. Thomas to Monsieur le Marquis de Champigny, Governor General of the French Windward Islands, March 21, 1734, reprinted in Caron and Highfield, "French Intervention," 26.

Gardelin's appeal for help, a force of at least 34 free Creole blacks led by their own captain assisted white troops from Martinique in quashing the rebellion.¹¹⁶

Rumors of a regional conspiracy that targeted English Tortola encouraged white colonists there to assist in the counterattack against the rebels at St. John. Unfortunately, only fragments of what happened on Tortola during the months following the rebellion remain, but several sources suggest that slave dissent increased after the revolt broke out on St. John. In a letter sent by Governor-General Mathew in late 1734, the Leeward governor remarked on the first law ever passed in Tortola. Following Mathew's advice, white Tortolans passed an "Act for punishing Rebellious Negroes." What motivated the colonists to write their first law is vague. Mathew only referred to a "Negro Murder" that "so terrified" white folk and slaveowners on the island because they feared "it should spread into a Negro Rebellion." He also mentions that he sent word to colonists at Spanish Town to be ready to provide assistance in case a slave rebellion did break out on nearby Tortola.¹¹⁷

Mathew may have underhandedly sent a Royal Navy ship to St. John and the English Virgins to help secure them from slave uprisings during the crisis. As referenced by a letter printed in *The Boston News Letter*, *The Pearl* left Antigua for the Virgins soon after news of the revolt reached Antigua and St. Kitts.¹¹⁸ However, the ship's departure from Antigua is somewhat puzzling. Governor-General Mathew did not tell the Board of Trade that he ordered the ship's captain to assist the Danes at St. John, nor does he mention a Danish appeal for help. Moreover, there is no way the Royal Navy captain

¹¹⁶ Monsieur le Chevalier de Longueville to Champigny, Guadeloupe, June 11, 1734, reprinted in *Ibid.*: 41.

¹¹⁷ Governor-General Mathew to Allured Popple, St. Kitts, January 20, 1734, CO 152/21/V86/101-101b.

¹¹⁸ Extract of a Letter from Antigua, dated January 11, 1734, March 7, 1734 *The Boston News Letter*.

received orders from superiors in England to assist, for the timing of *The Pearl's* departure from Antigua was too soon for Toller to have received orders from across the Atlantic. Yet colonists in Antigua clearly believed Captain Toller was headed to St. John for the purpose of putting down the revolt. In a separate letter sent to the Lords of Trade, Mathew mentioned that Toller was “bound the way” of the Virgins in January and that he ordered the ship captain to deliver a commission of deputy governorship to a colonist in Spanish Town, but he said nothing of Toller’s assignment to help the Danes at St. John.¹¹⁹

Mathew’s silence about *The Pearl's* departure for St. John not only suggests that he was hiding something from the Board of Trade. His silence also raises questions about the imperial and diplomatic tensions that the English governor faced because of the revolt. When Mathew arrived in the Leewards as the newly appointed Governor-General for the Leewards in November of 1733, he carried with him a commission that clearly stated he was obliged to forbid “the subjects of any Foreign Prince or State whatsoever” from settling any of the Virgin Islands “except St. Thomas, which has been for some time in possession of the subjects of the King of Denmark.”¹²⁰ As discussed earlier, St. John remained a disputed territory. Moreover, Mathew had to contend with the fact that the French were making deals with the Danish Company in preparation for a potential war with England. Planters in Martinique and Guadeloupe wanted to keep St. Thomas as an entrepôt for slaves and provisions. Mathew was already aware that in the summer of 1733, France sold St. Croix to the Danish Company partly in an effort to retain trading access to the free port. By September of 1734 the governor of the French Windwards had

¹¹⁹ Governor-General Mathew to the Secretary, Antigua, June 17, 1734, CO 152/21/V79/86b.

¹²⁰ Copy of the 87th Article of General Mathew’s Instructions for the Government of the Leeward Islands in America in 1733, CO 152/40/Red39ii/234.

also secured neutrality with the Dutch governors of St. Eustatius, St. Barts, and St. Martin—agreements that Mathew believed would help the French Navy “cutt off all communication” between the Leewards and Great Britain during wartime.¹²¹

The rebellion in St. John thus posed a problem for Mathew on two fronts: either he help put down the rebellion without authority from his home government, thereby aiding imperial competitors who promoted illicit trade in the Leewards, or he let the rebellion in St. John continue to boil over and potentially disrupt the security of St. Kitts, Antigua, and the other black majorities under his government. Since the news report printed in *The Boston Newsletter* clearly indicates that Antiguans believed Toller was headed to St. John to aid the Danish, Mathew’s silence suggests on the matter suggest he was weighing the costs of local collusion with imperial rivals against the demands of his metropolitan overseers. Either way, the arrival of *The Pearl* at St. John did little to help end the revolt. The rebels ambushed Toller’s crew at night, killing four of his men, causing *The Pearl* to lift anchor the next day.

A few weeks after the Royal Navy ship left the white colonists of St. John and St. Thomas to fend for themselves, Gardelin sent another appeal to Governor-General Mathew at St. Kitts. Mathew noted that despite a “modest” appeal from Gardelin, he declined to send help even though the “Negroes” had become “masters of the island.” Mathew’s refusal to help Gardelin infuriated local white Leewardians, some of whom elected to sail to St. John to provide assistance. John Maddox, his two sons, and nearly fifty other colonists arrived at the Danish colony on March 7, 1734 with weapons in hand. Eleven days later they found themselves face to face with the rebels on St. John.

¹²¹ William Mathew to the Secretary of State, Antigua, September 14, 1734, CO 152/40/Red38/219.

Maddox lost three of his men including his two sons. After several of his men mutinied, Maddox, like Toller, decided to abandon his mission.¹²²

Maddox and his men may have been motivated to sail to St. John after learning that slaves in St. Kitts had been plotting to revolt. As mentioned above, the letter printed in *The Boston Newsletter* and *The Pennsylvania Gazette* from Antigua mentions that slaves in the Leewards had been “encouraged” by the St. John revolt. According to the report, slaves on St. Kitts had already set fire to several houses before a trusty slave turned in a group of plotters to white authorities. Unfortunately, legislative minutes of the island do not mention a conspiracy or fires breaking out on the island in 1733 or 1734.¹²³

However, some evidence does suggest something transpired on St. Kitts during the violence on St. John. According to a list of debts owed by the government to colonists, payments were due to seven slaveowners for eight slaves who had been recently executed and one reward for a colonist who captured an “outlawed Negro.” Whether or not these were the black arsonists mentioned in the New England newspapers is unclear, for the memo does not explain why the men were executed. However, another reward mentioned on the list is for a “Negro who discovered the Murtherers of John Young.” This person may have been enslaved man who was said to have had a “peculiar

¹²² Governor-General Mathew to the Lords of Trade, Montserrat, March 19, 1734, CO 152/20/V36/110b, Westergaard, *Danish West Indies*, 172.

¹²³ Minutes of Council, St. Kitts, January 23, 1731, CO 152/43/188-189b. In some ways, however, the lack of evidence is not surprising. Compared to the other islands, the St. Kitts minutes are incredibly sparse—mostly because the secretary of the island, Wavell Smith, was embroiled in a controversy pertaining to his appointment. No minutes for the Assembly for 1733 and 1734 have been found, and the council only met twice in December of 1733—once in the first week of the month, and again on December 27 to confirm Mathew’s commission.

regard for his master” and helped to thwart the plot referred to in the newsletters.¹²⁴

Interestingly, while the St. Kitts minutes do not specifically mention an uprising on the island, officials in Martinique had heard rumors that white Kittsians had to contend with a conspiracy inspired by the St. John revolt. French officials also heard rumors that uprisings had broken out on some of the Dutch islands following the revolt in St. John.¹²⁵

While news of the revolt fueled fears and spirits in the islands to the east, the problems on St. John and St. Thomas increased. Without official support from Governor-General Mathew, the Danish governor decided to turn to the French at Martinique, some 360 miles to the southeast. “I feel that we are on the verge of some terrible happening,” Gardelin feverishly wrote in a letter destined for the governor’s residence at Fort Royal. The Danish governor not only wanted the French to send support to end the rebellion, but also to guard against a potential revolt in St. Thomas. “Not only are you bound to save us because we are allies, friends, and neighbors,” Gardelin wrote to the Marquis de Champigny, “but also because, as Christians, you cannot allow slaves to triumph over weakness and render us the victims of their rebellion.”¹²⁶

Gardelin’s message took two weeks to reach the Governor at Martinique, for the shipmaster had to sail against the prevailing currents. Once alerted, however, Champigny accepted the offer without waiting for royal approval and ordered two ships to begin to prepare for a journey to St. Thomas. The vessels carried two hundred men, including at least 50 free black soldiers and 16 enslaved valets. The men packed the ships with two months of provisions for the crew. Nine days later, on April 22—nearly six months after

¹²⁴ Account of the Orders and other Demands Against the Publick of St. Christophers, Minutes of Council, St. Kitts, February 20, 1734, CO 241/3.

¹²⁵ Orgueville to the Minister, Martinique, July 1, 1734, reprinted in Caron and Highfield, “French Intervention,” 49.

¹²⁶ Gardelin to Champigny, St. Thomas, March 21, 1734, reprinted in *Ibid.*: 26.

the St. John revolt first begun—the French forces arrived at St. Thomas. The following day the men anchored at St. John and set up camp in the pouring rain, using sails as tents.¹²⁷

By the time the French force from Martinique arrived, the rebels in St. John already faced considerable odds against them—they only had a single water source, limited gunpowder, and sparse provisions. Champigny’s orders were clear—he wanted his force to “exterminate the wretches to the last man.”¹²⁸ The rebels, however, managed to stay hidden until a sailor headed to Spanish Town spotted smoke coming from a peak over Coral Bay. The leader of the French force ordered the “Free Negro” company and 45 other men to hike up to the point, where they found several smoldering huts and a young boy who informed the party that the rebels would rather die than turn themselves into the white force. One rebel had already hung himself from a nearby tree when he realized he was about to be captured.

Masters on St. John tried to lure runaways back by spreading rumors that rebels would be pardoned if they returned to the lowlands. On May 16, “six besieged Negroes and two Negro women” marched out of the woods, but the French commander Longueville had them thrown in chains. A judge sent by Gardelin to St. John “passed sentence for the sake of formality,” and Longueville promptly executed three of the former rebels. The French officer sent the remaining five captives to St. Thomas, where they were publicly tortured and executed so Gardelin could make an example of them to other enslaved blacks who fell under his government.

¹²⁷ Orgueville to the Minister, Martinique, July 1, 1734, reprinted in *Ibid.*: 49.

¹²⁸ Champigny to the Minister, Martinique, April 12, 1734, reprinted in *Ibid.*: 33.

By the end of the month, the remaining rebels faced imminent starvation. In late May of 1734, a group of black troops from St. Thomas discovered the bodies of 19 men and 6 women who had decided to commit suicide instead of being reenslaved. Although rumors continued to circulate that a separate group of rebels was still on the run in St. John, the small expedition sent to find them came up empty handed.

Longueville gathered his men and returned to St. Thomas on May 26 after residing nearly a month on St. John. He left believing that he had ended a rebellion that had the potential to “inspire the spirit of revolt among the Negroes of all the islands.”¹²⁹ On July 1, 1734, Windward Intendent Jacques Orgueville repeated the claim when he prepared a final report for his superiors in France. The letter provided a narrative of the French expedition to the Virgin Islands in an effort to justify Champigny’s decision to send the force without formal approval from abroad. Orgueville related that the decision to send the force from Martinique to St. John was made

not only for the sake of the Danish islands but for the Windward as well. The Negro revolt on the island of St. John had been so contagious to the Negroes, or perhaps had spread such terror and panic in the minds of their masters, that it was believed to be necessary to take extraordinary precautions against the slaves on the island of St. Christopher and on other English and Dutch islands. Even in Martinique widespread rumors had it that we were off on a maroon hunt the very day of the departure of our expedition. We [also] put a few Negroes in prison on the denunciation of their master for loose talk which they had made. It is true, however, that...these remarks appeared innocent to us. They only seemed mutinous to their master because he feared that he might share the fate of the inhabitants of St. John. Still, this was one bad result of the revolt. But an end has been put to them by the complete annihilation of the rebels.¹³⁰

The intendent’s letter highlights the fine line between rumor and reality in the archipelago. In some cases, the St. John revolt very well may have inspired enslaved folk

¹²⁹ Monsieur d’Orgueville to the Minister, April 16, 1734, reprinted in *Ibid.*: 35.

¹³⁰ Orgueville to the Minister, Martinique, July 1, 1734, reprinted in *Ibid.*: 49.

in Martinique to talk to their masters with more of a haughty tone and may have even encouraged some to plot a different future. Perhaps the rebels in St. John did conspire with fellow Gold Coast slaves who labored at St. Thomas and Tortola. Maybe some enslaved folk in St. Kitts did hear of the revolt transpiring in St. John and ask themselves if it was time for them to do the same. Or maybe, as Orgueville claimed, some white colonists spun rumor into reality. Even then, conspiracies are by definition secret, so it is possible that the French imperial agent in Martinique was himself mistaken.

Clearly, however, there is one truth that emerges from the evidence: white colonists (regardless of imperial affiliation) believed that enslaved folk (regardless of their colonial ruler and ethnicity) were acting in response to events that took place on distant islands where slaves were rumored to be overthrowing their masters. The specter of a regional black awakening *seemed* like a real possibility because it *was* a real possibility. By 1733, nearly every island stretching from St. Thomas to Martinique was integrated into the Atlantic economy because of a labor regime predicated on the ideology of white power. The slave trade depended on it; the sugar trade depended on it; even the small cotton producers in the Virgins depended on exploiting racial others. Indeed, nuances pertaining to religious custom and laws regarding manumission and freedom for people of color differed according to imperial custom and local practice, and the frontier conditions of some of the Virgins may have allowed for paternalistic relationships to exist between masters and slaves.

Yet, despite all of these differences, the ideology of racial superiority united white colonists—Creole and European—across the islands. In turn, a regional consciousness about this ideology circulated the slave quarters, one that blossomed out of the immediate

experience of slavery, the slave trade, and the growth of local diasporas created by interisland trade and wartime capture. As enslaved folk were forced to migrate between the islands, they learned that having dark skin marked them as objects of white rule no matter the colony where they resided. Local diaspora making, whether in the Leewards proper or between the Virgins and the larger islands to the east, reminded enslaved folk in the islands that being black suggested commonalities in the face of ethnic differences and varieties of slave status. Thus, while the revolt in St. John may have been planned and plotted by Akwamu captives from the Gold Coast who had experience in battle, the meaning of the revolt morphed as news of the rebels' ongoing success circulated away from the island's shoreline. It is for this reason that the French officials repeatedly stated that they believed it was "in the interest of all nations" to help the Danish put down the St. John revolt. Any colony controlled by former slaves had the potential to upend the ideological order that sustained the entire region, regardless of the imperial colors that flew above its shoreline.

Conclusion

If the 1730s marked a "watershed moment in the history of the British state and empire," then the events of 1733 signaled the dark clouds of an emerging crisis on the horizon of the Atlantic imperial world.¹³¹ As discussed above, soon after the hurricane of 1733 and the subsequent revolt in St. John, colonial panic about black dissent erupted in St. Thomas, Tortola, St. Kitts, and Martinique. But news about black uprisings spread

¹³¹ Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, 170. Notably, the phenomenon of widespread dissent rattled the British Empire on both sides of the Atlantic world. News of black rebelliousness swirled together with fears of economic collapse and widespread hunger, rumors of a new Pan-Atlantic war pitting Hanoverian Britain against Bourbon Spain and France, struggles over the freedom of the press, and direct conflict between laborers and newly appointed state officials who were charged with implementing Walpole's new excise taxes on goods ranging from mast trees to gin.

beyond the Lesser Antilles as well as colonists and slaves learned about black protest via the trade routes that linked the Leewards to the larger Atlantic world. In Saint-Domingue to the west, white colonists faced an upswing in slave dissent in the Trou region between Le Cap and Santo Domingo, where a band of runaways led by Polydor raided struggling plantations for provisions.¹³² In 1734, panic about a slave plot gripped Providence in the Bahamas, where the storm laid waste to the fragile colonial settlement.

Newspapers, which had rapidly become part of merchant life in the Northern Colonies by the late 1720s and 1730s, helped fuel racial consciousness and the fear white colonists needed to take heed of saucy slaves who might be eager to flee, strike, or revolt at any time. Colonists in North America heard about the revolt in St. John during the same months they learned of the crisis in Jamaica, where slaves were becoming “rebellious Negroes,” forming “Negro Towns” in the mountains, and putting up a fierce resistance against imperial troops near Port Antonio.¹³³ Colonists soon imagined these events as part of a broader disintegration of the empire. Early in 1734, readers in Boston read about a supposed conspiracy in eastern New Jersey, where enslaved folk with an intent to “Murder the English” desired to assemble in “a great body” and flee to “some new country,” perhaps the “Indians in the French interest.”¹³⁴ Stories about slave

¹³² M. L. E. Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de La Partie Francaise de L'isle Saint-Domingue*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Chez l'auteur, au coin de Front & de Callow-Hill Streets; a Paris, chez Dupont, libraire, rue de la Loi, et à Hambourg, chex les principaux libraires, 1797), 175-176, Gabriel Debien, “Marronage in the French Caribbean,” in *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, ed. Richard Price (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 110, Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, 54.

¹³³ *New England Weekly Journal*, February 7, 1732, *Pennsylvania Gazette*, March 7, 1732.

¹³⁴ February 11, 1734, *Boston Weekly Rehearsal*, April 8, 1734, *New England Weekly Journal*. It is crucial to note that while some of these stories may have been mere rumor, they nonetheless blended with the personal and public accounts of armed conflict between slaves and colonists in the “Sugar Islands.” Facts, then, blended with fiction and exaggeration, but established the context for believing that the British sovereignty in the colonies was weak and that an empire premised on mass enslavement of outsiders was fragile. In Jamaica, some of the most fierce fighting with the “Rebellious Negroes” on the island erupted in

resistance echoed on the other side of the Atlantic as well, where London readers of the *Daily Courant* learned about the uprising on St. John via letters from St. Eustatius.¹³⁵

Seemingly sporadic at first, by 1737—after conspiracy scares erupted in Antigua and Guadeloupe—colonial heads of state began to argue that the events were connected, not in the sense of a grand conspiracy, but rather as a broader “Negro” awakening about political struggle in the colonies. Newly appointed Governor Trelawney of Jamaica, charged with organizing the final assault against the maroons on the island, famously penned that a “Dangerous Spirit of Liberty” had taken hold in the British plantations. Governor-General Mathew, who arrived in the Leewards to news of the St. John revolt, later called the seemingly connected episodes of black resistance a “contagion of rebellion.”¹³⁶ Citing the recent plot in New Jersey, the events in Jamaica, and the rebellion in St. John in the Virgin Islands, one writer to the *American Weekly Mercury* predicted that a “fatality was attending the English Dominions in America.”¹³⁷

In attempt to understand how and why this “spirit” appeared in the colonies, this chapter has situated the St. John revolt and the subsequent “contagious” nature of the rebellion within the context of both man-made and ecological catastrophe in the Leeward Islands. Within this framework, it is possible to see the crises of 1733 from several different angles. Perhaps news of the revolt in St. John did not stir slaves in other islands

late 1733— and by the next fall, readers in Boston learned that a regiment of six-hundred men led by two British colonels had been “beat off by the courage of a WOMAN”—probably the famed Nanny—near Port Antonio. Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman of Character in Jamaica, dated November 5, 1734, printed December 16, 1734, *Boston Gazette*.

¹³⁵ February 13 and February 18, 1734, *The Daily Courant*.

¹³⁶ Memorial of Edward Trelawney Containing some few Reasons for Continuing the Six Companies of Soldiers in Jamaica, Jamaica, n.d.(enclosed with a letter dated June 30, 1737), CO 137/56/80, Governor-General William Mathew to the Board of Trade, Antigua, January 17, 1737, CO 152/22/W88/302b. Gaspar, “A Dangerous Spirit of Liberty: Slave Rebellion in the West Indies During the 1730’s.”

¹³⁷ March 5, 1734, *American Weekly Mercury*.

to contemplate their own oppression. Maybe there was no “contagion” or “spirit” that swept through the islands. Maybe the “spirit of Liberty” was simply a work of the colonial imagination, “loose talk,” or even a way for colonial governors to draw lines between events that only seemed to be connected. Maybe, like amateur stargazers looking up at the midnight sky, white colonists were simply inventing constellations by drawing images out of the brightest stars they could see piercing through a sea of black.

Or, maybe the spirit reported by colonists did not sweep across the islands, but rather boiled up from below. Perhaps enslaved folk in Martinique, Tortola, and St. Kitts were responding to their immediate circumstances, to the crisis in food and health precipitated by the hurricane of 1733. Maybe enslaved folk did not know much about other lands and colonies, about where St. John or St. Thomas were relative to their local garden plot or watering hole. Maybe the only thing the runaways in Martinique knew in 1733 was that they were starving and that they could not stand a white person telling them what to do any longer. Maybe the maroons simply wanted to runaway to someplace else, maybe some new secret home high above the rocky cliffs of their old plantation.

Then again, maybe the ongoing struggle on St. John was a bright flash on the horizon, a sign of possibility, a spark of hope that peaked through a bloody mist of unbelievable misfortune. Maybe rumors of black success were enough for enslaved folk who lived on distant islands to know that somewhere out across the water someone like them was struggling and winning. Spirits, after all, are things that can’t quite be captured in the inky imperial quill of a non-believer. Like diasporas, spirits only exist if one believes in them.

Chapter VI

A Country Play

Thus far this work has illustrated how enslaved folk in the Leewards were exposed to geopolitical and social pressures on a local scale and how movement and experience shaped ideas about being black in the archipelago. However, little has been said about the African dimensions of life in the Leewards and how ideas about being from Africa informed the collective consciousness of the wider slave community. This chapter focuses on Antigua, the largest of the islands in His Majesty's Leeward Caribees. Our point of entry into the African dimensions of island life is the Antigua Conspiracy of 1736, and our focus is on the ways island-born Creoles and African-born enslaved folk created new social bonds across perceived social and ethnic differences during a moment of intense ecological and social pressure. At the heart of these encounters are two interrelated processes that shed light on what black Antiguans were doing in the summer and fall of 1736: revitalization and transculturation.¹

¹ On "revitalization," see Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist* 58, no. 2 (1956), Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), xxi-xxii. By revitalization, I am not suggesting a return to a distinct, idealized ethnic union, although Court's play and the rituals leading up to the event drew somewhat on "Akan" customs. Instead, I use the term more literally in an effort to point to the fact at both island and African born slaves would have called upon sacred power of the ancestors to empower them over the world of the living, both in context of social power and slave physical well-being. On transculturation, see Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, especially Fernando Coronil's comments, xxiv-xxvi, Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* (1991), Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008), and Dubois, *Colony of Citizens*, 2-3. Although influenced by these works, my use of the term, however, differs. Instead of viewing transculturation as the process wherein a dominant and subordinate "culture" interact and inform each other, I use the term to frame a way for thinking about how enslaved people from Africa and island born Creole slaves relied on practices (particularly those which signified identity) to articulate

Antigua, circa 1736

Before detailing how the slave cultural activity in Antigua in 1736 speaks to the issues of revitalization and transculturation, it is important to set the scene. The events that came to be known collectively as the “Antigua Conspiracy” began to unravel in the middle October of 1736, during the cane-planting season. The island was caught in the midst of another severe drought. The lack of water was so severe that cane fields were “burnt up”; upwards of 90% of the crop was eventually lost. To make matters worse, enslaved folk on the island had been pushed to extremes during the previous harvest season in an effort to make up for severe losses precipitated by the hurricane of 1733.²

Political turmoil also pulsed through the islands. Although residents in the Leewards no longer feared a pending war with France and Spain, tensions between the empires in the islands remained high. Leeward colonists (as well as the Dutch at St. Eustatius and French Guadeloupe) were furious with Governor-General Mathew’s efforts to break the illicit trade between merchants from the Northern Colonies, French traders, and Irish beef merchants—actions that not only threatened pocketbooks, but also access to food supplies.³ Mathew maintained that he was seizing ships in part to prevent the islands from being drained of hard currency, for local provision markets were already “distressed to an intolerable degree for want of small specie.”⁴ By late 1736, Kittsians decided to take their fury to the streets to burn and hang effigies of the Leeward Governor-General in protest.⁵

nebulous notions of a broader black consciousness that could account for cultural difference as well as slave solidarity.

² Gaspar, *Bondmen & Rebels*, 223-226.

³ Governor-General Mathew to Alured Popple, Antigua, July 17, 1736, CO 152/22/W48/127-128b.

⁴ Governor-General Mathew to the Board of Trade, Antigua, October 1, 1736, CO 152/22/W46.

⁵ Extracts out of a Letter from Governor Mathew, Antigua, January 17, 1736, CO 152/44/101.

For several weeks leading up to the discovery of the alleged conspiracy, slaves were seen marching late at night and on the weekend in large numbers to and from St. John, the most active port on Antigua and the meeting place for the island's government. According to one report, more slaves were "Assembled together in Greater Bodys, in and about the Town" than had ever been witnessed on the island in previous years. Not only were men and women gathered in large, rowdy groups, but blacks also "frequently insulted the Constables and the Militia Guard" who patrolled St. John on the weekends. White colonists also complained that they heard the sound of conch shells trumpeting late into the night—a familiar sound, but not during the evening. Slave drivers used conchs in the island to signal the beginning of the workday. The haunting echo of an island horn in the evening suggested that slaves were gathering somewhere. All of these acts fueled white suspicions that something was stirring in the slave quarters. Most dramatic, however, was the rumor that several enslaved men had been "caught in the Night" trying to get into Monk's Hill Fort, "armed with Cutlasses."⁶ The news deeply troubled the Antigua government. Not only was Monk's Hill the "Grand Magazine" of the island and full of gunpowder, but the image of several armed black men approaching a severely under-protected fort was eerily similar to the beginning of the revolt on Danish St. John, which had ended only two years earlier.

Justice of the Peace Robert Arbuthnot—believing that something was afoot—encouraged Antigua's constables to bring their complaints to him so that he could authorize public punishment for the slaves accused of "ill behavior." On the morning of Monday, October 11, 1736, Thomas Kerby—former agent for the Royal African

⁶ Minutes of the Antigua Assembly, October 15, 1736, CO 9/12/13.

Company and Speaker of the Antigua Assembly—asked Arbuthnot to assist him with a “tryal of some slaves informed against for gaming.” During the makeshift gambling investigation, “somebody” witnessing the examination mentioned that one of the accused suspects had been overheard saying “something to another slave about a List of Officers and Soldiers.” The rumor—reminiscent of the 1692 slave conspiracy in Barbados—was evidence enough for Arbuthnot to order constables to search slave quarters in St. John Town and “the plantations contiguous” for “Guns, Cutlasses, and Powder.” In the meantime, the men accused of gambling were publicly whipped.⁷

Hearing about the whippings, Jack, an enslaved cooper belonging to absentee plantation owner Philip Darby, complained out loud about what he perceived was excessive and unfair treatment leveled against the gamblers. “What,” he said, “do the Baccararas (white folks) mean by Punishing the Slaves?” “Do they think they Can live upon a Bit and Six Herrings a week?,” he proclaimed in an effort to draw attention to the extreme want facing slaves that October. Jack’s owner’s sister, Mrs. Douglass, warned him that speaking so freely was dangerous. Jack reportedly replied, “What can they do to me? They Can only whip me.” “No,” Douglass retorted, “they Can do worse.” “They Can only hang or burn me,” Jack defiantly stated, “I Can but Die.” Struck by Jack’s

⁷ This account introduces a report compiled by Justice of the Peace Robert Arbuthnot, supposedly provided to the councilors on October 15, 1736, hereafter abbreviated *AR*. Titled “The Substance of the Information given by Robert Arbuthnot, Esq. to the General & Council on Fryday the fifteenth Day of October 1736 of the Discoverys he made of the Dangerous Designs & behaviors of the Slaves,” the document is catalogued with documents dated January 8, 1737 from the Antigua Conspiracy trials. The Arbuthnot Report appears to be a summary of Arbuthnot’s notes and an account of his initial findings rather than an ongoing journal; it may be a transcript of an original report as the handwriting is the same as the minutes of council in which it is contained. The pages of CO 9/10 are improperly numbered; citations refer to the handwritten page numbers at the bottom, not the stamped page numbers. Emanuel’s testimony is the only one provided in the “Substance;” no trial testimony for Court or Tomboy appears in any of the documents sent to England. It is unclear why it was included with the council minutes in January, nearly two months after Arbuthnot gathered the information. Perhaps this was because of the mounting pressure stop the ongoing executions leveled by the second hanging court; Arbuthnot’s initial report—and Emanuel’s testimony in particular (discussed below)—provided the strongest ethnographic evidence of Court’s design to be crowned “King of Antigua.” October 15, 1736, *AR*, CO 9/10/41-42.

fearlessness, Douglass pressed the cooper why he was not afraid to lose his life. He supposedly responded, because “Court is King, and I am to be one of his Generals.”⁸

The enslaved man’s admonition that he was a general to a black “King” of Antigua fanned Arbuthnot’s fears that a plot was truly afoot. Although Jack later claimed that he was making his comments “in jest,” his bold statement caused Antigua’s Justice of the Peace to inquire about Court, a forty-five year old “Waiting Man” owned by Thomas Kerby. Colonists told Arbuthnot that on Sunday, October 3, 1736, Court performed a “Country Play”—a slave performance based on West African idioms—at Mrs. Parke’s plantation just outside of the major port town. According to one account, Court was “Crown’d King of the Coramantees in the Presence of the Greatest Number of Negros that were Ever known to Assembled together, near two thousand.” Slaves from all over the island attended the performance, as did a “great many” white colonists. Court relied on public performances familiar to slaves from the Gold Coast to stir his black audience’s imagination about an African-Creole alliance. Like nobles and leaders from the Gold-Coast and other West African states, Court sat “under a Canopy of State,” and was “surrounded by his great Officers” while he “walked in Procession as King.” By his side sat Tomboy, an enslaved Creole carpenter.⁹ Several other Creole slaves also attended the “Coromantee” King Court as his ceremony progressed on Sunday afternoon. Stories about this dramatic scene were enough to convince Arbuthnot that there was a deeper, more secretive meaning behind the performance, but Court’s owner, Thomas Kerby, maintained that the “Country Play” was just an innocent act. Arbuthnot pressed on, and within days Court and Tomboy were executed for plotting a revolt against the

⁸ October 15, 1736, *AR*, CO 9/10/42.

⁹ October 15, 1736, *AR*, CO 9/10/48-49.

King's government of Antigua. Over the course of the next four months, more than two hundred enslaved folk and free people of color were gathered up and accused of being involved in a plot to take over the island and "kill the whites." By the beginning of March of 1737, the government executed 88 men and was set to banish more than 30 slaves from the island.

Published accounts of Court's country play were the most detailed of any slave public performance in the British West Indies prior to 1750. Stories of the Antigua Conspiracy were more widely detailed in Northern Colony newspapers than were stories about the maroon uprisings in Jamaica—in part because the judges responsible for trying the conspirators sent copies of their official report abroad. News of Court's public ceremony circulated in printing houses on both sides of the Atlantic—readers as far apart as Dublin, Ireland and Virginia learned about the affair in late 1736 and 1737.¹⁰

Accounts not only served as an exciting read, but also an ethnographic warning about the dangers of alliances between blacks born in the New World—"Creoles"—and African-born slaves from the Gold Coast, known as "Coromantees." Readers were warned of masters who gave too many "opportunities" and "indulgencies" to their slaves, and learned that conspirators used dancing, gaming, feasting, and elaborate oaths to bring

¹⁰ An official report was submitted to William Mathew in late December of 1736 and appears in Antigua Council Minutes, January 24, 1736, CO 9/10/97-114 and Antigua Assembly Minutes, CO 9/12/36b-47b. The official report (hereafter called the "General Report") served as template for a 24-page pamphlet printed in Ireland, see Robert Arbuthnot et al., *A Genuine Narrative of the Intended Conspiracy of the Negroes at Antigua: Extracted from an Authentic Copy of a Report, Made to the Chief Governor of the Carabee Islands, by the Commissioners, or Judges Appointed to Try the Conspirators* (Dublin: Printed by and for R. Reilly, on Cork-Hill, 1737). The report was also reprinted over the course of the March 28, April 4, April 18, and April 25, 1737 issues of Zenger's *New York Weekly Journal*. *The Pennsylvania Gazette* relayed the report in the March 17 and March 24 issues, and *The Boston Newsletter* reprinted the thirteenth paragraph of report on February 24, 1737. Private letters detailing the ongoing event were printed in *The Boston Gazette*, *The Boston Evening Post*, *The New England Weekly Journal*, *The American Weekly Mercury*, and *The New York Gazette*, and *The Virginia Gazette*.

others into their plot.¹¹ Most importantly, colonists outside of Antigua learned to look out for the Coromantee “Ikem Dance,” a “Custom in Africa” that Gold Coast kings used to declare “War with a Neighboring State.”¹²

Historians, too, have honed in on the cultural character of the events because of the details the sources about the conspiracy reveal. Since the play and plots are so vividly revealed in the newspapers and Antigua government minutes, some scholars have dug into the source material to illustrate how enslaved Africans maintained distinct cultural continuities with specific West African cultures. In these works, Court’s “Country Play,” his oathing ceremonies, and the jubilant festivities that led up to the performance serve as evidence that “African” cultural expression served as the fountain of resistance in the slave community. African slave practices, in this view, were intrinsically resistive acts because they denied the destructive “social death” implied by commodification, whereas black Creole culture was inherently accommodative because island-born enslaved folk were raised as commodities from birth.¹³ Although these works tend to be influenced by ideas about materialism and the “master-slave dialectic,” a driving force behind them centers on the argument that African-born slaves possessed memories of their former homeland and way of life, but Creoles knew racial plantation slavery as normative and were thus more accommodative to labor regime.¹⁴ Importantly, these claims raise the important issue of how newly arrived enslaved folk adjusted to the violence of the slave regime with little previous experience of plantation labor or racial

¹¹ Ibid., 5-6.

¹² Ibid., 6-8.

¹³ Brown, “Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery,” 1243-1244.

¹⁴ Gaspar, *Bondmen & Rebels*, 246, Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 122-124, Mullin, *Africa in America*, 62-64, 211-212.

subjugation. However, these works have tended to treat “African” practices in the New World as static, overstating the degree of social distance between island-born and African-born enslaved folk while reaffirming the tropes that “Creole” and “African” were antithetical realities in the colonies.

Court’s “Country Play” and the events leading up to the Antigua Conspiracy suggest a different way of thinking about the relationship between slave identity and resistance in Antigua. Instead of analyzing Court’s public performance and the rituals surrounding the play as a function of distinct African and Creole cultural activities, perhaps the event is best understood as a conscious act aimed at promoting both transculturation and revitalization among blacks in Antigua in the face of considerable want and exploitation. After all, Court and his fellow “Coromantees” were not simply transplanting African cultural practices in Antigua—they were reimagining and refashioning them with the help of island-born Creoles. Together, Court, Tomboy, and their friends struggled to get black folk on the island to reimagine what it meant to be *at once* African and black Antiguans. These acts were interwoven with everyday Afro-Creole ideas about the cosmos and the spectral world of the ancestors. Slave leaders promoted oathing, feasting, and public performance to revitalize the slave community in the face of the immediate social chaos of droughts, imperial and domestic political tension among white colonists and imperial officials, widespread death, and heightened exploitation. In this sense, revitalization was not so much a return to a unique and distinct African cultural ideal, but an act of dynamic reinvention that drew on slave ideas about sacred power, leadership, and the possibilities of collective power.

Collectively, these cultural acts aimed to stoke the political imagination of the enslaved participants and to draw on the otherworldly power of their ancestors in an effort to transform lived reality. In short, the “Antigua Conspiracy” might best be interpreted as a case of dynamic “nativism,” wherein a small group of enslaved folk sought to promote a broader collective imagination about in the face of asymmetric power on the island. Drawing on generalized ideas about power, enslaved leaders worked to bridge plantation divides and perceived “African” and “Creole” differences by performing a unified example of black Antiguan identity that had already been signified through everyday practices of racial slavery in the region. Their rituals neither disregarded the power and knowledge African-born slaves like Court were thought to have possessed nor did they dismiss the valuable experience Creoles like Tomboy had from living in the imperially divided Leewards. Instead, the rituals openly articulated what was already well known in the slave quarters—that Africans and island-born Creoles, despite their differences, were collectively black slaves as long as they labored for white folks and aspiring British aristocrats in Antigua. Moreover, the gatherings underscored the potential power of turning latent ideas about common oppression into a collective, oppositional consciousness that skilled leaders hoped to use to influence slave ideas about the logic of minority white authority in Antigua.

Common Ground

Before delving deeper into the rituals and practices that bound enslaved folk together in Antigua in 1736, it is important to outline the everyday social links that connected men and women across the island. These connections formed the common ground that enabled enslaved folk in Antigua to imagine themselves as Afro-Antiguans in

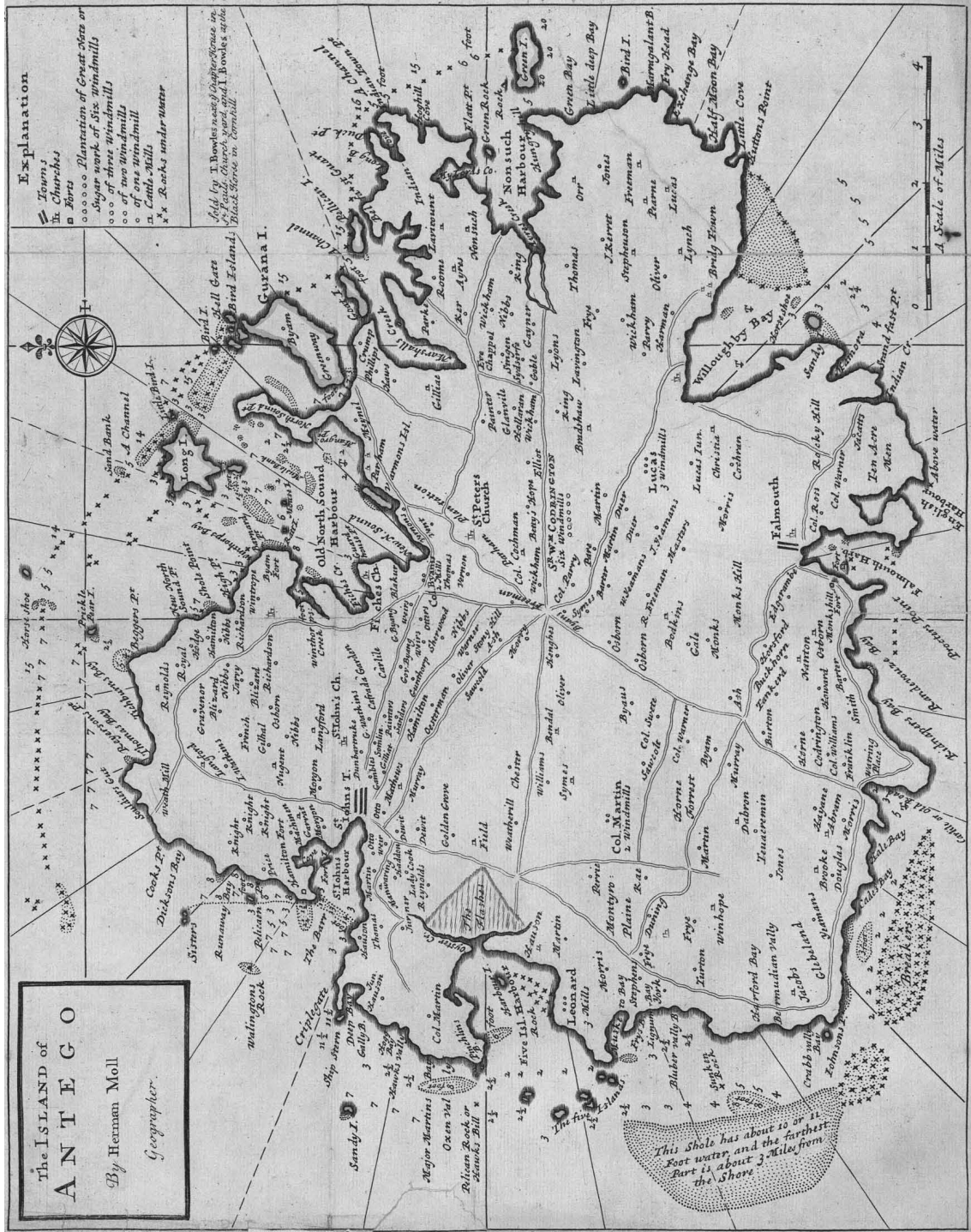


Figure 12:

“The Island of Antego,” by Herman Moll, c. 1736
CO 700/Antigua2

1736. Compared to its Leeward neighbors of Nevis, Montserrat, and St. Kitts, Antigua is relatively flat, save the mountainous Shekerleys on the southwestern side of the island. Despite being the largest of the Leewards—Antigua stretches roughly 16 miles across at its widest—trial evidence paints a picture of an island-wide information network that linked slaves together across plantation and parish divides. Using maps of the island and the trial records together, it is possible to uncover plantation connections for at least 107 of some 170 named slaves. Plantations from every parish in Antigua (and nearly every militia division) had slaves implicated in the conspiracy. Of those identified, 18 men resided in Nonsuch Division on the eastern half of the island, 20 came from Old North Sound Division in the middle of the island, and between 2 and 5 slaves came from Belfast, Willoughby Bay, Falmouth, Dickenson’s Bay, Five Islands, New Division, New North Sound, and Popeshead. Most of the accused (at least 37) came from St. John Division, which includes the port town on the western side of the island. Although women were accused of participating in the plots leading up to Court’s play, none were tried.

Most of the men implicated in the plot labored in tasks that required them to leave the cane fields either for short periods of time or entire seasons. Roughly 40% of the accused were skilled artisans who worked as masons, carpenters and coopers. Of these, dozens labored in St. John or other port towns on the island, but they remained connected to the plantation world. Perhaps more than 40% of the accused men (with identifiable status) labored on plantations—at least 35 men were drivers, and at least 7 were field laborers. Fisherman, carters, coachmen, and “waiting men” accounted for at least 10 of the accused. Although several women were mentioned during the trials, all of the

executed and banished were men. Men with Akan-derived names or were affiliated with Coromantee kin accounted for at least 42 of the 170-plus implicated, while men identified as Creoles accounted for at least 30. At least two Igbo men were accused of being involved, one of whom was a plantation driver. Unfortunately, the trial record does not clearly identify the “country” affiliation for the majority of the enslaved folk named during the trials. They were simply listed as Negroes.¹⁵

Since plantation exports relied heavily on the work of artisans, drivers, and carters—so-called “skilled” slaves—these men also had disproportionate access to mobility and the information circuits on the island. However, as discussed in Chapter IV, many enslaved folk in Antigua—field laborers as well as artisans—were familiar with the island roads, forts, and other matters of state infrastructure because they had been ordered to build and maintain at the government’s behest. Oliver’s Quou, for example, was described by the judges as “one of those Negroes who carried Powder to Monk’s Hill.”¹⁶

Direct involvement with state projects worked alongside the internal slave trade to accentuate slave exposure to the sinews that connected the broader Antiguan countryside to the ports. As Robert Baker’s massive map of Antigua illustrates, many of the enslaved folk accused of taking part in the conspiracy were property of owners who possessed multiple estates across the island as well as the archipelago.¹⁷ Thus, it is highly likely that men like Lyon’s Tom, Lavington’s Sampson, and Codrington’s Ghlode had spent

¹⁵ Data was compiled using trial records from CO 9/10 and 9/11, A List of the Names of Negros that were Executed for the Late Conspiracy, Their Trades, To Whom They Belonged, and the Day and the Manner of their Respective Execution and A List of Negroes to be Banished, both enclosed in Governor Mathew to the Board of Trade, May 26, 1737, CO 152/23/X7, and the lists in the General Report. Maps used include Herman Moll’s *Island of Antego*, c. 1739, CO 700/Antigua2 and Robert Baker’s *A New and Exact Map of the Island of Antigua in America*, c. 1748, CO 700/Antigua3.

¹⁶ Antigua Assembly Minutes, January 21, 1737, CO 9/11/12-13.

¹⁷ *A New and Exact Map of the Island of Antigua in America*, c. 1748, CO 700/Antigua3.

time at more than one plantation on the island, for their masters owned several on Antigua. Some of the accused spent considerable time outside of Antigua. Codrington's Jacko and Freeman's Secundi were both born in the French islands, where they may have been seized during wartime before arriving Antigua (see Chapter III). One man named Targut, who was baptized and could read and write, had "been to Northward," as had Vernon's Cudjoe, who had arrived in Antigua via Boston.¹⁸ Although it is not clear whether he spent time outside of Antigua, Court's "General" Tomboy was owned by a man who had family connections to Dutch St. Martin, where rumors of a slave rebellion circulated two months after the Antigua plot was supposed to have taken place.¹⁹

In addition to labor and the slave trade in Antigua, kin networks were particularly important ways for enslaved folk to connect across plantations. Monk's Mingo had wives at Booth's plantation and Ash's plantation. His brother, who labored on Benjamin King's plantation, also had a wife at Ash's, and the two brothers kept in contact by visiting their loved ones together.²⁰ Hanson's Quashee supposedly became involved with the country play while visiting his wife, who lived at Wavell Smith's plantation.²¹ "Fictive" kin were also important in linking slaves across plantation divides. Langford's Jack supposedly knew Court through his wife Coobah—she was one of Court's shipmates when they were sold from the Gold Coast to Antigua some thirty years earlier.²²

Evidence gleaned during the trials suggests that enslaved folk had a distinct way

¹⁸ Trial of Tilgarth Penezer commonly called Targut a Creole Christian Slave belonging to Widow Roach, November 26, 1736, CO 9/10/72-73.

¹⁹ William Mathew to the Board of Trade, December 23, 1736, CO 152/22/W91.

²⁰ Trial of Monk's Mingo, November 29, 1736, CO 9/10/60-61.

²¹ Trial of Hanson's Quashee, November 24, 1736, CO 9/10/68-69.

²² Trial of Morgan's Newport, November 9, 1736, CO 9/10/56.

of relating space and social affiliation on the island. Slaves in Antigua imagined themselves as part of an island comprised of a series of concentric “peoples” that overlapped across the countryside. On the smallest level was the plantation, which was the epicenter of daily life and thus the cauldron wherein people of African descent generated new ideas of belonging. Trial records are dotted with enslaved folk referring to each other according to the plantation where they labored, such as “Buckshorne’s people” and “Parham Negroes.”²³ Since they housed family members and kin, plantations were not only where work was done, but also key meeting places for small-scale feasts, festivities, and burials.

In addition to the plantation, however, enslaved men in Antigua also appear to have affiliated with larger, regional spaces on the island. Particularly important were the island’s divisions—carryovers from the seventeenth century, before the island was divided into parishes. Colonial governors used the division boundaries to organize the island militias. Trial evidence indicates that slaves identified each other according to these martial place names. During a feast, Hoskin’s Quashee was said to have led a toast or “health” to the enslaved folk from the divisions of St. George’s and Dickenson’s Bay.²⁴ In another case, Tomboy was said to have asked Cubbinah if he could amass the “People from Popeshead.” Trial records indicate that enslaved men sometimes took on aliases related to these militia hierarchies. During his trial, several men testified that Cubbinah was known as the “Lieutenant General of Popeshead.” Another man testified that before Cubbinah, a man named “Sigworth’s Quamina, now dead, was known as

²³ Trial of Monk’s Mingo, November 29, 1736, CO 9/10/61, Evidence against Parham Cuffey, a Driver who can Read and Write, February 24, 1737, CO 9/11/37.

²⁴ Trial of Tom Hanson’s Quashee, His Mother a Coromantee, November 24, 1736, CO 9/10/67.

Popeshead General.”²⁵ Monk’s Mingo was said to have taken on the name “Major Nanton of the Hill” and Hanson’s Quashee said that he met men who called themselves “Major Vernon” and “Colonel Gilbert” when he was with Tomboy at Morgan’s plantation.²⁶

In part, these Anglophone monikers may have been festive, “inversionary” pseudonyms to signify status. Yet they may have also been rooted in the very real role that enslaved blacks played in militia activities in Antigua. According to a law regulating the Antigua militia passed in 1703, “two trusty Negro-men, armed with good Firelocks, and a good sharp bill” were obligated to attend every officer of the militia cavalry, and “One Negro-man, with Red Coats, Black Leather Caps, and equally armed” were assigned “private Gentleman of the same body.”²⁷ Whether or not Coromantee men were singled out for these positions is unclear, but since a large proportion of enslaved folk from the Gold Coast were captured warriors and victims of war, the idea of military hierarchies would not have been a completely foreign concept.²⁸ English militia practices, in short, could provide Creoles and Coromantees alike a vernacular framework

²⁵ Trial of Cubbinah a Negro Creole Driver belonging to the Estate of Henry Osborne, December 8, 1736, CO 9/10/84.

²⁶ Trial of Monk’s Mingo, November 29, 1736, CO 9/10/60-61, Trial of Tom Hanson's Quashee, his Mother a Cormantee, November 24, 1736, CO 9/10/67.

²⁷ An Act for Regulating the Militia of this Island, no. 131, May 8, 1703, Barbara J. Fields, “Ideology and Race in American History,” in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. C. Vann Woodward, J. Morgan Kousser, and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 141. While it is unclear whether any of the men who took on the names of English militia officers were chosen by their masters to accompany them in case they were called to duty, many of the plantations involved in the conspiracy were owned by gentleman who served as majors, colonels, and captains in the island militia. Instead of simply performative, fictionalized names, men like “Major Nanton” and “Colonel Gilbert” may have in fact taking such names to signify their martial knowledge to other slaves—African and island born—who were aware of the workings of the island militias. Taking these names were also transcultural phenomena in the Ortiz sense, as they provided enslaved men who were war veterans in West Africa a framework for translating their understanding of martial hierarchies across ethnic lines into Antiguan creole.

²⁸ Philip D. Morgan and Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, “Arming Slaves in the American Revolution,” in *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age*, ed. Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 181.

for making sense of their own perceptions about martial order in Antigua.

Plantations and militia divisions were some of the more obvious places that enslaved folk used to make and imagine alliances in Antigua, but other places had particularly sacred import. These places were directly related to the ways people of African descent interpreted the workings of the cosmos. These sacred places would have been particularly significant gathering places during the ecological disasters that befell the Leewards in the early 1730s. Enslaved folk in Antigua (and Coromantees in particular) interpreted historical change and causality in relation to ideas about the sacred cosmos, in which beliefs about ancestral spirits figured prominently.²⁹ Moments of ecological catastrophe—such as the extreme droughts of 1735 and 1736, the cycle of diseases sweeping the islands after 1733, and hurricanes—were thus interpreted as consequences of lost connections with the spirit realm. Oldendorp noted that in St. Thomas, “Kramanti” women usually took a particularly active role in addressing disconnection with ancestral spirits during moments of drought, such as the one that plagued the Leewards in 1735. According to him, women would “present a variety of fruits” to a spirit interlocutor or Obeah-man and “ask him to provide rain.” These ceremonies, whether Coromantee or from another African tradition, drew upon what Oldendorp called “holy places,” which were sacred spaces where “visible or invisible gods” resided, such as “sacred houses or huts, lovely hillocks” and “sacred groves.”³⁰

Grave dirt, open pastures, and arbors figured prominently in discussions about Antigua oathing rituals in 1736. Graves not only marked the places where kin were

²⁹ John K. Thornton, “War, the State, and Religious Norms In “Coromantee” Thought: The Ideology of an African American Nation,” in *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 191-192.

³⁰ Oldendorp and Bossart, *History of the Mission*, 191-192.

buried, but also a physical vector between the spirit world and the world of the living. They were powerful crossroads that linked the past and the present together. Secundi, the Coromantee driver who was rumored to have inducted several non-Coromantees into a plot to revenge Court's assassination, was said to have used dirt from his sister Cecile's grave to create a binding oath with fellow conspirators. In a separate instance, Obbah gathered some dirt from her sister's grave and supplied it to a group of oath-takers in a calabash. Court was also said to have passed around a concoction mixed with grave dirt while speaking Coromantee to Creoles, and several gatherings were said to have taken place at "the arbor," in open fields, and at "the point."³¹

Arbors, graves, and other sacred places were thus instrumental places where ancestors could be invoked with the sacred incantations of Coromantee words; but also locales where slaves from different backgrounds could gather alongside Coromantees to acknowledge otherworldly power. Death is a universal fact of life; in the Leewards in the 1730s, in the face of ecological disasters, overwork, and malnutrition, enslaved folk from all backgrounds experienced the passing of kin and loved ones. Environmental disaster and asymmetric access to food supplies thus worked together to enhance the need for enslaved colonists in Antigua to appeal to the sacred cosmos for redress in the world of the living. Evidence suggests that the judges who tried suspected conspirators were well aware of the importance of otherworldly power that infused the festivities: when they ordered slaves to be burnt at the stake, the judges had them executed at one of their key meeting places—Otto's pasture, just outside of St. John. On Antigua, Otto's pasture was the sight of the largest black Sunday marketplace in Antigua, where women and men

³¹ Trial of Newport, November 9, 1736, CO 9/10/56, Evidence against Parham Watty, January 14, 1737, CO 9/10/6-10.

from all around the island could gather to exchange food items as well as important goods for sacred offerings—items like rum, chickens, cocks, goats, glass bottles, and beads.³²

Not only was the pasture a major crossroads of the island linking St. John to the other divisions of the island—the field was probably a spiritual crossroads as well. On the Gold Coast, Dutch observer Pieter de Marees noted that at traders near Cape Coast and El Mina kept shrines to honor the guardians of the marketplace. Market folk decorated their altars with “straw wisps and *Fetissos*” and honored their “God” with gifts of millet and palm oil to eat and water to drink. On holy days, spiritual “Fetisseros” or “preachers” sat on a stool in the middle of the marketplace and performed sacred rights as local traders bore witness to his elaborate rituals.³³ It is not a coincidence that white observers noted that on Sunday nights in Antigua, slaves actively engaged in public drumming, dancing, and drinking near the town—activities that were not only joyous and physically liberating, but also infused with the power of the sacred cosmos.

Coromantee Identity as a Model for Diasporic Practice

Earlier chapters of this study discussed the ways slave acculturation to slave life in the Leewards—becoming “Creole” in the imaginative sense—not only involved learning how to live in the face of racial plantation slavery, but also how to negotiate

³² Gaspar, *Bondmen & Rebels*, 146-148, J. Luffman, *A Brief Account of the Island of Antigua Together with the Customs and Manners of Its Inhabitants, as Well White as Black: As Also an Accurate Statement of the Food, Cloathing, Labor, and Punishment, of Slaves, in Letters to a Friend Written in the Years 1786, 1787, 1788* (London: Printed for T. Cadell, 1789), 138-140. Bosman noted that women were the principal marketers on the Gold Coast, see Willem Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea, Divided into the Gold, the Slave, and the Ivory Coasts* (London: Printed for James Knapton, at the Crown, and Dan Midwinter, at the Rose and Crown in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1705), 463. For description of a Gold Coast market, see Pieter de Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)*, trans. Albert Van Dantzig and Adam Jones (Oxford: Published for British Academy by Oxford University Press, 1987), 62-65.

³³ Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)*, 67-68.

regional warfare and geopolitical tensions (Chapters III & IV) as well as the island and regional environment (Chapters IV & V). Who, then, were Coromantees, the group of slaves white Antiguans maintained were the principal instigators of the plot? How did Coromantee identity relate to space in Antigua?

In the British colonies, Coromantees were identified as a “country,” not in the modern sense of a nation or an ethnicity, but more like a mutual-aid group that provided African-born slaves with a framework for creating new alliances and social bonds.³⁴ At its core, Coromantee identity emerged out of the ability of enslaved folk from separate societies in the Gold Coast to speak with each other despite differences in dialect—Coromantee “talk” was a New World, creolized version of what is today called Akan (or Twi). In the Gold Coast, Akan served as a *lingua franca* that facilitated trade and diplomacy between coastal communities and inland gold and slave-trading states.³⁵ While dialects of Twi served as the primary language in many regions including those governed by Fante and Akwamu, the language also served as a secondary language in other communities. Locals, however, did not give the language a singular name. Christian Protten—the son of an enslaved Moravian convert from Danish St. John—noted that the Gã speakers in Accra and Fon-speaking residents of Popo spoke to their Fante neighbors in “Fante.” Interestingly, in places where dialects of Akan were spoken as a secondary language, the reverse was not usually common. Gã speakers, for example, could communicate with other Akan speakers in and around Accra, but they were hard

³⁴ Thornton, “The Coromantees,” 169.

³⁵ Ibid.: 165, Thornton, “War, the State, and Religious Norms In “Coromantee” Thought: The Ideology of an African American Nation,” 182-183.

pressed to find someone who spoke Gã in Denkyira territory to the west.³⁶

Enslaved folk from Gold Coast and neighboring communities brought their ability to speak dialects of the common language with them to the Leewards. Oldendorp, who spoke to dozens of enslaved folk in St. Thomas during his stay on the island, noted how an Akkim man he met “spoke the language of the Amina and said that he also understood the languages of the Kommu, Assie, Fante, Agumma, Tjuru, Wamwi, Dentjela, Akkran, and Watje.” Oldendorp also noted that a man he met told him that the “Akripon also speak the language of the Amina,” while the “Tambi can understand the Amina, but they do have a language of their own.”³⁷

Whereas in St. Thomas, slaves often called Twi “Amina,” in Antigua, enslaved folk—Coromantee and Creole alike—called this common language “Coromantee.” The language spoke by slaves in 1730s Antigua has corollaries in other New World colonies where men and women from the Gold Coast ended up as slaves. As anthropologist Kenneth Bilby has illustrated, the Accompong Maroons in Jamaica use a ritual, “invocational” “Kromanti” language as a way to “encapsulate, through symbolic means, a past that is to be alive in the present” and a strategy for reaffirming historical consciousness.³⁸ Trial records suggest that enslaved folk who understood Coromantee in Antigua might use the language to speak with each other around non-speakers, often as a

³⁶ See H.M.J. Trutenau, ed. *Christian Protten: Introduction to the Fante and Accra (Gã) Languages, 1764, and J.E.J. Capitein's 1744 Fante Catechism*, Second (Corrected) ed. (London: Afro-Press, 1971), 6-8. Protten, the son of the Rebecca Protten of the Danish St. John, called Gã “Accra” and what may have been Twi “Fante or Amina.” He assured his Moravian benefactors that the latter was “definitely understood by all and sundry on the whole Gold Coast” and was used “by all sorts of people as a general language,” and was understood by “all Accra people, without any exception.” He wrote the *Introduction to the Fante and Accra Languages* with the intent that that it would be used by future Moravian missionaries on the Gold Coast intending to convert “mulatto” children at Danish Fort Christiansborg.

³⁷ Oldendorp and Bossart, *History of the Mission*, 161-164.

³⁸ Bilby, *True-Born Maroons*, 21.

ritual tongue that enhanced the otherworldliness and Africanness of the moment. Slaves frequently testified to the uses of Coromantee in the presence of non-Coromantees during ritual oaths and feasts. During the trial of Jack, a “Coromantee Field Slave,” Dick testified that he heard Secundo (a Coromantee driver) specifically say to Jack “me Secundi Brasso” and “Accartirri” as the two “talked the Coromantee Language.”³⁹ Court, for example, was said to have consecrated a toast “in Coromantee to the Coromantees” before turning around to other Creoles in attendance to tell them, “in English,” what the ritual meant, an act that highlights how the creolized Akan served as a medium for local diaspora making in Antigua.⁴⁰

Although Coromantee language provided enslaved folk a way to forge cross-plantation alliances with co-countrymen, Coromantee descent did not determine allegiance on the island. During the conspiracy trials, testimony revealed that different “companies” of slaves were going to be responsible for ransacking plantations according to the militia division where they resided. While the trial judges maintained these companies were going to be organized into Creole and Coromantee divisions, evidence suggests that internal, plantation alliances played a more important part. When one slave reportedly asked Quashee, an island born man, whether he was going to join with Creole Tomboy or Coromantee Court, he said he was going to stick with his fellow plantation man, Tomboy. Notably, the judges made a point of noting that Quashee, while island born, was the son of a Coromantee woman—a significant fact since descent in most Akan

³⁹ Trial of Jack, a Coromantee Field Slave belonging to Colonel Cochran, December 3, 1736, CO 9/10/79. The trial transcript offers the translation of “a great man” and notes that “Accartirri” meant “I sill cutt their heads off.” In his 1705 history of the Gold Coast, Willem Bosman noted that a Brasso was a Fante “word importing leader” or “chief governor.” Bosman, *New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, 56-67.

⁴⁰ Trial of Tom Hanson’s Quashee, His Mother a Coromantee, November 24, 1736, CO 9/10/68.

families is imagined along matrilineal lines.⁴¹

This evidence suggests that rules about who could and could not be Coromantee were not rigid, but rather plastic and mutable. In fact, Court was probably not a native Twi speaker—he was most likely Gã. Both “Kwartey” and “Tackey” (Court’s “alias”) are Gã names that are used to signify the first-born child of two distinct noble lineages.⁴² Not only was Court likely Gã, but as discussed below, he needed to be schooled by an elder about how to perform the central act of his country play—the ikem shield dance. These facts alone highlight the degree of flexibility enslaved folk attributed to the meaning of being Coromantee in the 1730s. “Country” ideas about being Coromantee not only allowed members to cast a wider net for mutual support and cross-plantation alliances; country identities also underscored broader notions of difference that potentially informed the collective consciousness of enslaved folk whether they were island or African-born.

In a more immediate and every-day sense, Coromantee performance in Antigua had many functions: it served as a way to signify difference between Coromantees and their others; it worked as a sacred language that evoked psychological connections to ancestors and places of the Old World; and in the presence of non-Coromantee enslaved folk, it had a mysterious performative dimension that ascribed power to the ritual at hand. Although Court’s contemporaries identified Coromantee as a distinct ethnic identity, it

⁴¹ Trial of Tom Hanson's Quashee, his Mother a Coromantee, November 24, 1736, CO 9/10/66.

⁴² Court actually went by two Gã names. Both “Kwartey” and “Tackey” (Court’s “alias”) are Gã names that are used to signify the first-born child of two distinct noble lineages. Perhaps more importantly, Court needed to be schooled in the rituals of his country so that he could share them with other blacks from around the island. Prior to his performance, Court enlisted the help of an elder from the Gold Coast to show him how to dance the ikem. Thornton, “The Coromantees,” 176, n. 125, Richard Hart, *Slaves Who Abolished Slavery: Blacks in Rebellion*, Reissue ed. (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2002), 12.

was in fact Afro-Creole, a New World invention that enslaved folk used to create bonds beyond the boundaries of the plantation and in the face of the inter-colonial slave trade.⁴³ As such, the idea of being Coromantee functioned as a model for the ways enslaved folk from African and island traditions could find common ground in the face of exploitation.

Country ideas like being Coromantee were at heart oppositional—not necessarily in a reactive sense—but because they emerged out of the context of dislocation and isolation imposed upon enslaved folk who had been detached from their homelands and dehumanized by commodification. Coromantee identity served as an example of the potential of slave counterpower, for it modeled to other enslaved folk in Antigua ways to organize themselves in the face of white terror. In the sugar islands, to be Coromantee was to be at once black and African. In turn, as a signifier of “Africanness,” country plays and ritual practice encouraged alternative ways of interpreting the world, ways of thinking that drew their power from the spirits of a distant land.

The Damnation Oath

Officially, the invisible boundaries of the plantations acted as social borders. From the perspective of the plantation manager, cultivating a sense of plantation unity was instrumental in keeping the plantation in working order and the owner’s property accounted for. From the perspective of enslaved folk, however, these collective values translated into mutual support on the plantation. Enslaved folk sharing plantation space relied on one another to protect garden plots and cattle pens from poachers and bandits seeking to access food during times of want; sometimes, enslaved folk even whipped or murdered slaves from other plantations who attempted to steal from their plantation

⁴³ Thornton, “The Coromantees,” 162.

grounds. For masters as well as enslaved folk, then, suspicion of outsiders and unknowns was integral to maintaining the plantation order, as enslaved folk working together on a plantation found it necessary to maintain an “insider” versus “outsider” plantation perspective.

Evidence from the Antigua Conspiracy suggests that enslaved folk put a premium on trying to overcome these divisions in the months leading up to the Court’s country play. Although culturally, Coromantees, Creoles, and other enslaved shared much in common because of everyday interactions, the collective consciousness emerging from the plantation did not easily translate into cross-plantation unity. To overcome perceived differences and suspicions, enslaved folk in Antigua turned to sacred rituals to forge new alliances that bound them together. One ritual in particular—called the “Oath of Secrecy and Fidelity” by the judges—figured prominently in trial evidence of the conspirators. Throughout the trial record, judges and slaves called this sacred agreement the “health” or the “damnation” oath, referring to the belief that those who broke the agreement would face “damnation and confusion.” Based on Coromantee traditions, the ritual took on broader meaning as Creoles and Coromantees alike used it to bind enslaved folk from different plantations and ethnic backgrounds together in secrecy and solidarity.

Trial judges did not learn about the oath until after executions and torture had already begun. According to the *Narrative*, the justices first heard about the powerful binding ritual from an enslaved Creole man named Treblin, who had been accused by two other slaves of hosting feasts where the ritual took place. After being jailed, Treblin became a key witness during the trials after he revealed that the oath was used to bind

Tomboy and Court “over a grave at the point” and by other slaves at his house.⁴⁴ His testimony proved key to unraveling what prosecutors believed was a revenge plot hatched by Secundi, a baptized “Creole.” Prior to coming to Antigua, Secundi spent time in the French islands before he became a driver on young Thomas Freeman’s plantation. For the judges, eyewitness testimony about the oath was positive proof that enslaved men from different plantations and ethnic backgrounds had sworn allegiance to each other and to the task of overthrowing the Antigua government.

Quamina, an enslaved Coromantee, provided the most vivid account of the oath to the justices. During the trial of Quawcoo, “an Old Oby Man,” plantation “physician,” and Coromantee, Quamina told a story about how he witnessed Freeman’s Secundi and Hunt’s Cuffy take the oath from Quawcoo one night. Secundi arrived at the obeah man’s house and gave Quawcoo a chicken, a “Dominique Cock,” and a bottle of rum. Quawcoo took the items and several sheepskin “obey,” or sacred charms, and arranged them on the ground. The obeah man then “took the Cock, cut open his mouth and one of his toes, and so poured the Cock’s blood over all the Obey, and then rubb’d Secundi’s forehead with the Cock’s bloody toe.” After marking Secundi’s face, Quawcoo then took the bottle of rum, poured some on the obey charms, “drank a dram,” and then “made Secundi swear not to Discover his Name.” Secundi then asked the mystic when the time would be right to rise against their masters. Quawcoo reportedly picked up a string, “ty’d knots in it,” and told Secundi that he need not rush, for he “had tyed those knots so the Bacararas [whites] should become Arrant fools and have their Mouths stopped and their hand tyed

⁴⁴ Arbuthnot et al., *A Genuine Narrative*, 12.

that they should not Discover the Negro's Designs."⁴⁵

What is fascinating about the oath was its ritual plasticity: while almost all slaves testified that it involved basic material ingredients—most importantly liquor, blood, and grave dirt—the ritual was reinvented in different settings according to who was performing the oath and who was partaking in the ceremony. Evidence suggests that after Court and Tomboy took the oath together near the grave at “the point,” they proceeded to use the basic outlines of the oath to convince other enslaved men to join their plan, oftentimes adapting the ritual according to their audience. Tomboy reportedly offered the oath at a feast where “a great number of Creoles and Coromantees” from St. John town gathered. After the guests were finished eating, Tomboy lifted a bottle of liquor and said, “Gentleman, I am going to Toast a Health & Damnation to them that wont pledge it or give their Assistance.”⁴⁶ Sometimes slaves changed the ingredients of the oath. At one feast, Hoskin’s Quashee asked Tomboy if he could take the oath with something besides rum punch because “his Constitution would not bear” the drink. Tomboy and Court allowed him to substitute the rum punch with water, and Quashee then “drank a health to Dickenson’s Bay,” the militia division just north of St. John.⁴⁷ While island-born enslaved folk and Gold Coast-born slaves were the primary oath takers, other evidence suggests that African-born slaves from other country backgrounds also accepted the oath. After Secundi took the oath from Quawcoo, he also shared it with other recruits much in the way that Tomboy and Court did during their feasts. Primus, an “Ebo Field Negro,” reportedly took the oath and promised Secundi that he would “knock

⁴⁵ Trial of Quawcoo an Old Oby Man & Physicion & Cormantee belonging to Mr. William Hunt, December 11, 1736, CO 9/10/91.

⁴⁶ Trial of Tilgarth Penezar Commonly called Targut a Creole Christian Slave belong to Widow Roach, November 26, 1736, CO 9/10/74.

⁴⁷ Trial of Tom Hanson’s Quashee, His Mother a Coromantee, November 24, 1736, CO 9/10/67.

the white people in the head” after drinking from a bowl of punch. He then turned to Hunt’s Cuffey, a Coromantee, and drank a health in his honor. Primus, however, refuted the charge, stating that his accuser Quamina was making up the claim because he “had a mind to his wife,” Margaret.⁴⁸

Admittedly, enslaved folk may have exaggerated the use of the oath, and the testimony about the health may have the result of hearsay, rumor, and false testimony by enslaved folk who were desperately trying to save their own lives at the expense of others. Witnesses could have learned about the general character of the oath in jail or during trial. It is also likely that at least some enslaved folk were well aware that white elites and poor folk on the island also ascribed power to oathing ceremonies that bound their masters to their king as militia officers, assemblymen, and council members; even for white colonists, then, oaths served a quasi-magical or religious aspect to imperial contracts that were meant to symbolize promises made to members of a military hierarchy.⁴⁹ Some enslaved folk in Antigua may have learned of European oathing practices in Africa; Willem Bosman noted that Dutch merchants in Axim used Bibles to consecrate military alliance oaths between black caboceers (“principal men”) and company officials.⁵⁰ Yet much of the testimony suggests that enslaved folk put stock in the power of the oaths that slave leaders conducted regardless of their ethnic affiliation. Whether Coromantee, Creole, or Igbo, slaves taking the oath believed that they were engaging in a sacred agreement that had consequences if broken. Thus, the mere belief in the existence of the oath speaks directly to the fact that enslaved folk in Antigua were

⁴⁸ Trial of Primus, a Ebo field Negro belonging to Peter Bawn, December 13, 1736, CO 9/10/92.

⁴⁹ For example, Governor-General William Mathew took “the test” and the oath when he arrived in St. Kitts after returning to govern the Leewards in 1733, see Minutes of the Council of St. Kitts, December 27, 1733, CO 241/3.

⁵⁰ Bosman, *New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, 134-135.

already actively developing syncretic beliefs about the ways the worlds of the living and the dead permeated social life in the islands. Judges, in turn, viewed the oath as an act of witchcraft and heresy, and thus turned to the stake as the ritual means to purge the perceived evil from the island.⁵¹

It is possible that the judges fabricated elements of slave testimony and drew from familiar histories of the Gold Coast to buttress their argument that so many of the suspected conspirators needed to be executed, but there is also plenty of evidence to suggest that Coromantee oathing was a diasporic practice that slaves used in colonies besides Antigua. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century travel accounts of the Gold Coast written by European merchants and slave traders frequently remark on the practice of “eating fetish,” when Gold Coast merchants and other elites used oaths to bind Europeans to military alliances, trade deals, and land use rights on the coast.⁵² Moreover, sacred oaths involving blood and rum figure prominently both in eighteenth-century discussions of plots involving Coromantees as well as modern ethnographic studies of Maroon communities in Jamaica and Guiana.⁵³ During the 1712 slave insurrection in New York during which eight to ten white colonists were murdered, Coromantees, Papas, and Creole blacks (free and enslaved) were rumored to have taken an oath consecrating their

⁵¹ Of at least 88 enslaved men executed, 77 were burnt at the stake. Slaves were executed by ritual burning even before Treblin revealed the oath, see Gaspar, *Bondmen & Rebels*, 30-36.

⁵² *The Golden Coast, or, a Description of Guinney*, (London: Printed for S. Speed, 1665), 72-73, Ludvig Ferdinand Rømer, *A Reliable Account of the Coast of Guinea (1760)*, trans. Selena Axelrod Winsnes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 100-102, 205, 100 n.174, Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)*, 69-70, 108-109, Bosman, *New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, 133-135, 149-150.

⁵³ Barbara Klamon Kopytoff, “Colonial Treaty as Sacred Charter of the Jamaican Maroons,” *Ethnohistory* 26, no. 1 (1979), Kenneth Bilby, “Swearing by the Past, Swearing to the Future: Sacred Oaths, Alliances, and Treaties among the Guianese and Jamaican Maroons,” *Ethnohistory* 44, no. 4 (1997), Bilby, *True-Born Maroons*, 262-270.

union.⁵⁴ In his study of Maroon oathing practices in Jamaica and Guiana, Kenneth Bilby unearthed several accounts—both oral and archival—of the importance Maroon leaders attached to ceremonies whereby blood from the participants was drawn, placed in a calabash, mixed with rum, and drank to consecrate sacred promises. Maroons believed that if these agreements were broken, “death and damnation” would find the violators.⁵⁵

Feasts

While the commissioners interpreted Court’s public ceremony as the key to establishing Court, Tomboy, and at least six others as the symbolic leaders of the intended insurrection, it was the slave testimony of elaborate feasts and ritual oaths that underscored for the trial judges that the plot was real. Just before rumors began to swirl about a pending slave revolt in mid-October, white colonists complained about large gatherings of enslaved people in and around the port town of St. John. Conch shells were heard echoing across the cane fields late into the night, and large numbers of energetic slaves were seen traveling together back and forth from Otto’s pasture south of town. At one point, an armed white man fired into the air in an attempt to break up a large party of slaves, only to be derided for his efforts. Arbuthnot argued that this activity was evidence that the “insolence” of the slaves had increased “to a very dangerous pitch” by early October.⁵⁶ In his mind, these gatherings confirmed that slaves in Antigua were conspiring, but they may have simply been large feasts where enslaved folk shared in

⁵⁴ Thornton, “The Coromantees,” 173, Walter Rucker, “Conjure, Magic, and Power: The Influence of Afro-Atlantic Religious Practices on Slave Resistance and Rebellion,” *Journal of Black Studies* 32, no. 1 (2001): 86-88. See also Letter from Thomas Barclay to the Secretary of the SPG, New York, May 31, 1712, Fulham Papers, A9/206, Letter from Mr. Sharpe to the Secretary of the SPG, New York, June 23, 1712, Fulham Papers, A9/216-217.

⁵⁵ Bilby, “Swearing by the Past, Swearing to the Future: Sacred Oaths, Alliances, and Treaties among the Guianese and Jamaican Maroons,” 664-669.

⁵⁶ *AR*, October 15, 1736, CO 9/10/41.

providing gifts of food and drink in the face of adversity.

Enslaved folk testified to more than twenty feasts in the months leading up to the Court's public performance at Widow Parke's pasture. Slaves brought alcohol and food with them from their plantations and the market and shared their fare, although participants were expected to provide the host with a monetary gift in exchange for hosting the party. Musicians, including fiddlers and horn players, were typically encouraged to attend the late night parties. Slave leaders accused in the plot hosted several feasts leading up to the country play. Court and Tomboy hosted several gatherings, and Secundi was said to have had at least three feasts.⁵⁷ Martin's Jemmy, whose testimony the commissioners relied heavily upon, claimed that in St. John alone there were frequent gatherings for "several months past," including feasts at "Shephard's, Wavel Smith's, at Darby's, at Court and Tomboy's, at Mr. Gunthorp's, at Mrs. McSweeny's, and other places."⁵⁸ The feasts varied in size, but always involved slaves from multiple plantations, various owners, and even multiple militia divisions. Court and Tomboy attended many of the feasts together. In at least one case, the commissioners recorded testimony that white folk were present.⁵⁹

Slaveowners and poor white folk often cited feasts as evidence that enslaved folk were engaged in subversive activities. As discussed in Chapter IV, white Nevisians cited a slave feast as evidence against Frank and other suspected conspirators.⁶⁰ Slaves feasts were outlawed when marooning mushroomed in St. Kitts in 1722, but the gatherings

⁵⁷ *AR*, October 15, 1736, CO 9/10/49-50, Trial of Mr. Langford's Robin, a Caromantee, November 13, 1736, CO 9/10/57, Evidence against Vernon's Cudjoe, January 14, 1737, CO 9/11/15.

⁵⁸ Trial of Ned Chester a Mulatto Carpenter belonging to Caesar Rodney, November 26, 1736, CO 9/10/69.

⁵⁹ Trial of Tilgarth Penezar, Commonly called Targut, a Creole Christian Slave belong to Widow Roach, November 26, 1736, CO 9/10/72-77.

⁶⁰ Deposition of Mary Combs, Wife of John Combs, Taylor, in Minutes of Nevis Council, September 29, 1725, CO 186/1/39.

were not specifically mentioned in the similar act passed in Antigua the same year.⁶¹ Generally, however, feasts were tolerated in the Leewards. On the Stapleton estate in Nevis, the manager was well aware that slaves gathered to drink and share food supplies in 1734.⁶² At least one plantation owner in Antigua allowed his slaves to host feasts leading up to the Antigua Conspiracy in 1736. Targut, an enslaved, baptized carpenter, stated that he hosted a feast “at Lyndsey’s by the Manager’s leave.”⁶³

It is not surprising that these large gatherings and feasts took place between August and early October. In the West Indies, the rainy late summer corresponded to the sugar cane planting season, but also signaled more time for slaves to tend to their small provision grounds. As Robert Dirks and David Barry Gaspar have argued elsewhere, the conclusion of the shipping and processing season in the West Indies was followed by an increase in available time for the harvest of locally raised goods, such as “Guinea corn” and yams.⁶⁴ In Jamaica, “yam time” was celebrated at the end of September and involved large, kin-oriented family gatherings. Generations of men and women typically gathered at an ancestor’s burial place, sacrificed a cock or a goat, and then proceeded to a central meeting place to have a feast and dance with their neighbors. A slave interviewed in 1824 remarked that during “yam time,” it was “customary for us all to have our friends about us.”⁶⁵

Not coincidentally, in West Africa the harvest season for crops like yams and corn

⁶¹ *Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of St. Christopher*, 72, *Laws of the Leeward Islands*, 206-217.

⁶² David Stalker to William Stapleton, 1734, Stapleton MSS. 6/10.

⁶³ The Trial of Tilgarth Penezar Commonly called Targut a Creole Christian Slave belong to Widow Roach, November 26, 1736, CO 9/10/72.

⁶⁴ See Gaspar, *Bondmen & Rebels*, 142-143, Dirks, *The Black Saturnalia: Conflict and Its Ritual Expression on British West Indian Slave Plantations*. See also, Smith, *Natural History of Nevis*, 232.

⁶⁵ Reprinted in Dirks, *The Black Saturnalia: Conflict and Its Ritual Expression on British West Indian Slave Plantations*, 147.

also arrived between late August and October. The seasonal timing of these gatherings helps explain why these public rituals seemed to be more frequent in late August and September in Antigua. In many parts of West Africa, including Nigeria, Ghana, and parts of Congo, residents participate in seasonal celebrations that invoke the power of ancestors, purify the landscape of malicious spirits, and foster emotional bonds of collective identity. Harvest celebrations thus symbolize community rebirth. These West African rituals often correspond to the harvest season, typically of yams, but also with other crops such as corn or millet. In contemporary Ghana, thousands from the interior of the country travel to the coast to participate in Odwira (the Akan festival punctuated by the first yam harvest), Ohun (the Akyem harvest festival), and Homowo (a Gã festivity tied to the first corn harvest).⁶⁶ In each case, celebrations first take on a particularly local character and are often organized around kin groups. Families first honor neighborhood leaders or chiefs before they gather in a central location, usually a large town, to confirm the power of the stool and in turn, unite a diverse and sometimes fractious population through public acts of ritual and merriment.⁶⁷ During his time as a factor for the Dutch West India Company, Bosman witnessed many of these elaborate gatherings that marked the end of the harvest season. He called these Gold Coast

⁶⁶ Such a description nonetheless glosses over the considerable dynamism and different meanings that persisted year by year and from location to location. *Odwira* translates from Twi as “purification” whereas *Homowo* means literally “hooting for hunger” in Gã. Different polities celebrate at different times, but always between late August and early January. See Herbert M. Cole, “The Art of Festival in Ghana,” *African Arts* 8, no. 3 (1975), John Parker, *Making the Town: Ga State and Society in Early Colonial Accra* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000), 5, Gilbert, “Aesthetic Strategies: The Politics of a Royal Ritual,” 99. For a dated yet informative discussion of Homowo see Quartey-Papafio, “The Ga Homowo Festival.”

⁶⁷ Such a description nonetheless glosses over the considerable dynamism and different meanings that persisted year by year and from location to location. Napoleon Bamfo, “The Hidden Elements of Democracy among Akyem Chieftaincy: Enstoolment, Destoolment, and Other Limitations of Power,” *Journal of Black Studies* 31, no. 2 (2000), Gilbert, “Aesthetic Strategies: The Politics of a Royal Ritual.” On the origins of Homowo note Sophia D. Lokko, “Hunger-Hooting Festival in Ghana,” *The Drama Review: TDR* 25, no. 4 (1981).

festivities “fairs.”⁶⁸

As the harvest season for garden crops approached in Antigua in 1736, Court and his co-conspirators drew upon elements of these diverse African “country” traditions to unify enslaved people throughout the island and to bridge differences in prestige and identity that otherwise enabled white overseers, plantation owners, and merchants to exploit people of color for their labor. Clearly, if Court and Tomboy did plot to overthrow the plantocracy in Antigua (and kill the Governor-General of the Leewards), their choice of late October would have been optimal for a variety of reasons, including the general air of enthusiasm and the sense of “counterpower” that circulated across the plantation boundaries.⁶⁹ Public gatherings were both a visual confirmation of the numerical superiority of the enslaved population as well as infused with a degree of cosmic power that Court and Tomboy could hope to harness in their effort to steer enslaved Antiguans to revolt.

Making the “Canopy of State”

Court’s public performance on October 3, 1736, was aimed at gathering enslaved folk from the existing social networks that pulsed through Antigua under a common umbrella. By gathering as many enslaved folk as they could together in one place, Court and Tomboy worked to affirm a collective consciousness. The trial judges called this massive play “the Master-piece of the plot” and a way for Court to “make proof of his numbers.”⁷⁰ In open daylight just after noon, Court, Tomboy, and their Coromantee and Creole assistants joined together at Mrs. Dunbar Parke’s pasture just outside of St. John

⁶⁸ Bosman, *New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, 159-160.

⁶⁹ On counterpower, see Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, 24-27.

⁷⁰ Arbuthnot et al., *A Genuine Narrative*, 6.

to perform a great “shew and dance.”⁷¹ With horns blowing and drums thumping, Court marched into the field first, accompanied by Gift, Animoo, and Quashey, each of whom took on Coromantee titles. After Court took his seat in the middle of the pasture stage, Tomboy—designated as Court’s “greatest General”—marched into the scene, accompanied by Hercules, Fortune, and Jack. It was an event that was months in the making; it was also a new festivity that gained white recognition because of its novelty in Antigua.

In an effort to make sense of the public ceremony, the judges crafting the General Report turned to their private libraries in an effort to understand what had transpired that afternoon. One work they certainly turned to was the 1705 translation of Willem Bosman’s *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, originally published in Amsterdam two years previous.⁷² In their report submitted to Governor-General Mathew, the judges claimed that the performance signaled that “a new Government was to be established,” but that Court had desired to rule as a monarch while the Creoles had desired to settle a commonwealth.⁷³ These contrasting models for political organization were not only gleaned from British experience—they were directly taken from Bosman’s work description of Gold Coast polities.⁷⁴ The claim that Court and Tomboy had

⁷¹ Ibid., 8.

⁷² Bosman, *New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*. For a discussion of the accuracy of the translation, see Albert van Dantzig and Willem Bosman, “Willem Bosman’s “New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea”: How Accurate Is It?,” *History in Africa* 1 (1974). Van Dantzig published an eight-part revision of the English translation in *History of Africa* that compares the Dutch and English. Bosman admitted that he was generalizing, noting that “indeed the best of their Governments and Methods of Administration of Justice are so confused and perplexed.” See Bosman, *New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, 164. Some of the justices may also have read Pieter de Marees’s work which contained a description of an ennobling ceremony and was accompanied by a stylized plate depicting a man riding into the scene on a stool, Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)*, 167-170.

⁷³ Arbuthnot et al., *A Genuine Narrative*, 6.

⁷⁴ Bosman, *New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, 78-79, 162-195.

different opinions about how to govern Antigua not only made the conspiracy seem real, but it also cast the ceremony as an event rife with ethnic tensions rather than a festivity meant to promote black unity under a common banner of African-diasporic consciousness in Antigua. Although it is important to keep evidence about Gold Coast societies in mind, treating the festivity as an authentic reproduction misses the degree to which Court's country play was in fact a consciously Antiguan event meant to signal a collective black revival.

Evidence throughout the trial records indicate that Court did not organize his performance based on memories alone. Instead, he relied on a wide-ranging cast of slave actors from diverse backgrounds to help him acquire the material goods necessary for the event and to train him on how to carry out the performance. Although specific practices from the Gold Coast may have informed the play, when it was finally performed, it was already heavily creolized even if it was meant to enhance black onlookers' ideas about Africanness in Antigua. Court was said to have lived in Antigua for more than thirty-five years and was described as an "elderly" fellow of forty-five—which means he probably arrived in the Leewards when he was about ten.⁷⁵ It is possible that Court was not yet initiated into adulthood and had yet to have learned the meanings behind the very rituals he wanted to perform in 1736.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ General Report, January 24, 1736, CO 9/10/97(handwritten 101). See also Gaspar, *Bondmen & Rebels*, 320, n314.

⁷⁶ Accounts of puberty rights are not well detailed in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century accounts of the Gold Coast. Rømer wrote that in and around Gã -speaking Accra, young boys were not "considered a man unless he has been circumcised," which often did not happen until after the initiate was older than eight. Both Rømer and Bosman note that the Gã were the only ones to practice circumcision; see Rømer, *A Reliable Account of the Coast of Guinea (1760)*, 100, 111-112, Bosman, *New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, 210-211. Note also, Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)*, 23.

Justice Arbuthnot learned some of the most vivid details about Court's desire to put on his country play from Emanuel, an enslaved cooper who worked in St. John. Emanuel—described as a “Portuguese Negro”—told Arbuthnot a detailed story about how Court wanted the cooper to make a large, ceremonial “canopy of state” for him. Tensions between Court and Emanuel had been ongoing. Early in 1736, Emanuel was working hard trying to finish his coopering tasks for the day when Court walked into his shop asking for a favor. According to the report, the cooper was a bit annoyed; several weeks earlier Court had belittled him and his wife Isabella after Emanuel refused to play his trumpet for Court at a feast. When Court last visited Emanuel, the forty-something Coromantee man was dressed for a special event and was wearing a “great coat,” carried a saber with a red handle by his side, and wore a “green silk cap on his head with a bunch of black feathers.” “The trumpet belongs to the King,” Emanuel had told him, “and is for the White People and not proper for Negroes.” Court, in an effort to demean Emanuel, told the cooper's wife to “take your husband and tie him upon your back.” After insulting Emanuel's manhood and calling his wife “not good,” he mounted a mare and rode off “in a great passion” for his feast on Langford's land. This was just before Christmas—several weeks earlier—and now Court was back at the shop, this time asking for a different type of favor.

Emanuel explained that Court entered the cooper's shop in early January with his hands full of several pieces of wood, some wire, some blue cloth, and a large piece of white ozenbrig. “What do you want me to do with this,” Emanuel reportedly asked him. “I want to play my Country Play,” Court replied, proceeding to ask the enslaved cooper if he could fashion him an umbrella. Emanuel hesitantly agreed to help, quickly piecing the

sticks together and then cutting the cloth together to form the pieces of the shade. Happy with the frame, Court left it behind with Emanuel to pick it up at a later date after he found someone to sew the canopy together. Emanuel, feeling disrespected, threw the frame behind his house, hoping not to deal with Court again. Unfortunately, Court returned a few days later, this time with the cloth stitched together, some blue paint, and a vial of linseed oil. He wanted Emanuel to decorate the umbrella after he was finished assembling the canopy to the frame, asking the cooper to “paint a Pigeon on top” with the blue paint. He left again, promising the cooper that he would be back to pick up his ceremonial umbrella.⁷⁷ Emanuel, frustrated with Court’s requests, did not make the canopy. The cooper told Arbuthnot that he refused to do so because “his mind misgave him that it was for no good purpose.”⁷⁸

The exchange between Court and Emanuel is fascinating on several levels. Rarely do private correspondence and government documents mention seemingly mundane encounters between black folk from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds—Court was known to his peers on the island as a Coromantee who had been born in the Gold Coast, while Emanuel was a “Portuguese Negro.” Furthermore, the meeting not only highlights tensions between two enslaved men in Antigua. The encounter also reveals some of the ways enslaved folk drew upon a general diasporic imagination to reinvent and affirm a collective black Afro-Creole identity locally in Antigua. It is notable that Court, who arrived in Antigua as a young boy via the Gold Coast, turned to Emanuel, a “Portuguese” black cooper, to help him construct a

⁷⁷ Examination of Emanuel, a Portuguese Slave Belonging to Edward Gregory a Cooper in the Town of St. John's, October 12, 1736, CO 9/10/49-50.

⁷⁸ Examination of Emanuel, a Portuguese Slave Belonging to Edward Gregory a Cooper in the Town of St. John's, October 12, 1736, CO 9/10/53.

ceremonial umbrella and to paint it with a bird symbol. Neither man would have been truly familiar with the customs of Court's "country," yet Court was eager to have him craft the umbrella and decorate it with symbols.

Court's request to have Emanuel paint a picture of a "pigeon" on top of his umbrella is also telling, and may point to his desire for black onlookers from the Gold Coast to remember their past.⁷⁹ The pigeon may have the image of the proverbial sankofa bird. Later symbolized in heart-shaped form in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Akan arts, particularly adinkra cloth, the bird is usually displayed with his head facing backwards. The bird is said to symbolize remembrance and is used to remind onlookers to not forget what they have left behind.⁸⁰

Court's request for an "umbrella" is also fascinating, for it brings to mind a striking symbol of political regalia of Akan communities of the Gold Coast. Whether or not Arbuthnot was personally familiar with the significance of the umbrella is unclear; engravings of West African kings being shaded by servants carrying umbrellas existed as early as 1602.⁸¹ By the beginning of the eighteenth century at the latest, Akan heads of state engaged in trade relationships with Dutch and British used large umbrellas to

⁷⁹ Examination of Emanuel, a Portuguese Slave Belonging to Edward Gregory a Cooper in the Town of St. John's, *AR*, October 12, 1736, CO 9/10/47. Emanuel's testimony was taken a few days after Robert Arbuthnot began to interview enslaved men and women about what he believed was an increased level of "insolence" by blacks in town. Arbuthnot, having heard rumors that Court had been "crowned King," casually asked Emanuel if he ever had any exchanges with the Coromantee man, upon which Emanuel "opened such as scene without seeming himself to know the meaning of it." The cooper innocently told his story Court, describing his dress and the umbrella frame. Arbuthnot took these as sure signs that umbrella was in fact a canopy and that Court had in fact been "preparing the badges of Royalty" for some months.

⁸⁰ Birds—particularly feathers—figured prominently in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century "fetishes" and regalia in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century descriptions of ceremonies practiced in West Africa; Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)*, 69-70. Eric Seeman has recently argued that adinkra symbols may not have existed in the early eighteenth century, and that the heart shaped symbol for sankofa is a much later invention. See Erik R. Seeman, "Reassessing The "Sankofa Symbol" In New York's African Burial Ground," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (2010): 109-113.

⁸¹ Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)*, xxiii, plate on xv.

signify their prestige to onlookers during public festivities, including harvest festivals such Odwira, funeral celebrations, “outdooing” festivals, oath swearing ceremonies, and ennobling rituals.⁸²

The judges involved in trying the Antigua Conspiracy were not certain about the meaning of Court’s play. While Arbuthnot suggested in his report that “Court’s play” was used to signify that he had become King of Antigua, the judges in their report backed away from this claim, and argued that the performance was a shield dance that was actually a public declaration of war called the ikem. John Thornton has argued that while the ceremony used military symbolism, “it was not specifically a military event and was acquired by merchants rather than soldiers, although the distinction between the two tended to blur in the conscription-oriented societies of the Gold Coast.”⁸³ Significantly, both de Marees and Bosman described something akin to the ikem dance in their histories of the Gold Coast, describing the display as a ceremony used by merchants and other “commoners” as way to take on noble titles.⁸⁴ The judges may have picked up on this theme, for they argued in their report that Court pretended to be of “Royal-Blood” and had acquired “much more Money than Slaves are usually Masters of.”⁸⁵ Yet, in their official report, they backed off Arbuthnot’s insistence that Court’s play was a coronation and emphasized its martial importance. While their explanation is possible, it was more

⁸² Sharon F. Patton, “The Asante Umbrella,” *African Arts* 17, no. 4 (1984): 65-66, Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: The Structure and Evolution of a Political Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 117.

⁸³ Thornton, “War, the State, and Religious Norms In “Coromantee” Thought: The Ideology of an African American Nation,” 195.

⁸⁴ Bosman, *New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, 136-137. Thornton argues that Court’s ikem “corresponds almost exactly” with Bosman’s description, see Thornton, “War, the State, and Religious Norms In “Coromantee” Thought: The Ideology of an African American Nation,” 195.

⁸⁵ Arbuthnot et al., *A Genuine Narrative*, 4. They also claimed they learned about the ways the ikem was performed in “Coromantee country” from witnesses and confessions, not from Bosman or de Marees, see Arbuthnot et al., *A Genuine Narrative*, 6.

than likely that Court was simply trying to perform the dance and show as a way to signify leadership, much in the way that present-day asafohene do during “outdoorings” and harvest festivals.⁸⁶

Court was not even certain how to perform the ikem. Much as Court relied on Emanuel to make him his ceremonial umbrella, he turned to another man born in the Gold Coast to show him how to perform the sacred ikem or shield ceremony. Quawcoo, who was identified as a spiritual “Oby man” and Coromantee, reportedly gave Court lessons on the dance steps for the performance and the types of material items used in the ceremony, including the “Oben,” or ceremonial elephant tusk horn. After Quawcoo was brought to trial, Langford’s Billy testified that he saw Court and the Obeah man at Kerby’s wharf in early September. Quawcoo was “shewing Court how they played with the Ikim in his country” while wielding a “Wooden Cutlace to shew how they fought there.” Quawcoo also had a “sheep skin on his Thigh and blowed an Oben,” which the judge noted was an “Elephant’s tooth.”⁸⁷

In their report, the judges noted that Court’s public performance of the ikem was adapted for an Antiguan audience. Since Emanuel had refused to supply the umbrella, Court elected to have two wooden, ikem shields. Instead of metal cutlasses and lances, as were common in the Gold Coast, Antiguans carved them out of wood. Whereas in “Coromantee country,” it was typical for the declaration of war to conclude with the execution of a captive taken from the opposition, in Antigua, Court’s Braffo smashed a drum “instead of a man.”⁸⁸ Most importantly, the judges maintained that Court and the

⁸⁶ Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)*, 168, n.162.

⁸⁷ Trial of Quawcoo an Old Oby Man & Physicion & Cormantee belonging to Mr. William Hunt, December 11, 1736, CO 9/10/89.

⁸⁸ Arbuthnot et al., *A Genuine Narrative*, 8.

other Coromantees performed a key part of the ceremony in the Coromantee language as a way to confuse the Creoles. During the ikem, Court was rumored to have taken a wooden cutlass and pressed it against the foreheads of his Creole general Tomboy, pronouncing a sacred oath in Coromantee that bound the two men together in battle. Importantly, neither de Marees nor Bosman mention such an oath in their descriptions of the shield ceremony. However, the judges insisted that the oath was central to understanding the plot, noting, “This dance without the Oath is often used in the Coramantee Country as an entertainment” but with the oath was “certain a declaration of War.” According to witness accounts of the ceremony, the Creoles did not know the meaning of the oath, but several Coromantees spectators knew what it meant and responded with a collective response of three “huzzas.” Others, fearful of the coming violence that the oath signified, reportedly jumped into the arena in an effort to prevent Court and his assistants from finishing the ceremony.⁸⁹ Whether or not Court’s country play was actually a declaration of war is unclear. Nor can we say with any certainty that Tomboy and the other Creoles did not understand the meaning of the oath. Regardless, it is interesting that Court’s play was meant to draw people from around the island into a public space just outside of the seat of government of Antigua—a fact that certainly stirred the imaginations of both the participants and the judges in 1736.⁹⁰

Conclusion

Court’s country play, while rooted in ideas about being a Coromantee, spoke to multiple audiences at the same time: Coromantees who traced their identity to the Gold

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹⁰ One colonist told Arbuthnot that some “two thousand Negroes” and a “great many White People” were present at the performance. *AR*, CO 9/10/48-49.

Coast, island-born black folk who identified as Creoles, slaves more generally as such, and white onlookers, some of whom ultimately interpreted the display of status as a “danger to the state.”⁹¹ Slaves performed the play for the *island*; the performance was at once a Coromantee event at the same time that it was a signal to people of African descent in Antigua that they were joined together by their common dispossession.

Court’s play, months in the making, speaks to slave ideas about collective power and the prospects of a new collective identity in Antigua in the 1730s. White colonists testified to an increase in public behavior that was never previously seen on the island before in the months leading up to 1736, an indication that Court, Tomboy, and the numerous other enslaved folk who participated in the festivities were actively engaged in deliberately creating something new. Although Court may have modeled his play on ideas about Coromantee statecraft, both the preparation for the performance and the gatherings leading up to the event indicate that ideas about crafting a flexible notion of slave identity that could account for black cultural diversity on the island were at the heart of the Antigua Conspiracy.

Enslaved leaders involved in the plot did not aim to revitalize a dying culture or restore an idealized African past, but they did aim to revitalize and empower a sick and hungry community through the use of rituals that served to remind the audience of alternative, Afro-Creole sources of power.⁹² The men and women like Court, Secundi, Quawcoo, and Obbah aimed to invigorate people who already perceived of themselves as part of a wider Antiguan population marginalized by the colonial order and slavery. The accounts of feasts point to a long-standing island tradition, one wherein enslaved folk

⁹¹ Antigua Council Minutes, January 8, 1736, CO 9/10/38, AR CO 9/10/48-50.

⁹² For a similar argument, see Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815*, 122-129.

gathered not only for pleasure, but also to share vital resources with kin and friends who had been dispersed throughout the island. These collective gatherings, in addition to everyday encounters framed by dynamics of labor, provided a fluid arena for enslaved folk to share ideas about who they were and where they belonged. But these events were also infused with beliefs and practices that encouraged an active and imaginative rethinking of the extent to which white power and authority could control the destiny of enslaved folk and people of color in Antigua. As enslaved folk testified throughout the trials, beliefs in a powerful alternative cosmos of ancestors and spirits permeated slave gatherings as well as the play itself. From the point of view of frantic white folk and government officials, oathing, Coromantee talk, and Obeah seemed more like heretical acts of witchcraft than religion. For enslaved folk—*island* and African-born—these features of Antiguan society provided solutions that did not come from their masters' authority and power, but rather from spiritual forces that white colonists and imperial officials could not truly grasp nor wanted to understand until after rumors of the plot came to the fore. For overworked and hungry men and women laboring in dry Antigua in 1736, spirits and ancestors provided the power for enslaved folk from different backgrounds to turn their island country into a new land.

Conclusion

In Search of Will

On Saturday July 4, 1741, New Yorkers gathered to watch a man burn at the stake. Residents in town knew him as Will, but some called him Bill. Only two days before, a court tried Will for joining with a motley group of Irish tavern keepers, Spanish sailors, disaffected soldiers, and fellow slaves—many of them Coromantees—in a plot to take the “country” after burning nearby Fort George to the ground.¹ Will’s sentence came swiftly.

Will, as it turned out, had an extensive knowledge of subterfuge, conspiracy, and outright rebellion. The judges in the northern port town believed that he was involved in the St. John revolt of 1733. They also knew that prior to Will’s arrival in New York, he was known as “Widow Langford’s Billy” in Antigua, where he resided before his exile from the island for his role in the conspiracy of 1736. Billy made it to New York by testifying against Court, Tomboy, and dozens of other slaves four years earlier, but when he was implicated for his role in the New York Conspiracy of 1741 his recent past came back to haunt him. From the judges’ point of view, Will was an “expert in plots,” and because of his particular skills, they believed it was “high time to put it out of his Power

¹ Thomas J. Davis, *A Rumor of Revolt: The "Great Negro Plot" In Colonial New York* (New York: Free Press, 1985), Linebaugh and Rediker, *Many-Headed Hydra*, Jill Lepore, *New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in an Eighteenth-Century Manhattan*, First Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage, 2006).

to do any further Mischief.”² So the judges ordered him to be chained to a wooden stake and lit on fire for terrified fellow slaves and white colonists to observe on a Saturday afternoon.

Will’s story was a major motivation for this study. To the judges, Will was the perfect villain. Not only was Will black and a slave in New York during a moment of panic, he was reportedly familiar—intimately familiar—with two of the most notorious acts of slave dissent to grace the pages of *The New York Gazette* and *The New York Weekly Journal* in recent memory, both of which took place on small islands far to the south. But what made Will—or Billy—who he was? Was it simply his alleged role in the St. John revolt and his testimony during the Antigua trials that made him a perfect antihero, a happenstance character in an aspiring judge’s narrative? Or was Will a product of his Leeward past, a person who had learned lessons of an imperially divided region that was at once united by the common realities of racial oppression and exploitation?

Digging deeper into Billy’s life reveals that in order to understand him—and in some ways the New York Conspiracy itself—one has to explore the world that made the supposed plotter who he was. This means moving way outside of the boundaries of colonial New York, to Antigua and the other Leeward Islands. Reading early colonial newspapers about the New York plot revealed that the Leewards were part of a long-standing but forgotten history of colonial North America. Between 1718 and 1738, the number of ships traveling between New York and the British Leewards rivaled those

² Daniel Horsmanden, *Journal of the Proceedings in the Detection of the Conspiracy Formed by Some White People, in Conjunction with Negro and Other Slaves, for Burning the City of New-York in America and Murdering the Inhabitants* (New York: Printed by James Parker at the New Printing-Office, 1744), 119.

plying to Jamaica. A similar pattern existed in shipping circuits linking Boston and Philadelphia to the Leewards as well—and these numbers do not include the ships sailing between St. Eustatius, the Virgin Islands, and the Northern Colonies.³ In part, the importance of the Leewards to colonial merchants and absentees was rooted in their ascendancy to the top of the sugar trade—exports from the Leewards tripled after St. Kitts became wholly “British” in 1713. Between 1711 and 1720, the four small islands collectively shipped 37.9% of all sugar sent to England—more than Jamaica and Barbados. By the 1730s, sugar exports from the Leewards accounted for nearly 46%, or three times the amount shipped from Barbados.⁴ The connections between the Leewards to northern ports were so important that by the 1720s, merchants in Philadelphia and New York frequently relied on ships from Antigua as their most up-to-date source of news from England.⁵ These interlocking worlds made Will’s journey to New York possible. He was not alone. Between 1715 and 1750, about 1 out of every 5 slaves sold at New York came from the Leeward archipelago.⁶

On Antigua, Will—like Frank, the “ungrateful rogue” from Chapter IV—was a driver on a plantation in Old North Sound Division. He was not a skilled artisan or town slave, but he did possess a remarkable “cosmopolitan ability to transcend the confines of nations and cultures,” skills that he would use after he was exiled to New York.⁷ As a

³ James Brown, George Philip Krapp, and John Carter Brown Woods, eds., *The Letter Book of James Browne of Providence: Merchant, 1735-1738* (Providence: Printed for the Rhode Island Historical Society, 1929), 31, 23, 28, 51.

⁴ Steele, *The English Atlantic*, 286, 296-301, Noël Deerr, *The History of Sugar*, 2 vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1949), I:193-198, Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, 490-491.

⁵ Steele, *The English Atlantic*, 29.

⁶ James G. Lydon, “New York and the Slave Trade, 1700 to 1774,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1978): 383, Gregory E. O’Malley, “Beyond the Middle Passage: Slave Migration from the Caribbean to North America, 1619-1807,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (2009): 129.

⁷ Berlin, “From Creole to African,” 262.

driver, Will labored as an intermediary between a black labor force made up of men and women who came from a wide array of places and spoke multiple languages and a white manager whose sense of self was rooted in his ability to turn the plantation into a successful imperial enterprise. Will's primary encounters in Antigua were with the men and women who toiled in the cane fields, people who had come from places as near as Nevis and as far away as Dahomey. He was responsible for setting the pace of the work as well as for making sure that the white manager knew what he needed to know about slave activity. Both Will's outward-looking, worldly experience and his potentially subversive ideas about power in the colonial world were traceable to his life in Antigua, an island where the vast majority of the inhabitants labored like him—in agricultural production. His search for a new land began not in New York, but in the constellation of islands called the Leewards.

The Leewards share an interesting quality with New York—their island character. Writing in 1966, Fernand Braudel noted that islands often play a role “in the forefront of history.” “The events of history often lead to the islands,” he wrote, “perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they make use of them.”⁸ Seemingly isolated and alone, when islands become integrated into shipping routes they become actively bound to the history of places beyond their shores.⁹ Braudel's insights about the islands in the Mediterranean stuck in my mind while trying to understand Will. The fact that Antigua became so integral to the British Empire during the same period that the enslaved man lived on the island for did not seem coincidental. Like the other enslaved folk caught up in the

⁸ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds, II vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), I:154.

⁹ *Ibid.*, I:150.

Antigua Conspiracy of 1736, Will was part of a larger trend of historical change that was experienced locally, within the boundaries of the island.

The colonial history of the Leewards reveals that slaves made use of the islands, not just internally, but externally as well. Enslaved folk fled to the mountainous interiors, but also across island boundaries. Caught in the crossfire of competing empires, slaves in the islands served as spies who provided intelligence to outsiders during wartime, armed themselves during moments of invasion, and sometimes even guarded the very plantations where they labored as slaves. Enslaved folk turned their knowledge of the mountains, their view of the shorelines, and the sea into sources of resistance—both against their masters and their masters' imperial enemies. In the face of capture and dislocation, enslaved folks in the Leewards reframed these broader historical experiences into local forms of knowledge. Slaves learned how to sneak between Nevis and St. Kitts for raucous Sunday festivities and how to gain access to ships leaving Antigua and Montserrat. They learned of hiding places where they could gather to meet with loved ones who had been sold to distant plantations and even other islands. Even when they were taken from their families and sold to new plantations, enslaved folks chose to remember where they came from in the archipelago. Men and women took on names that not only signified their African pasts, but also names that underscored where they came from in the Leewards. Together, these acts promoted an image of the islands as places intimately connected by the sea as well as by interlocking histories.

These regional experiences worked to shape both internal island alliances as well as broader perspectives about race and belonging. In his autobiography, Olaudah Equiano detailed how his experience in the Leewards shaped his understanding of race

and power. While laboring as an enslaved sailor, Equiano sold bottles and other small items between Montserrat, St. Kitts, St. Eustatius, and the Virgin Islands in order to save hard currency to purchase his freedom. The black sailor's travels between the islands suggested to him that the treatment of the slaves in all the islands he visited was "nearly the same; so nearly indeed, that the history of an island, or even a plantation" might "serve for a history of the whole." One encounter he had in Montserrat stood out in particular. While in Plymouth, he met "a poor Creole negro" who had been often "transported from island to island" in the Leewards. The man told Equiano a story about how his master repeatedly took away the fish he caught to subsidize his meager rations. "When my master, by strength, takes away my fishes, what me must do?" the man said to Equiano. "I can't go to anybody to be righted." The story moved Equiano so much that he "could not help feeling the just cause Moses had in redressing his brother against the Egyptian," the story of Exodus.¹⁰ Soon after his encounter with the Creole Leeward slave, Equiano hatched his plan to buy his freedom and escape his pharaoh.

The desire to search for a new way of life in the Leewards was a longstanding tradition that informed ideas of resistance in the slave quarters. As discussed in Chapter I, collective black escape informed enslaved folk's dreams of a new land as early as 1639, when more than sixty runaways fled up the mountains of St. Kitts to escape from the French quarter. Africans and island-born slaves both turned the island environment into a powerful source of opposition, sometimes independently, but often together. As the cases of maroonage in St. Kitts and Antigua in the 1680s and 1720s indicate, decisions to flee were not necessarily related to whether an enslaved person was island-

¹⁰ Olaudah Equiano and Vincent Carretta, eds., *Olaudah Equiano: The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 110-111.

or African-born. Flight also continued to be a tool for resistance in the Leewards even after Creole populations became the majority of the inhabitants in the region. However, as the sugar plantation regime gobbled up the landscape and forests were destroyed for fuel, runaways found it increasingly difficult to sustain themselves in the mountains.¹¹ Departure by sea nonetheless remained a possibility. Seaborne escape informed black ideas about resistance in the Leewards into the eighteenth century—as late as 1748, colonists in St. Kitts and Nevis had to contend with plots by slaves that involved seizing canoes and sailing vessels in an effort to get off the island. Even in the nineteenth century, after news of abolition reached the Virgin Islands, slaves tried to flee Danish St. Thomas to Tortola in hopes of gaining freedom in British lands.

Collective exodus was not an option for the vast majority of enslaved folk in the Leewards, however. Instead, people of African descent had to work to turn the islands into their own “countries” in the face of white power and racial violence. Yet as the Antigua Conspiracy and the St. John revolt indicate, even in cases of internal alliance-making, enslaved folk had to contend with regional influences that shaped the local character and culture of the slave population. In the Leewards, becoming an islander—becoming Afro-Creole—involved learning not only how to adapt to the new environment, but also to the atmosphere of competing empires and diverse cast of colonists who lived in the islands. Forging alliances in the slave quarters of the Leewards thus required a mindset that was open to change and flexible enough to allow enslaved outsiders from disparate African communities and other islands to become insiders.

¹¹ Gaspar, *Bondmen & Rebels*, 256-258.

Just as the region facilitated radicalism in the slave quarters, the Leewards also encouraged white settlers to think about alternatives to both physical containment and ideologies of empire. White debtors, indentured servants, and former sailors also turned the archipelagic landscape into a source of power. Indentured servants in Nevis searched for liberty in the ships that passed by the islands in the 1630s. Poor Irish colonists, many of them sent to the islands as war captives, used the atmosphere of competing empires to find freedom from abusive masters in the 1660s and 1690s. Tortola and Spanish Town became havens for poor white settlers who wanted to escape the clutches of the colonial state following the War of Spanish Succession. In the archipelago, islands on the horizon symbolized the possibilities offered by flight to somewhere new and distant.

The leeward environment even encouraged merchants to think about what James C. Scott has called the “art of not being governed.”¹² When riots broke out in St. Kitts in 1736 and white colonists burned Governor-General Mathew in effigy in Basseterre to protest his seizure of ships plying back and forth with St. Eustatius, protestors were not only voicing their anger over imperial coercion, but also to the long tradition of ambivalence about domestic control from abroad that stretched back nearly a century. This tradition continued to inform the political outlook of islanders in the decades after Mathew’s tenure. In 1765, more than half of the white colonists in Nevis and St. Kitts participated in wide scale riots to protest the Stamp Act. On October 31 and November 5 (the anniversary of the Glorious Revolution), Nevisians and Kittsians gathered alongside sailors from the Northern Colonies to burn stamps and effigies. Even though the sugar

¹² James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

colonies were disproportionately taxed by the act, colonists from the neighboring islands were the only West Indians to take to the streets to protest the new imperial legislation.¹³

While both were born out of the same environment, these different currents of political thought—slave radicalism and imperial indifference—were often not reconcilable. White debtors who fled to the Virgin Islands did so with the hopes of keeping their slaves and protecting their property. Protestors who burned the Governor-Generals body in effigy in Basseterre, St. Kitts did so because they wanted continued access to the slave trading circuits that linked St. Eustatius to New England. Slave flight and public protest in the Leewards ran counter to the desires of white slaveowners who wanted, above all else, to maintain power over their black property. The desire to preserve white power in the Leewards was so profound that at certain times—such as during the St. John revolt and the black awakening of the 1730s—colonists found it more important to defend the ideology than they did imperial authority. Though forged in the same cauldron, the motives behind these two traditions of political opposition more often than not ran counter to each other.

However, as Will's story suggests, the current of radicalism that informed slave life in the Leewards did not necessarily preclude collusion and common dreams with poor whites who had been marginalized by colonial elites. Enslaved West Indians in New York could find many things in common with poor and middling white colonists in New York, especially Irish tavern keepers who hosted large feasts replete with rum and fiddlers. Even in the Leewards, where race stifled cooperation between poor white servants and enslaved folk, common exploitation could sometimes inspire collective

¹³ O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean*, 89-90, 99-101.

action. In January of 1745, as they sat together to drink drams in a local tavern in St. John, Antigua, the councilors of the island received word of another rebellion. Servants and slaves in nearby Barbuda—the personal colony of the Codrington family that sits less than 26 miles from Antigua—rose up together, killed the violent governor of the island, and were rumored to have control of the small fort.¹⁴

¹⁴ At a Meeting of the Council Appointed by His Honour the Lieut. Governour the 17th Day of January 1745 at House of John Lindsay Tavern Keeper in St. John's Town, Antigua Collection, Box 2.

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