

The Journal of Caribbean History



VOLUME 59: 2
2025

*Special Issue – Small Islands, Proximity and
Connection in the Eastern Caribbean*

The Journal of Caribbean History

VOLUME 59: 2

2025

*Special Issue – Small Islands, Proximity and
Connection in the Eastern Caribbean*

Published by the
Departments of History
The University of the West Indies

ISSN 0047-2263

Published for the Departments of History
The University of the West Indies

© 2026 The Departments of History
The University of the West Indies

ISSN 0047-2263

eISSN: 0799-5946

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37234/JCH.2025.u1000000>

Print-only subscription rates for 2026 are as follows:

Institutions

North America/Canada: US\$90 + US\$25 shipping & handling

Europe/United Kingdom: US\$100 + US\$30 shipping & handling

Latin America/Caribbean: US\$45 + US\$20 shipping & handling

Rest of the world: US\$100 + US\$40 shipping & handling

Individuals

All: US\$40 + US\$20 shipping & handling

Subscription rates are subject to change without notice.

Back numbers of the journal are available.

All print subscriptions and orders should be directed to:

The University of the West Indies Press

7A Gibraltar Hall Road

Mona, Kingston 7

Jamaica, West Indies.

www.uwipress.com

uwipress.journals@uwi.edu

Prepayment is required. Payments can be made by cheque made payable to the UWI Press drawn on a US bank or credit card (Visa or Mastercard).

Direct deposits are also accepted. Please contact the UWI Press for details.

Online access available through Project Muse, <https://muse.jhu.edu/journal/746>.

Journal design by Robert Harris

Set in Axiomatic 9/13 x 24

Printed in the United States of America.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Editor

Kathleen E.A. Monteith Professor of History,
The University of the West Indies
(Mona)

Other Members

Heather Cateau Senior Lecturer in History,
The University of the West Indies
(St Augustine)

Alan Cobley Emeritus Professor of History,
The University the West Indies (Cave Hill)

Aviston Downes Senior Lecturer in History, The University
of the West Indies (Cave Hill)

Dexnell Peters Senior Lecturer in History,
The University of the West Indies (Mona)

Consulting Editors

Hilary Beckles Vice-Chancellor,
The University of the West Indies

Richard J.M. Blackett Emeritus Professor of History,
Vanderbilt University, USA

Bridget Brereton Emerita Professor of History,
The University of the West Indies

Patrick Bryan Emeritus Professor of History,
The University of the West Indies

Carl C. Campbell Emeritus Professor of History,
The University of the West Indies

B.W. Higman Emeritus Professor of History, Australian
National University and the University of
the West Indies

Franklin W. Knight Emeritus Professor of History,
Johns Hopkins University, USA

Woodville Marshall Emeritus Professor of History,
The University of the West Indies

Verene Shepherd Emerita Professor of History,
The University of the West Indies

Matthew J. Smith

Professor of History, and Director for the
Study of Legacies of British Slavery,
University College of London, UK.

The *Journal of Caribbean History* is a peer-reviewed journal which is published in June and December each year by the Departments of History, the University of the West Indies.

The editor will consider for publication articles on aspects of Caribbean History, including the histories of the mainland territories of North, Central and South America, where these are related to the Caribbean.

In addition to articles, we invite the contribution of research notes and notices of books or theses in Caribbean history currently in progress.

Articles and book reviews (both text and notes) should be typed, double-spaced, and submitted in MICROSOFT WORD in an attachment file. Quotations should be in double inverted commas (quotations within quotations in single inverted commas). Contributors are required to submit both ENDNOTES (not footnotes) and a list of REFERENCES. Notes can be inserted using the "insert endnote" feature in Microsoft Word. Use only abbreviated references in the endnotes (e.g., Smith, 44). Where more than one work by the same author is used a short title of the particular work should be included in the citation (e.g., Smith, *Caribbean Approaches*, 44). Archival sources and other references to depositories should carry the reference to the depository first – e.g., British National Archives, CO 111/46, Bathurst to Beard, 12 June 1818.

A full list of references for all articles and books should be placed after the endnotes. As far as possible, citations of books should be as follows: surname(s) of author(s), other names, title of book or article, place of publication, publisher, and date of publication. Articles should be cited as follows: surname(s) of author(s), other names, title of article (in double inverted commas), title of journal (in italic), volume, number, date and pagination. Internet references should be done as far as possible in the same way, but the URL (source site) should also be included. Please note the examples below. For single or double authored texts: James, Evelyn, Jane Griffith and William Caines. *Humans in Society*. Kingston: People's Press, 2000. For book chapters: Smith, Joseph. "The Volume of the Slave Trade". In *The Chains of Slavery*, edited by John Goddard, 416–30. Kingston: People's Press, 1998. For articles: Frank, Betty. "If We Could Know the Truth". *History in the Making* 34, no. 72 (2009): 63–90. For Internet sources: Zobel, Gibby. "Brazil's Slave Descendants Seek Justice", 28 November 2005. <http://www.assatashakur.org/forum/afrikan-world-news/13450-brazils-slave-descendants-seek-justice.html> (Accessed 20 January 2009).

Avoid the use of such computer codes as First Line Indent, Widow/Orphan, Conditional End of Page, and Block Protect. Failure to follow

the correct format for presentation of the article could lead to delay in its publication.

Tables must be submitted as separate Word or Excel files. Any artwork to be included in an article must be submitted as individual high-resolution TIF or JPEG files. Contributors are responsible for securing permission to reproduce material. Please also see the University of the West Indies Press website for additional journal style information for articles and book reviews. The Editor can also be contacted for Journal style information.

Contributors should submit their articles as an e-mail attachment in Microsoft Word to kathleen.monteith@uwimona.edu.jm. Contributors should send with each article a brief abstract (not more than 100 words) of its content. They should also submit a short note about themselves, including any academic or institutional affiliation.

All articles and correspondence with the editor should be addressed to Professor Kathleen Monteith, Journal of Caribbean History, Department of History and Archaeology, University of the West Indies, Mona, Kingston 7, Jamaica (kathleen.monteith@uwimona.edu.jm).

Indexed in: IBZ – International Bibliography of Periodical
Literature on the Humanities and Social Sciences
IBZ – CD-ROM
HAPI – Hispanic American Periodicals

Contents

Introduction: Small Islands, Proximity and Connection in the Eastern Caribbean <i>Gunvor Simonsen, Joy D. Lewis, Felicia J. Fricke and Rasmus Christensen.....</i>	<i>1</i>
Islanders, "Hospitality", the Islander Commons, c. 1492–1624 <i>James F. Dator.....</i>	<i>18</i>
"The Best of All the Virgins": Crab Island as a Contested Commons from the Late Seventeenth to the Mid-Nineteenth Century <i>Rasmus Christensen</i>	<i>51</i>
Plausible Itineraries: Slavery and Maritime Marronage in the Grenadines <i>Patrick T. Barker.....</i>	<i>73</i>
Archipelagic Law-Making: Borrowing and Implementing Caribbean Slave Law in Swedish St Barthélemy <i>Fredrik Thomasson.....</i>	<i>95</i>
An Eastern Caribbean Maritime Network: The Bigard Family of St Barths, 1802–1829 <i>Felicia J. Fricke.....</i>	<i>121</i>
The "Mount Moritz Bajans": Origins and Establishment of Grenada's "White" Tribe <i>John Angus Martin.....</i>	<i>155</i>
Beyond Indenture: Indian Immigrant Mobility in St Lucia, 1859–1903 <i>Terencia Kyneata Joseph.....</i>	<i>177</i>

Amelioration, Amalgamation and Protest:
The Virgin Islands in the 1940s and 1950s

Joy D. Lewis 210

Critical Reflection: Smallness, Proximity and
Connection as Caribbean Themes

Cush Cuthbertson-Sewer 244

Notes on Contributors

Patrick T. Barker is Assistant Professor of History at Miami Dade College, USA.

Rasmus Christensen is a PhD Fellow in History at the Saxo Institute, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

Cush Cuthbertson-Sewer is an independent researcher examining the eighteenth-century roots of Black resistance through the lens of land and food justice in the US Virgin Islands (formerly the Danish West Indies). She holds a BS in Psychology from Texas Woman's University, USA.

James F. Dator is an Independent Scholar based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA.

Felicia J. Fricke is Assistant Professor in History at the Saxo Institute (Faculty of Humanities) and the Centre for Privacy Studies (Faculty of Theology), University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

Terencia Kyneata Joseph is Associate Professor in History at the University of the Southern Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago.

Joy D. Lewis is Assistant Professor of History at Morgan State University, Baltimore MD, USA.

John Angus Martin is an independent historian, archivist, and museum curator in Grenada. He has his doctorate from Leiden University, the Netherlands.

Gunvor Simonsen is Associate Professor in History at the Saxo Institute, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

Fredrik Thomasson is Associate Professor of History at Uppsala University, Sweden.

Introduction

Small Islands, Proximity and Connection in the Eastern Caribbean

GUNVOR SIMONSEN, JOY D. LEWIS, FELICIA J. FRICKE
AND RASMUS CHRISTENSEN*

This special issue is concerned with how smallness, proximity and connections have shaped, and still shape, the history of the Lesser Antilles in the Eastern Caribbean from European colonisation in the fifteenth century onwards. The relatively small size of the Lesser Antillean islands, and their close proximity to one another, set in motion exchange and connections between communities. Smallness and overexploitation through export crop agriculture, however, also exposed islanders to resource scarcity. Indeed, with European colonialism came lifeways that were decidedly unsustainable, both in the short term and also, in a certain sense, in the very long term. Thus, for centuries, islanders living on small islands, in close proximity and with a limited resource base, have turned towards their neighbours across the sea. They have crossed formal and informal borders to carve out places for themselves and their loved ones. It is this long history of islanders living on small islands, often marked by exploitative economic systems, which is the theme of this special issue.

The idea for this special issue grew out of the conference "Inter-Island Connections in the Lesser Antilles: Family, Friends and Institutions across the Sea". Held in February 2023 at the University of the Virgin Islands, St Thomas, the conference was organised by the Caribbean Genealogy Library (St Thomas) and the IN THE SAME SEA project based at the University of Copenhagen. The conference sought to examine how the

* This Special Issue is supported by the European Research Council, under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No. ERC-2019-COG 863671).

archipelagic setting of the Lesser Antilles has shaped island existence, and what this has meant for family and friendship across the islands throughout the last five centuries. During two workshops in 2024, these topics were further explored and transformed into research papers, which form the main content of the present issue.

Today, the legacies of colonialism are highly visible in the Lesser Antilles, as small-island states and territories attempt to overcome challenges relating to climate change, limited sovereignty and the establishment of resilient economic activities that benefit islanders. Of the seventeen countries on the United Nations' list of non-self-governing territories, four are in the Lesser Antilles. The list is one of the tools used by the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization to track the process of decolonisation that began after World War II, as more and more countries became independent states, no longer subject to European imperial powers. The many small-island states on the list underscore the particular challenges islanders have faced and still face as they strive to establish a future that moves beyond the legacies of European colonialism. The Lesser Antillean territories on the list are Anguilla, Montserrat, the United States Virgin Islands (i.e., St Thomas, St Croix and St John), and the British Virgin Islands (i.e., Tortola, Anegada, Virgin Gorda, and Jost van Dyke).¹ In addition to the islands whose status as colonies is arguably still up for debate, the Lesser Antilles include several other island-states and territories with complicated constitutional arrangements, underscoring that the establishment of sovereignty in the archipelago is fraught with difficulties, not least because of economies based on tourism and on the provision of various financial services to customers in distant markets. In the independent former British colonies in the Eastern Caribbean, the process of replacing the British monarch as head of state is still incomplete; only Trinidad and Tobago (1976), Dominica (1978) and Barbados (2021) are currently republics. Few of these nations endorse the Caribbean Court of Justice as their appellate legal court, although it was established in 2006.² The French Lesser Antilles are likewise challenged. Martinique and Guadeloupe are departments of France, yet their financial and productive structures contribute to high costs of living and high unemployment rates.³ St Barthélemy (commonly referred to as St Barts or St Barths), though part of France, is not part of the European Union (EU), which has allowed the island to maintain a fairly liberal tax regime.⁴ Meanwhile, St Barths is able to take advantage of EU programmes and has the Euro.⁵ In the Dutch Caribbean, since 2010, the islands of St Eustatius, Saba and Bonaire

have been public bodies of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This closer relationship has frustrated local communities because of its inability to solve existing governance problems, while also introducing new ones.⁶ The many different constitutional arrangements found in the Lesser Antilles are evidence of the challenges of establishing sovereign states on small islands that have a long history of export-oriented colonialism and high intensity monoculture.

The Lesser Antilles, our area of study, is a chain of islands in the Eastern Caribbean stretching (at its smallest extent) from Anguilla in the north to Grenada in the south. Varying definitions of the Lesser Antilles may include or exclude the Virgin Islands, Tobago, Trinidad, and the ABC islands, based on geological origin; a shared political, economic and social history; or a mixture of both.⁷ For the purpose of this special issue, we include the Virgin Islands because of their small size, proximity and significant historical connections to the rest of the archipelago, exemplified by close inter-island trade networks and migration patterns. The Lesser Antilles makes up only 3 per cent of the Caribbean landmass in contrast to the Greater Antilles, which makes up 89 per cent. The largest island in the Lesser Antillean region is Guadeloupe, measuring 657 square miles.⁸ However, the majority of the islands are significantly smaller; so small that for most of them the sea is visible and readily accessible from almost anywhere on land. The islands are also situated close to each other, making it possible to travel by boat from Grenada in the south to the Virgin Islands in the north and further on to the Greater Antilles while seldom losing sight of land.

Aside from their small size and close proximity, the islands of the Lesser Antilles share some fundamental environmental features that have shaped the history of human activity on and between the islands. These include the yearly hurricane seasons, which create changeable weather and destructive tropical storms. Most of the Lesser Antillean islands are located in the hurricane zone, experiencing 258 hurricanes and 292 tropical storms between 1690 and 2008, the majority of which hit islands stretching from St Kitts in the north to Martinique in the south. Barbados and the islands to its south experience fewer, but still destructive, tropical storms, as exemplified by the devastating Hurricane Beryl that hit the Grenadines in 2024.⁹ Earthquakes are also recurrent in the archipelago, with a higher frequency in the southern region, due to tectonic movements in the juncture between the North American and Caribbean plates, located nearby in the Atlantic Ocean.¹⁰ Notwithstanding these similar conditions, the varied geology across the archipelago has also



The Lesser Antilles. *Source:* Gabriëlle La Croix

created different preconditions for island existence. One big difference is between the islands of the outer limestone arc, such as Anguilla, St Martin/Maarten, St Barths and Antigua on the one hand, and the islands of the inner volcanic arc, consisting of the islands on the string from Saba in the north to Grenada in the south, on the other. Because of their level topography and limestone bedrock, the islands of the outer arc receive less rainfall and are more prone to drought, which has occasionally forced inhabitants to import fresh water from other nearby islands.¹¹ In contrast, because of the high volcanic peaks, islands of the inner arc experience more orographic rainfall, while the volcanoes themselves can cause major disasters. Both human modification of island environments and global climate change have increased the destructive power of these natural events.¹²

Because of the islands' small size, their environments are easily disturbed and unbalanced. Prior to the arrival of European colonisers, the impact of the Taíno and Kalinago on island ecologies had been minimal. They had introduced livestock, fruits and food crops, and cultivated small fields, but to a degree that did not significantly change land and sea habitats. A notable exception is the sea turtle, which was hunted to an extent that made them disappear from some islands.¹³ The Kalinago were especially mobile, exploiting the close proximity between islands. Their *conuco* agriculture was possibly less extensive than that of the Taíno, but their dugout canoes were of excellent quality, some needing a crew of forty to fifty people.¹⁴

In contrast, Europeans exploited the islands, from early on, in a way that made profound and lasting negative changes to island environments. Among the many changes brought about by the establishment of export crop production, the most important was arguably the removal of tropical seasonal forest and rainforest. In 1672, Sir William Stapleton, the first governor of the Leeward Islands, reported that "most of the islands are destitute of timber, Antigua, only excepted." In 1687, the British botanist and physician Hans Sloane noted that forest clearance had reached the upper slopes of Nevis Peak, while the lowlands of Martinique and Guadeloupe were also losing their forest cover. By 1750, Antigua was all under cane with little if any forest left.¹⁵

The consequences of these fundamental changes to island landscapes stand out in the description of Barbados by Heinrich von Uchteritz, shipped to the island together with about 1,300 other captives taken at the battle of Worcester in 1651 by Cromwell's forces. Back in Europe, Uchteritz noted that Barbados was located in a "beautiful place" yet told

his readers that "no birds" were heard there ["so höret man doch keinen Vogel allda"].¹⁶ The high canopies had gone and so had the birds that nested there. Large wooded areas were gradually cut down to make space for agriculture; to benefit from the immediate but short-lived rise in soil nutrients; because woods could harbour fugitive enslaved people; and because timber was used for building material.¹⁷ Indeed, deforestation had many negative effects on the local environment, such as soil desiccation and a greater risk of floods and landslides.¹⁸ Furthermore, it introduced a permanent shortage of timber in many colonies, especially in Barbados and in the northern part of the Lesser Antilles.

As is well-known, the environmental changes brought about by the establishment of cane agriculture in the Caribbean began in Barbados, spread across the other islands in the Lesser Antilles, and then reached the Greater Antilles. Though these larger islands, taken one by one, would obviously trump single islands of the Lesser Antilles in terms of productive volume in absolute numbers, taken as a whole, the Lesser Antilles remained a place of intense exploitation. By 1770, the enslaved in the Lesser Antilles, which as noted took up only 3 per cent of the Caribbean land mass, were responsible for about 40 per cent of the region's sugar output. Likewise, the smaller islands received a disproportionate share of the captive Africans arriving in the Caribbean.¹⁹ On some islands, such as Dominica and Guadeloupe, mountainous regions and rocky shorelines were impossible to put under cane. On other islands, such as Anguilla on the drier outer limestone arc, deforestation and a weak orographic effect resulted in low average annual rainfall that could only sustain cane agriculture when sugar prices peaked. Yet, the situation on Barbados would, with some variation, emerge on the other islands of the Eastern Caribbean: intense and extensive export crop production, combined with an absence of hinterlands and an ensuing shortage of the resources that these offered to islanders. Though in language that is now outdated, David Watts' observation that "the intensity of slave use was high" in the Eastern Caribbean was to the point.²⁰ On the smaller islands of the Lesser Antilles, there were few remaining locations where resources external to the plantation regime could be protected, harvested and enjoyed. The combined pressure of plantation slavery and the absence of places of refuge added force to the interconnections between islanders that had marked the Lesser Antilles from their initial population more than four thousand years ago.²¹

In addition to scarcity on the small plantation islands, connections between islands were facilitated by the political and economic conditions

of an archipelago that was colonised by six imperial powers. Islands such as St Eustatius, Saba and St Barths were too dry or too steep to support large-scale sugar cultivation. Instead, St Eustatius and St Barths became important commercial centres that serviced the needs of islanders across the Caribbean. In contrast, Saba, Barbuda, and at some points Anguilla, functioned as a kind of hinterland on which islanders grew provisions and raised livestock for an archipelagic market, with small and comparatively poor populations. Thus, people from all over the Caribbean and across the Atlantic flocked to St Eustatius and St Barths to take advantage of their free port status, while inhabitants of Saba were often forced to leave the island to find work.²² In this way, the economy became an important push/pull factor that linked communities together across the sea.

Political developments also shaped migration and connections within the Lesser Antilles. The small islands were easy targets when European powers competed for sovereignty and territory.²³ With the exception of Barbados, most small-island colonies changed hands many times. Some of their settlers and the people they enslaved would relocate or be driven away as a result of this unremitting warfare. St Lucia, for instance, is a case in point. From the 1630s to the early nineteenth century, the island was invaded by and shuffled between the British and French about twenty times. St Lucia highlights the frequency of war in the region and underlines that small islands, in general, were relatively easy to conquer and to lose.²⁴ The fragile sovereignty that marked many of them meant that many European settlers and enslaved Africans had social, cultural and economic ties to other islands, and that island communities, as a whole, comprised Europeans and Africans from a diversity of ethnic and national backgrounds.²⁵

The migration that shaped pre-emancipation islands also came to form post-emancipation societies, though migration patterns changed. In the immediate post-emancipation years, many within the planter-class refused to accept that they no longer had unpaid, forced labourers. On many of the islands, the conditions of the formerly enslaved did not immediately change in any meaningful way. The newly freed on the smaller islands of the Eastern Caribbean were often land-less, and planter-enacted trespass and vagrancy laws limited their economic opportunities, which further tethered them to the plantations where they had been enslaved. Despite these attempts at restriction and repression, new migration patterns soon emerged as islanders in search of better wages and opportunities began to move from island to island, often towards territories where land was still available for new production.²⁶ Within months of emancipation,

hundreds of people from "Saint Kitts, Nevis, Montserrat, Antigua, and the Windward Caribbean had sailed south in response to wages offered by Trinidadian planters".²⁷ Eventually, thousands sailed southward to Trinidad, the majority of them accomplishing "their journeys on the decks of tiny fishing sloops and schooners over hundreds of miles of tropical ocean interrupted by stormy interisland passages and unmarked rocks and shoals".²⁸ As the changing migration patterns connected the region and its people in new ways, a new sense of shared identity started to emerge.²⁹

Archipelagic movement and connections are still important issues in the region today. In the 2020s, air travel to the Caribbean from destinations like the United States and Europe has vastly improved, while air travel *within* the Caribbean has become more difficult. A good example is the regional airline Leeward Islands Air Transport Services, more popularly known as LIAT. This company was founded in 1974 with the express purpose of facilitating air travel between the Leeward Islands, although its routes ultimately expanded as far north as Puerto Rico and as far south as Guyana. Over the years, LIAT was often criticised for poor customer service, delayed baggage and an irregular service that led to the airline often being referred to as "LIAT – Leave Island Any Time". In 2020, after years of financial instability, it was announced that LIAT was to be liquidated, leaving many to ponder the effect it would have on regional air travel.³⁰ In 2024, LIAT, like several other regional airlines before them, officially went out of business. In the immediate aftermath, the region was forced to acknowledge that an airline with irregular service, but a stellar safety record, was better than no airline at all.³¹ While there are a few other small airlines, including LIAT20, which initially began offering flights between Antigua, St Lucia and Barbados in August 2024, with plans for expansion in the region, most operate very limited routes and schedules.³² Because of this, islanders, visitors and tourists more frequently use mainland airport nodes to move from island to island in the archipelago. Sea travel, which had for centuries fostered inter-island connections, also remains a major means of transport within multi-island territories, as well as for international travel. There is a regular, but not always daily, ferry service between many of the Leeward and Windward Islands, including between the British and United States Virgin Islands; St Martin/Maarten and Anguilla; St Martin/Maarten and St Barths; St Maarten and Saba; Antigua and Montserrat; St Lucia and Martinique; St Lucia and Dominica; Guadeloupe and Martinique; and Dominica and Martinique.³³ Yet, despite numerous (and more modern)

means of transportation, becoming more interconnected and integrated remains an important challenge for island states and territories in the twenty-first century.

Proximity, connection and smallness are underlying threads in all the articles of this special issue. They have frequently led to inter-island movements aimed at securing, building and maintaining economic, political and familial networks, as well as movement for financial security or to access natural resources. Placing the articles into chronological order, we begin with James Dator's evaluation of the sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century interactions between Indigenous people and European merchants, smugglers, and privateers leading up to the establishment of permanent English and French settlements on St Kitts in the 1620s. Using accounts of seventeenth-century European travellers, Dator pinpoints the meanings and values that Indigenous people, often referred to as Kalinago, inscribed on the archipelagic landscape, and how they inhabited it. They understood the archipelago as an interconnected space, where islands offered different opportunities for habitation and exploitation according to their different ecologies. European efforts to establish permanent settlement and turn the island into a scene of plantation production overstepped the boundaries that had guided Indigenous hospitality and trade relations in the Lesser Antilles since 1492.

The theme of the commons recurs in the article by Rasmus Christensen, in which he shows how Crab Island, now Vieques, offered crucial resources for islanders in the Virgin Islands and the Leeward Islands, while concurrently inciting diplomatic conflicts between the Danish, English, and Spanish empires from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century. European colonists in the region prioritised the cultivation of cash crops over food crops for domestic consumption, leading to a reliance on imported foodstuffs. To accelerate development and increase profits, islands were deforested to maximise the available arable lands for cash crop cultivation. They were soon also overpopulated, straining the limited resources available on each island. It is against this background of regional resource scarcity, and the ability to cross the waters to supplement their needs, that Christensen traces how islanders in the region exploited Crab Island. By showing how Crab Island became a significant regional commons as well as an imperially contested territory, Christensen directs our attention more generally towards regional hinterlands, and their important role in sustaining populations and societies on small, resource-scarce islands.

By the eighteenth century, the colonisation of the Eastern Caribbean

was established and the use of enslaved labour firmly entrenched. During this period, there were three main ways by which enslaved Africans could secure their freedom: manumission, self-purchase and escape. For those who chose "escape", the smallness of some islands made it difficult, if not impossible, for them to maintain their freedom. The surrounding seas, however, could serve as a watery highway to what they hoped would be permanent freedom. Patrick Barker, using archival records, newspapers and fugitive adverts, examines maritime marronage in the Grenadines and Grenada, looking specifically at Carriacou fugitives Henry, Smart and Quamy. Those seeking freedom had to be calculating and strategic. The islands to which they fled show that enslaved people were acutely aware of maritime navigation, surrounding island geographies, and the laws that could offer them refuge or protection. This article not only examines maritime maroons, but also considers the decisions and plausible itineraries available to fugitives, particularly in the period after Spain ended its long-standing asylum policies in the late eighteenth century.

Turning from enslaved fugitives' itineraries to the making of law in the Lesser Antilles, Fredrik Thomasson's subsequent article uncovers how Swedish colonial authorities on the island of St Barths borrowed from and adopted legal statutes and customs from neighbouring colonies to govern a society founded on the institution of racial slavery. The Swedes arrived in the Caribbean in 1784, when they acquired the island of St Barths from France. Thomasson uncovers how Swedish colonial officials turned to the legal institutions, laws, and customs of the neighbouring Dutch, Danish, British and French islands. Rather than measuring legal developments on St Barths through metropolitan standards and concluding that law on St Barths was deficient, Thomasson argues that the judicial system that emerged on Swedish St Barths should be understood through its adjustments and adaptations to the surrounding archipelagic legal environment.

Next, and speaking in particular to our themes of proximity and connection, Felicia Fricke writes about an early nineteenth-century maritime family, providing an analysis that places human stories in the context of quantitative data. Using newspaper sources that record the journeys of vessels sailing between the Swedish port of Gustavia (St Barths) and its trading partners, she provides an overview of this free port's maritime trade network and then situates the French-Swedish Bigard family of colour within it. While not the largest or the most successful of Gustavia's maritime families, the Bigards are representative of other such networks that formed the foundation of island interconnections

across the colonial period in the Caribbean. Born to a white French patriarch and a free woman of colour from Guadeloupe, the family's second generation included merchants, sailors and revolutionaries in the 1810s and 1820s. Their stories complicate our understandings of race in this place and time, as well as encourage us to think about the roles, responsibilities and opportunities afforded to enslaved people and to free women in the maritime environment. Inter-island engagements and multinational identities could be an asset, or at times a hindrance, to the individuals who made up these networks; but they remained essential to the continued success of the colonial project in the region.

Proximity is also elaborated upon in John Angus Martin's article about the poor white community of Grenada's Mount Moritz, who migrated there from Barbados from the 1860s onwards. The post-emancipation era had a serious impact on the ability of Barbados' poor white population to support themselves, and their dire circumstances and the lack of locally available land or employment led the island government to explore sending them elsewhere; perhaps to Jamaica, St Vincent, Grenada, or to other smaller islands. This article shows how inter-island travel became a survival necessity for this small group, whose presence was often considered a nuisance by other residents. Travel across the sea to Grenada initially offered these white Bajans employment on a cocoa plantation, and later, the opportunity to live as tenant farmers. In the wider context of the history of poor white populations in the Lesser Antilles, this study contributes to our understanding of how present-day Caribbean populations are a sum of such movements, creating and combining new cultures and communities. Such a discussion is essential in providing a more thorough understanding of migration; to include those groups whose movements perhaps had a greater contemporary ambiguity.

The following essay by Terencia Kyneata Joseph likewise focuses on the trajectory of a relatively small group, that of the indentured Indians who arrived at St Lucia during the second half of the nineteenth century, contracted to labour on the island's sugar estates. While island planters were eager to gain access to indentured labour, they were often unwilling or unable to fulfil the requirements of the indenture contracts, failing to pay wages and provide medical care. Joseph shows that Indians' experiences during indentureship and after were shaped by the size, environment and topography of St Lucia. She argues that the small size of the community, its distribution across the islands and its isolation on the estates generated a sense of disconnection and loneliness. In addition, St Lucia's weak and shifting sugar economy created few opportunities for

employment, while the decision by authorities and planters to restrict the sale of private land closed off routes to self-sufficiency. Consequently, the numbers of Indians who returned to India or chose to re-migrate in search of community and opportunity elsewhere were high. Joseph's mapping of the community of Indians in St Lucia adds to our understanding of indentureship in the Caribbean while also underscoring the challenges of creating communities of belonging on small islands where natural resources were scarce and human resources were limited by continued planter dominance.

Our study on smallness, proximity, and connection in the Eastern Caribbean continues with Joy Lewis' examination of the British and United States Virgin Islands in the 1940s and 1950s. Conceptualising the Virgin Islands as a borderland zone, Lewis shows how proximity played a key role in an intertwined and interdependent relationship that saw the territories reliant upon each other for labour, goods, services and ideas, as well as for economic and agricultural needs. Familial ties strengthened these transnational bonds. The British Virgin Islands deliberately rebuffed closer association with other, more distant, British territories, and the American islands supported several petitions to the federal government to ease the access of British Virgin Islanders into the US territory. Even when the British islanders sought more internal autonomy, through a demand for the restoration of the Legislative Council and a massive islandwide demonstration against the then-commissioner, they took great pains to take no action that could jeopardise the long-established relationship with their American counterparts. What these islanders recognised very early on was that they were connected by both water and blood; and that their ability to travel the seas was essential to their survival, growth and development.

Lastly, we finish with a thoughtful reflection by Cush Cuthbertson-Sewer. This special issue on smallness, proximity and connection has brought to mind several themes, principally mobility, identity and fluidity, which Cuthbertson-Sewer elaborates upon. She does this in the context of her attendance at our special issue workshop, as well as of her own family history rooted in St John, United States Virgin Islands. Finally, this critical reflection also brings forward some questions that the special issue encourages us to ask when thinking about the Caribbean as an interconnected space. It offers a view of historical work in the region as a way to excavate inter-island relationships across time, space, cultures and nations.

The articles in this special issue will contribute to a more nuanced

appreciation of the multi-layered and complex history of the Caribbean. Though racial slavery, export crop production and long-distance trade shaped the history of the whole Caribbean archipelago, the smallness and proximity of the Lesser Antilles facilitated different and more intense connections between islanders. This dynamic is part of what has made the Lesser Antilles what it is today.

NOTES

1. Dickson.
2. See contributions in the special issue "Republicanism in the Commonwealth Caribbean", *Social and Economic Studies* 72, nos. 1&2 (2023), in particular Barrow-Giles and Yearwood; Carter; Ghany; and O'Brien, "The Road to Republicanism in the English-Speaking Caribbean"; and O'Brien, "The Post-Colonial Constitutional Order of the Commonwealth Caribbean".
3. Nesbit, 32–33, 37–42; Gomes and Wong, 165–69.
4. Broekhuijse et al.
5. European Commission, "Saint Barthélemy", accessed 7 January 2025, https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/countries/saintbarthelemy_en#:~:text=Saint%2DBarth%C3%A9lemy%20is%20a%20French,development%20is%20based%20on%20tourism.
6. Mulder, 11–28; Veenendaal, 257–79.
7. Higman, 2–5; Morgan, 24–27; Murphy, 9–11; Paquette & Engermann, 1; Watts, 4.
8. Morgan, 24.
9. Morgan 34; Schwartz, xvi.
10. Morgan, 38; Zacek, 24.
11. Morgan, 35–36.
12. Schwartz & Mulcahy, 187–252; Webber, 46–52.
13. Morgan, 82.
14. Watts, 70–75.
15. Quote from Watts, 394. For the process of deforestation see Watts, 393–95, 434.
16. von Uchteritz, 8. Von Uchteritz' account is also mentioned in Watts, 219–20.
17. Morgan, 95.
18. Schwartz & Mulcahy, 226–27.
19. The percentage is calculated from the figures provided in table 3.1, Eltis, 113–14.
20. Watts, 315.
21. Slayton, 18, 85; Napolitano et al.
22. Espersen, 773–97; Klooster, 89–92.

23. Higman, 230–31.
24. Harmsen, 21–59.
25. Mulich, 51–80.
26. Putnam.
27. Richardson, 206.
28. Ibid., 207.
29. See for example Hall, 46–47.
30. Loopnews.com, "LIAT: Union slams Gaston Browne's 'compassionate' statement", accessed 22 April 2025, <https://www.loopnews.com/content/liat-union-slams-gaston-brownes-compassionate-statement/>.
31. Blake, "A requiem for LIAT (1974) Ltd", *Jamaica Gleaner*, 19 May 2024, accessed 10 April 2025, <https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/commentary/20240519/byron-blake-requiem-liat-1974-ltd>.
32. Birns, "Antigua's LIAT 2020 Begins Commercial Flight Ops", CH-Aviation 9 August 2024, accessed 22 April 2025, <https://www.ch-aviation.com/news/143516-antiguas-liat-2020-begins-commercial-flight-ops>.
33. Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority, "Barbuda Express Ferry Service & Day Tours", accessed 11 April 2025, https://www.visitantiguabarbuda.com/other_content/barbuda-express-ferry-service-day-tours/; BVI Ports Authority, "Ferry", accessed 11 April 2025, <https://bviports.org/ferry>; Discover Dominica Authority, "Island Hopping / Ferries", accessed 11 April 2025, <https://discoverdominica.com/en/island-hoppingferries>; Établissement Portuaire de Saint-Martin, Établissement Portuaire de Saint-Martin, "Ferry Terminal", accessed 11 April 2025, <https://www.portdemarigot.com/en/gare>; Guadeloupe Islands Tourist Board, "Island Hopping", accessed 11 April 2025, <https://www.lesilesdeguadeloupe.com/tourism/en-gb/island-hopping>; Montserrat Tourism Authority, "Getting Here", accessed 11 April 2025, <https://www.visitmontserrat.com/sea/>; Saint Lucia Air and Sea Ports Authority, "Ferry Terminal: Inter Island Connections", accessed 11 April 2025, <https://www.slaspa.com/index.php/seaports/facilities/ferry-terminal>; The British Virgin Islands Tourist Board, "Ferry Schedules", accessed 11 April 2025, <https://www.bvitourism.com/ferry-schedules>; Virgin Islands Port Authority, "Ferry & Cargo Vessel Schedules", accessed 11 April 2025, <https://www.viport.com/schedules-ferrycargoschedules>.

WORKS CITED

- Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority. "Barbuda Express Ferry Service & Day Tours". Accessed 11 April 2025. https://www.visitantiguabarbuda.com/other_content/barbuda-express-ferry-service-day-tours/.
- Barrow-Giles, Cynthia, and Rico J. Yearwood. "Monarchism to Republicanism in the Commonwealth Caribbean: Pathways, Progress, and Pitfalls". Special

- issue on Republicanism in the Commonwealth Caribbean. *Social and Economic Studies* 72, nos. 1&2 (2023): 10–37.
- Birns, Hilka. "Antigua's LIAT 2020 Begins Commercial Flight Ops". CH-Aviation, 9 August 2024. Accessed 22 April 2025. <https://www.ch-aviation.com/news/143516-antiguas-liat-2020-begins-commercial-flight-ops>.
- Blake, Byron. "A requiem for LIAT (1974) Ltd". *Jamaica Gleaner*, 19 May 2024. Accessed 10 April 2025. <https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/commentary/20240519/byron-blake-requiem-liat-1974-ltd>.
- British Virgin Islands Tourist Board. "Ferry Schedules". Accessed 11 April 2025. <https://www.bvitourism.com/ferry-schedules>.
- Broekhuijse, Irene, Ernst Hirsch Ballin, and Sofia Ranchordás. "The Constitutions of the Dutch Caribbean: A Study of the Countries of Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten and the Public Entities of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba". In *The Oxford Handbook of Caribbean Constitutions*, edited by Richard Albert, Derek O'Brien and Se-shauna Wheatle, 216–41. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020 (published online 06 August 2020).
- BVI Ports Authority. "Ferry". Accessed 11 April 2025. <https://bviports.org/ferry>.
- Carter, Henderson. "Fifty-Five Years in the 'Doldrums': Barbados's Protracted Move to Republicanism". Special issue on Republicanism in the Commonwealth Caribbean. *Social and Economic Studies* 72, nos. 1&2 (2023): 63–87.
- Dickson, Susan. "The British Overseas Territories of Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, and Turks and Caicos Islands: A Modern Approach to a Traditional Relationship". In *The Oxford Handbook of Caribbean Constitutions*, edited by Richard Albert, Derek O'Brien and Se-shauna Wheatle, 188–215. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020 (published online 06 August 2020).
- Discover Dominica Authority. "Island Hopping / Ferries". Accessed 11 April 2025. <https://discoverdominica.com/en/island-hoppingferries>.
- Eltis, David. "The Slave Economies of the Caribbean: Structure, Performance, Evolution and Significance". In *The Slave Societies of the Caribbean III*, edited by Franklin W. Knight, 113–14. General History of the Caribbean. London: UNESCO, 1999.
- Espersen, Ryan. "From Hell's Gate to the Promised Land: Perspectives on Poverty in Saba, Dutch Caribbean, 1780 to the Mid-Twentieth Century". *Historical Archaeology* 52 (2018): 773–97.
- Établissement Portuaire de Saint-Martin. "Ferry Terminal". Accessed 11 April 2025. <https://www.portdemarigot.com/en/gare>.
- European Commission. "Saint Barthélemy". Accessed 7 January 2025. https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/countries/saint-barthelemy_en#:~:text=Saint%2DBarth%C3%A9lemy%20is%20a%20French,development%20is%20based%20on%20tourism.
- Ghany, Hamid. "Introduction". Special issue on Republicanism in the Commonwealth Caribbean. *Social and Economic Studies* 72, nos. 1&2 (2023): 1–9.

- Gomes, Roxanne, and Alfred Wong. "Intractable Social-Economic Problems of Martinique". *Études caribéennes* 21 (2012): 159–76.
- Guadeloupe Islands Tourist Board. "Island Hopping". Accessed 11 April 2025. <https://www.lesilesdeguadeloupe.com/tourism/en-gb/island-hopping>.
- Hall, Catherine. "What is a West Indian?". In *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*, edited by Bill Schwartz, 31–50. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003.
- Harmsen, Jolien. *A History of St Lucia*. Vieux Fort, St Lucia: Lighthouse Road Publications, 2012.
- Higman, Barry W. *A Concise History of the Caribbean*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021 (2nd edition).
- Klooster, Wim. *Illicit Riches: Dutch Trade in the Caribbean, 1648–1795*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 1998.
- Loopnews.com. "LIAT: Union slams Gaston Browne's 'compassionate' statement". Accessed 22 April 2025. <https://www.loopnews.com/content/liat-union-slams-gaston-brownes-compassionate-statement/>.
- Montserrat Tourism Authority. "Getting Here". Accessed 11 April 2025. <https://www.visitmontserrat.com/seal>.
- Morgan, Philip D. "The Caribbean Environment to 1850". In *Sea and Land: An Environmental History of the Caribbean*, edited by Philip D. Morgan, John Robert McNeill, Matthew Mulcahy and Stuart B. Schwartz, 19–129. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022.
- Mulder, Nikki. "Stories of Autonomy on Non-Sovereign Saba: Flipping the Script of Postcolonial Resistance". *Etnofoor* 30, no. 1 (2018): 11–28.
- Mulich, Jeppe. *In a Sea of Empires: Networks and Crossings in the Revolutionary Caribbean*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- Murphy, Tessa. *The Creole Archipelago. Race and Borders in the Colonial Caribbean*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021.
- Napolitano, Matthew F., Robert J. DiNapoli, Jessica H. Stone, Maureece J. Levin, Nicholas P. Jew, Brian G. Lane, John T. O'Connor, and Scott M. Fitzpatrick. "Reevaluating Human Colonization of the Caribbean using Chronometric Hygiene and Bayesian Modeling". *Science Advances* 5, Issue 12 (2019). doi/10.1126/sciadv.aar7806.
- Nesbit, Nick. "France's Colonies and the Second World War". *Lesprit Créateur* 47, no. 1 (2007): 32–43.
- O'Brien, Derek. "The Post-Colonial Constitutional Order of the Commonwealth Caribbean: The Endurance of the Crown and the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council". *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 46, no. 5 (2018): 958–83.
- . "The Road to Republicanism in the English-Speaking Caribbean". Special issue on Republicanism in the Commonwealth Caribbean. *Social and Economic Studies* 72, nos. 1&2 (2023): 38–62.
- Paquette, Robert L., and Stanley L. Engermann. *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1996.

- Putnam, Lara. "Borderlands and Border Crossers: Migrants and Boundaries in the Greater Caribbean, 1840–1940". *Small Axe* 18, no. 1, Issue 43 (March 2014): 7–21.
- Richardson, Bonham C. "Caribbean Migrations, 1838–1985". In *The Modern Caribbean*, edited by Franklin W. Knight and Colin A. Palmer, 203–28. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989.
- Schwartz, Stuart B. *Sea of Storms. A History of Hurricanes in the Greater Caribbean from Columbus to Katrina*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.
- Schwartz, Stuart B., and Matthew Mulcahy. "Natural Disasters in the Caribbean to 1850". In *Sea and Land: An Environmental History of the Caribbean*, edited by Philip D. Morgan, John Robert McNeill, Matthew Mulcahy, and Stuart B. Schwartz, 187–252. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022.
- Slayton, Emma Ruth. *Seascape Corridors: Modeling Routes to Connect Communities Across the Caribbean Sea*. Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2018.
- Saint Lucia Air and Sea Ports Authority. "Ferry Terminal: Inter Island Connections". Accessed 11 April 2025. <https://www.slaspa.com/index.php/seaports/facilities/ferry-terminal>.
- Veenendaal, Wouter. "The Ties that Bind: Smallness, Nonsovereignty, and Political Reform in St. Eustatius". *New West Indian Guide* 90 (2016): 257–79.
- von Uchteritz, Heinrich. *Kurtze Reise Beschreibung Heinrich von Uchteritz worinnenvermeldet, was er auf derselben für Unglück und Glück gehabt, sonderlichwie er gefangen nach West Indien geführt, zur Slavery verkauft, undauff der Insel Barbados durch den Namen seines Herrn Vettern Johan Christoff von Uchteritz ... wunderbarlich errettet und erlöset worden*, gedruckt bey Johan Holwein, 1666.
- Watts, David. *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture and Environmental Change since 1492*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Virgin Islands Port Authority. "Ferry & Cargo Vessel Schedules". Accessed 11 April 2025. <https://www.viport.com/schedules-ferrycargoschedules>.
- Webber, Oscar. *Negotiating Relief and Freedom: Responses to Disaster in the British Caribbean, 1812–1907*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023.
- Zacek, Natalie A. *Settler Society in the English Leeward Islands, 1670–1776*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Islanders, “Hospitality”, the Islander Commons, c. 1492–1624

JAMES F. DATOR

Near the village of Stone Fort on the leeward side of St Kitts, not far from the main road that tour buses use to shuttle cruise ship passengers around the island, there is a ravine locals call “Bloody River”. It carves its way through a remarkable volcanic-rock canyon that threads its way to the Caribbean Sea. Its path embodies the story of the island’s colonisation. Carved into the top of the ravine, and out of sight of the air-conditioned passerby, there are over 100 eroding drawings (“petroglyphs”) that archaeologists date to the Early Ceramic Age (500 BCE–750 CE).¹ The waterway, which was also known as Pelham River, carves its way to the mythic site of “Bloody Point”, so named on maps of the island by 1714 at the latest.²

Local legend states that Bloody Point and Bloody River were named to commemorate a violent nighttime massacre of Indigenous Islanders perpetrated by French and English settlers in 1626. Sources suggest small numbers of Europeans were living on the island as guests prior to the violence. Taking their cue both from local oral legend and the historical marker placed by the government soon after the island gained independence from Britain in 1983, Kittitians refer to the events as the “Kalinago Genocide of 1626”. In the postcolonial era, the materiality of the site, marked by the winding ravine and the remnants of Indigenous imagery, offers Kittitian guides a way to tell a powerful counter-narrative of the island nation’s history; one that does not begin with European “discovery” but rather invasion, violence, and bloodshed launched against an already present society.³

The story of Bloody River serves as a physical reminder of St Kitts’s remarkable but overlooked history. It is history alive, carved on the landscape. At the end of the sixteenth century, the island was still a part of an ancient islander commons: Indigenous Islanders on Dominica knew

it as *Liamáiga*, which the eighteenth-century historian Bryan Edwards later translated as "fertile island".⁴ In the 1620s, European violence transformed Liamáiga into the first English and the first French colony in the Caribbean archipelago. In fact, they divided Liamáiga into two colonies: English St Christopher and French Saint-Christophe. The anti-Indigenous violence these settlers perpetrated at Liamáiga ricocheted across the archipelago. Over the course of the next decade, English, French and Dutch settlers used the island of St Kitts as a springboard to invade Nevis (c.1628), St Martin/Maarten (c.1631), Montserrat (c.1632), Antigua (c.1633), Guadeloupe (c.1635), Martinique (c.1635), and St Eustatius (c.1636). Decades later, English planters called St Kitts the "fountain from whence" the empire was "watered with planters."⁵

Bloody River embodies a moment when the Indigenous peoples of the Lesser Antilles first lost their sovereignty to Europeans. To some, it signifies the historical transformation from European "plunder" to "planting".⁶ This understanding has persisted for centuries. In the 1650s and 1660s, Huguenot minister Charles de Rochefort and Dominican priest Jean-Baptiste du Tertre described the Kalinago massacre in like fashion. Both men lived in the region and heard stories about the event, which they repeated in their works.⁷ Du Tertre first detailed the legend in *Histoire Générale des Îles des S. Christophe, de la Guadeloupe, de la Martinique* (1654), wherein he told the story of how an unnamed Indigenous Islander revealed a plot to expel the European visitors at the next full moon.⁸ Later, in his *Histoire Générale des Antilles Habitées par les François* (1667–1671), du Tertre named the informant as a "Carib" woman called "Barbe".⁹ Similarly, de Rochefort referenced the massacre in his *Histoire Naturelle & Morale des Îles Antilles de L'Amerique* (1658), which Englishman John Davies translated six years later. "The English and French Colonies had their beginning at the same time, which was in the year One thousand six hundred twenty five," de Rochefort explained; "they in one night rid their hands of all the most factious of that Nation."¹⁰ Historian Richard Dunn echoed de Rochefort's account centuries later. "The two nations 'solved' the Indian problem by staging a sneak attack on the Caribs," he wrote in his essential work *Sugar and Slaves*, "massacring them in their hammocks."¹¹ Numerous historians of the Anglophone Caribbean have followed Dunn's passing reference to the so-called "Indian problem", overlooking both the context and contingencies of European and Indigenous Islander interactions across the Lesser Antilles prior to 1626.¹² Still, as historian Casey Schmitt rightly states, scholars have yet to reckon with why the island's Indigenous inhabitants allowed English

and French camps on Liamáiga in the first place. Schmitt hints it was because the island was already a smuggling waypoint, but this is only part of the story.¹³

A more complete account must not only focus on trade and exchange, but also the meanings and values Indigenous Islanders gave to these exchanges. Thankfully, a wide array of scholarship on the cultural history of the Indigenous Caribbean now exists. Historical research now highlights the influence and resilience of Indigenous Islanders in the Eastern Caribbean in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁴ Scholars also possess detailed knowledge about the differences between the Indigenous ethnohistory of the early modern Caribbean and colonial cant about “peaceful” Arawak and Taíno, and “intractable”, purportedly cannibalistic “Caribs”.¹⁵ Along with work by literary scholars, this research reflects on how the discursive residue of the Columbian moment can overdetermine historical analyses. More recent scholarship reaches further back in time using Spanish archival sources. Works by Erin Stone and Ernesto Mercado-Montero, for example, emphasise the agency, ingenuity and power of Indigenous peoples in the Caribbean vis-à-vis the regional Spanish *rescate* or smuggling trade and slavery.¹⁶

One element of this complex story that has received less attention from historians, however, relates to the ideological underpinnings that gave rise to Bloody River. The issue is the concept of property in land. In order to understand why Islanders entertained the presence of European outsiders at Liamáiga in 1624, there is the need to approach the question by exploring how Indigenous Islanders understood and used the archipelagic landscape according to their own meanings and values. There is little evidence to suggest that Indigenous Islanders understood each island in the archipelago as a unit of private property or as independent sovereign domains, let alone ones ruled by singular kings. Instead, Indigenous Islanders viewed their world as a dynamic, mosaic landscape composed of interconnected kinship-oriented village centres, community riverbeds, highland gardens, resource-rich rainforests, and common archipelagic resource hinterlands, henceforth collectively referred to as “the Islander Commons”.¹⁷ Indigenous Islanders controlled access to the commons and granted hospitality to outsiders on their own terms, shaping, in turn, how Europeans obtained resources from the archipelago prior to the violent transformation of Liamáiga into the colony of St Christopher.

These dynamics are explored in the pages that follow. The first section clarifies the subject: Who were the people of the archipelago? The second section explores Islander “canoe societies”, examining how they used the

archipelagic landscape prior to the Columbian invasion. Finally, the issue of Islander "hospitality" is discussed: the community rules and obligations about granting European outsiders use of the Islander Commons in the wake of the Columbian encounter. Only after surveying these dynamics can the cultural history of Liamáiga and the surrounding archipelago prior to 1624 be fully investigated.

People of the Islands

Human activity in the Lesser Antilles is ancient, stretching back millennia. Archaeologists now divide this long history—or "prehistory", as it is often cast in archaeological literature—into two overlapping eras, each with different sub-eras: the "Archaic Age" (~ 4000/5000 BCE to CE 400–800), which is characterised by human use of stone-tool technologies, and the "Ceramic Age" (BCE 400 to CE 1492), which is characterised by manioc agriculture and pottery production.¹⁸ Although outsiders have debated the origins of the Indigenous Caribbean since the colonial period, scholars now widely accept that migrants came into the Caribbean from the greater Orinoco River Basin in South America. The earliest wave of inhabitants—the "Archaics", heretofore described as "First Islanders"—either canoed up the chain of the Lesser Antilles and concentrated in the Greater Antilles or canoed directly to Puerto Rico from the Venezuelan coastline.¹⁹

Scholars fixated on the origins debate once believed that multiple waves of culturally diverse migrants arrived in the Caribbean and introduced contrasting pottery styles during the Ceramic Age. However, a massive genomic mapping project has radically transformed knowledge about these populations. Using genetic information from human skeletons, scholars now know that First Islanders shared the "most genetic drift with Indigenous groups from Central and South America who belong to seven language families: Arawakan, Cariban, Chibchan, Chocoan, Guajibuan, Mataco-Guaicuru and Tupian".²⁰ By about CE 1000, a Ceramic Age wave of new inhabitants nearly displaced First Islanders. Crucially, Ceramic Age Islanders were mostly endogamous. Only three out of 201 excavated individuals tested possessed DNA that linked them to First Islander ancestors. Although this new evidence does not rule out long-standing interaction between First Islanders and Ceramic Age newcomers, it definitively links the newcomers "to speakers of languages in the Arawak family from northeast South America".²¹ This genetic affinity persisted into the fifteenth century and beyond, including modern-day residents

of Puerto Rico, where many residents claim a "Taíno" ethnicity today.²²

The genetic evidence radically downscales the size of the precontact Caribbean Indigenous population. Scholars have long used historical accounts to surmise that the Indigenous population in the Caribbean ranged from about 60,000 to 1,000,000 in 1492.²³ The genetic evidence, however, indicates that the childbearing age population of Hispaniola and Puerto Rico combined could not have been larger than 8,150 individuals and was likely closer to 3,000 by the time of Spanish invasion. More broadly, the total archipelagic population was probably between 9,000 and 80,000 inhabitants, with the most likely number at around 30,000. Hence, it is unlikely that Indigenous Islanders in the eastern archipelago alone numbered 30,000 by 1600, as historian Philip Boucher estimates.²⁴ Still, as DNA researchers note, "the devastating effects that European colonization, expropriation, and systematic killing of Indigenous people had on Caribbean populations is indisputable."²⁵ By 1540, according to Spanish records, only 250 Indigenous people remained in Hispaniola.²⁶ Since the archaeological and historical evidence indicates that the Indigenous populations in Hispaniola and Puerto Rico were much larger and organised into more state-like structures compared with the dispersed Indigenous Islander villages in the Lesser Antilles, each home to at most a couple of hundred people, one might assume a late fifteenth-century population across the Lesser Antilles of perhaps a few thousand people.

Notably, the evidence underscores what scholars such as Neil Whitehead, Peter Hulme and Jalill Badillo have argued over decades of scholarship: ethnonyms such as "Taíno", "Arawak", "Carib", and even "Kalinago" were mostly used by Europeans to divide Indigenous Islanders into ethno-geographic categories to distinguish between potential allies and intractable enemies. Rarely did Indigenous Islanders use these terms when identifying themselves in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.²⁷ The name *Taíno*, for example, was believed by the Spanish to mean "good Indian" in 1494 but was not even used as an ethnonym almost three hundred and fifty years later, in 1836, by a fabulist ethnographer who fabricated Indigenous folktales.²⁸ It is also well known that *Carib*, also a misnomer, became a Spanish category used by jurists and settlers who sought royal sanction for enslaving Indigenous peoples.²⁹ "Caribes," the Spanish friar Las Casas explained in 1542, "was the term that the Spanish used to make free people into slaves."³⁰

Noting this discursive history, some historians and archaeologists still choose to use the term *Kalinago* when referring to Islanders in the Eastern Caribbean, citing the few known historical cases of Indigenous

Islander self-ascription recorded by missionary Raymond Breton during his time in the Dominican village of Itassí in the 1640s.³¹ Yet, much like the self-ascription "Taíno", evidence suggests that "Kalinago" only regained traction as an archipelagic identity signifier during a broader trend of Indigenous revitalisation discourse in the second half of the twentieth century.³² Moreover, as historian Ernesto Mercado-Montero points out, "there is no evidence that every Indigenous group shared a collective Kalinago identity in the sixteenth-century Lesser Antilles."³³ He opts instead for the terms *Carib* and *Lesser Antillean*, but buried in Breton's dictionary are other terms that are more apt; terms that can help scholars reconceptualise the long history of Indigenous power and cultural flux across the early Indigenous Caribbean.

Breton's informants taught him that the most appropriate word was *Oubaobonom*, meaning "people of the islands" or "Islanders". They used the term to define themselves in contradistinction to mainlanders, whom they called *baloüebonom*.³⁴ An anonymous Frenchman shipwrecked at Martinique in 1618, more than twenty years before Breton's arrival in the Caribbean, also heard the terminology and briefly referenced it in an unpublished manuscript.³⁵ De Rochefort, who praised Breton in his work, was also familiar with the naming problem. "As to their calling themselves Calinago," the Huguenot minister wrote, "it is possible they may have many different names." As "for the denomination Oubaobonon," de Rochefort explained, it "sufficiently shows that it is not particular to" the inhabitants of Dominica but to Indigenous "Islanders generally".³⁶ As the name suggests, the Indigenous peoples of the Lesser Antilles viewed the archipelago as a central aspect of a broader regional identity. A saying Breton recorded in the 1640s underscores this point: "*Koumoulicou nhányem amonchéentium oúbao*." He translated the expression as "The Caraïbes who come from other islands are people of our nation," inserting the term *Carib* where the term *oumoulicou* (better translated as "kin") was used.³⁷ *Oubaobonon* was thus a capacious term used by Indigenous Islanders to encompass all the village-to-village diversity of Indigenous archipelagic life and history.

Oubaobonon lived in what archaeologist Isaac Shearn aptly names "canoe societies". "Seafaring canoes," Shearn writes, were central "to the networked, highly dynamic social conditions of the Ceramic Age."³⁸ Islanders crafted their largest seafaring vessels by felling tall, straight gommier trees (which only grow in highland rainforests) and hollowing out their cores with fire and handaxes. De Rochefort described the gommier as one of two types of "Acajou" trees, the other being red

cedar, which are rare in the Leewards but more common in Puerto Rico and the Windwards.³⁹ Islanders used the thick sap of the gommier to make caulk for their vessels by boiling it and mixing it with shark oil and cotton lint; a practice that Islanders in Dominica still carried out in the early twentieth century.⁴⁰ The largest of the Islanders' seafaring vessels, the *canáoa* (generally called *pirogues* by Europeans), measured between 25 and 60 feet in length and could carry just as many people. Builders stabilised them with wood branches and planks so they could cut through rough seas. Artisans crafted smaller *couliála* out of the smaller red cedar. Unlike the *canáoa*, which Islanders used for migration and long-distance warfare, they used *couliála* for short coastal fishing trips, harvesting crops from nearby island gardens, and—in the post-contact era—carefully approaching European deep-sea vessels. Whereas the *canáoa* could carry dozens of people and were used for migration and war, one to three mariners manned the smaller *couliála*. Islanders paddled their watercraft forward by pushing the water behind them—a technique novel to Europeans, who rowed with their backs facing their destination.⁴¹

Islanders organised villages around a large common meeting house, the *táboüi*. The *táboüi* signified the head and the heart of the community. Each meeting house marked out a kinship group or extended filial network. Relatives and dependents lived in circular or oval structures that arched away from the meeting house.⁴² The meeting houses played such a key role that French observers referred to the villages and the meeting houses by the same name, *carbets*.⁴³ Each family in a *táboüi* planted foodstuffs, sacred medicines, and other useful plants in their *moanna* (feminine: *maynabou*), which typically contained root vegetables, cotton, fruits and tobacco. Women, men and children planted *moannas* deep inland, far from their villages, high in the mountains, and out of sight from the shoreline. Women and children did the harvesting. Men also raised additional gardens near seasonal worksites. Islanders used slash-and-burn techniques to clear the bush near mountainous gommier groves, flint and fishing commons, and dedicated offshore islands as gardens as well. Gardens were manifestations of familial labour and sites of connection with deceased kin. Shamans and elders forbade young men from marrying until they proved themselves by raising a garden. When kin died, Islanders forbade one another from reusing the land or from taking food or supplies.⁴⁴

Islanders mobilised social labour via kinship, which connected villages across island interiors and archipelagic seaways. Gender was central to the division of labour and the structure of hierarchical power within and

across táboüis networks; kinship wed island communities together. By the seventeenth century, male figures with the biggest families were known as the *tiouboutouli aute*, or leaders of the táboüi group. Echoing the spatial organisation of the village, de Rochefort translated *tiouboutouli aute* as the "captain of the family, or of the houses".⁴⁵ Yet, Islanders were matrifocal communities. They enlarged interisland kin networks by sending young men who were not yet canoe-leaders to live near their wives' father's táboüi. As Breton noted, "men follow their wives." In turn, *tiouboutouli aute* who "had many daughters are at an advantage: for their sons-in-law come to live with them, tend their gardens, build their huts, and go fishing for them". They also helped build their father-in-law's canoes.⁴⁶

Canoe life defined Islander culture in innumerable ways. Interisland mobility was essential to social reproduction across the archipelago, where land was abundant and labour was scarce. Islanders thus placed a premium on maritime skill and knowledge. The *tiouboutouli aute* were also the most skilled *ouboútonum* in the islands. As Europeans understood it, *ouboútonum*—almost always men, it seems—were the "captains" of the canoe crews of each village. They tended to be elders with the most children.⁴⁷ Whereas newly married men who were not captains moved to their wives' father's villages, *ouboútonum* did not.⁴⁸ Kin of all ages and genders also played essential and specialised roles in the weeks-long, ritualised process of canoe-building and launching.⁴⁹ All members of the villages played roles in decisions about going to war, in deciding whether to put captives to death, and in special rituals that celebrated the return of war parties and divided the spoils.⁵⁰

Ouboútonum guided other canoeists, the *tiouboutouli canáoa*, into battle.⁵¹ Typically three or four women, sometimes female captives, travelled with war parties to gather foodstuffs, comb the warriors' hair, and decorate the warriors in preparation for their raids.⁵² Men known as *nhalenê* were the oldest táboüi leaders and captains; de Rochefort compared them to "admirals".⁵³ Despite these rankings, however, neither *tiouboutouli aute* nor *ouboútonum* ruled as sovereigns. Islander social formations were not "chiefdoms" in the anthropological sense.⁵⁴ As de Rochefort explained, no singular community member possessed "any command over the whole Nation nor any superiority over the other Captains". Sons, moreover, did not become a leader of a canoe crew just because of their lineage. Instead, young men reached status positions through "election" by the community according to valour achieved at sea and at war.⁵⁵ When Islanders elected for war, they marshalled their kin-based archipelagic network after community deliberations. Organised

raids typically took place in the last quarter of the year, after hurricane season.⁵⁶ As one anonymous eyewitness recalled, "they send off a canoe with about twenty men to warn those on another island to prepare for war, and thus those who have been warned must go and warn others, agreeing to meet up to leave all together."⁵⁷ When outsiders arrived seeking help or trade, village communities collectively debated whether to approach them.⁵⁸ In turn, individuals who offered outsiders hospitality without community counsel from their kin, including kin from neighbouring islands, might trigger collective reprimand and cause intra-community strife.⁵⁹

The spatial organisation of First Islander and later Islander villages across sea channels suggests another aspect of their social horizon. First Islanders organised their village communities to take advantage of the region's unique currents and sightlines. They preferred to build their villages near riverbanks and springs but away from the coasts; places such as Indian Creek, Antigua, and Bloody River, St Kitts, for example.⁶⁰ Later Islanders instead positioned their villages strategically, building neighbouring communities on mountainsides and across seaways. Recent discoveries of ancient petroglyphs on the north side of Montserrat at Soldier Ghaut resemble similar stone etchings of figures near Bloody River in St Kitts, which is on the leeward side of the island and faces Montserrat.⁶¹ The two islands were intervisible; conical Nevis rises between them. Similarly, the site called "Trants", which is located on the northeastern coast of Montserrat, is opposite the mangroves of Indian Creek. Although Trants is much older than Indian Creek, the two communities coexisted for at least five hundred years.⁶² Citing these spatial networks, archaeologists maintain that villages that faced each other on opposing island shores "likely had more extensive contacts with one another than those at opposite ends of the same island".⁶³ In broad terms, these spatial dynamics point to a series of intercommunicative settlements; a form of Islander environmental knowledge that doubled as social knowledge.

The Mosaic Harvest Ground as Islander Commons

As Shearn argues, canoes served a "structuring role in society, bridging kinship and affinal ties [. . .] in a lifetime of constructing and voyaging canoes in specific social groups, making possible the interactions required for the biological, social, and material reproduction of society".⁶⁴ First Islanders seized on the archipelago's tightknit quality and ecological

diversity; their material culture indicates broader, seasonal circuits of harvesting, gathering and exchange. They travelled in a "cycle that took advantage of seasonal, biotic resources across the archipelago: a form of archipelagic resource mobility in its broadest sense".⁶⁵ But instead of a so-called "hunting and gathering society" that roamed the archipelago by canoe, Islanders later created the mosaic harvest ground by creating a world of interconnected villages and resource hinterlands.

Islanders harnessed two large-scale environmental dynamics to their advantage. First was the equatorial current, which drives the Atlantic Ocean waters swiftly northwest from northern Brazil, across the Lesser Antilles and into the Bahamas, where it converges with the Gulf Stream. The currents made northwest movement by canoe and sail swift. Travel in the opposite direction by canoe could easily double the duration. Sailing against the currents and winds, however, was even more difficult for massive square-rigged ships such as the Spanish naos and galleons. De Rochefort concluded that it was "almost a miracle that" the Spanish ships could "advance a league in a day against the wind".⁶⁶ The wind and water currents protected Islanders from antagonists hailing from Puerto Rico and Hispaniola, especially the European conquistadors who invaded at the end of the fifteenth century. By the late 1620s, English and French pirates learned that, because of the wind and water currents, Liamáiga was a strategic spot to use as a haven before sacking Spanish ships travelling through the Virgin Islands.⁶⁷

Indigenous Islanders also harnessed the geological nature of the region to their advantage. The Lesser Antilles are made up of two major tectonic ridgelines, one volcanic and the other limestone. The outer arc stretches across the Virgin Islands, Barbuda, eastern Antigua, Grande-Terre Guadeloupe, and Barbados. With some exceptions, the islands of the inner chain sit close together like stepping stones across a river, whereas the outer chain islands sit farther apart. The exception is in the Leewards, where the two chains join to form Guadeloupe and Antigua. The greatest distance between any two islands in the inner arc is under forty miles. Neighbouring islands are visible to the naked eye. Islands along the inner chain are so close to one another that a quick glance can easily fool an onlooker into thinking that two neighbouring islands are one. As one climbs higher into the mountains, however, the view of the archipelago comes into sharp focus.⁶⁸ The dual arcs of islands also formed dispersed pockets of natural resources. Rich soil and valuable materials such as gommier forests, and flint, clay, and coloured stone harvest spots dotted the archipelago in uneven fashion. The inner chain

is volcanic and mountainous with rich soil, which is ideal for large tree growth and manioc gardens. It bows in an arc from Saba in the north to the Grenadines in the south. The outer rim of the Lesser Antilles is mostly limestone-based and comparatively flat with rocky soil, which is better for cotton (which Islander women used to make hammocks, rope and twine). Rocky soil, though, made raising food crops at scale more difficult.⁶⁹

Islander-lived geographies and archipelagic ecologies were intertwined. From Dominica northward, the inner and outer island chains are closer to one another. This made it easier for mariners to manoeuvre canoes between the volcanic islands and their limestone neighbours. Hence, archaeologists believe that the Leeward region was the most densely populated part of the archipelago until a dry period began around CE 750, when Islanders began settling new *táboüis* farther south, past Martinique.⁷⁰ The flat and relatively dry limestone coastlines of Anegada and Barbuda, for example, possess rich shellfish and other sea life; they exist close to volcanic islands with rich soil, such as St Kitts, Nevis, and Basse-Terre Guadeloupe. Indigenous Islanders also used smaller islands as harvesting grounds and gardens. Those from Guadeloupe and Dominica used Marie-Galante as a kind of "garden" for growing fruit and cotton.⁷¹ They named islands according to their resources: La Désirade was *Oualiri* (a type of hot pepper), Antigua was *Oüá'ladli* ("land of the fish oil"), and Montserrat was *Allioüágana* ("land of the prickly bush").⁷²

Forests, flint and clay were critical resources that Islanders turned into a kind of mosaic commons. They relied almost exclusively on gommier trees to build their ornately decorated dugout canáoa. Yet gommier trees grow on just eight islands southeast of Puerto Rico: St Kitts, Montserrat, Guadeloupe, Dominica, Martinique, St Lucia, St Vincent, and Grenada.⁷³ For Indigenous Islanders, gommier groves were mystical places infused with spectral power. Friar Ramón Pané, who travelled to the Caribbean in 1494, recorded how Islanders in Hispaniola (*Aitiij* in Arawak) relied on ritual specialists to transform the spirits of giant trees into *zemís*. These figurines, sometimes made of canoe wood, embodied otherworldly power.⁷⁴ Similarly, Islanders in the Eastern Caribbean believed supernatural spirits, generally known as *maboya* and *chemin*, inhabited forests and unique trees. Mariners painted images of these spirits on the front of their giant canoes and named their vessels according to the instructions of the spirits.⁷⁵ Oubóútonum found and constructed their canoes according to elaborate rituals that involved communication with tree spirits. Making canoes, in turn, required elaborate community-

wide ceremonies during the felling, construction and launching process.⁷⁶ Historical evidence suggests that by the late fifteenth century, when the first Europeans sailed into the archipelago, most Islanders in the Lesser Antilles were concentrated in *táboüs* that dotted the hillsides of the gommier islands.

Islanders repeatedly defended their rights to the gommier from the fifteenth century onward. Iberian settlers in Puerto Rico learned of the importance of the gommier forests in the earliest decades of attempted settlement. According to reports collected by Peter Martyr, historian for the Spanish Crown, sometime between 1509 and 1512 a group of Iberian settlers trekking through the forests in eastern Puerto Rico crossed paths with Islanders from nearby St Croix. Working through a translator, the settlers learned that these Islanders had secretly landed on eastern Puerto Rico to avenge a wrong done to them over the forests; a violation of what Martyr referred to as the Indigenous "laws of hospitality".⁷⁷

According to the story, local custom dictated that Islanders in Puerto Rico were obliged to share access to gommier groves with their neighbours from St Croix, where gommier trees did not grow. Breaking the custom put the Islanders of St Croix and Puerto Rico at odds. Speaking through a translator, and with their bows drawn, the Crucian party told the settlers that they had come to Puerto Rico to murder an Indigenous village leader (called "caciques" by the Spanish) and his kin. This was not a "Taíno" versus "Carib" ethnic battle; these ethnic categories did not even exist at the time. Instead, the attack was a revenge killing for violation of a shared custom. The community leader in Puerto Rico had violated the shared rights to the forest. The Crucians explained that the cacique, who had recently allied with the Iberians, murdered several Crucian woodcutters while they were exercising their shared claim to the gommier commons. Believing their right to the forest was being brutally violated, the Crucian Islanders secretly paddled to Puerto Rico to close the circle of violence, bring their dead home, and reassert the commons tradition.⁷⁸ The ritual may have broken the impasse. As the decades proceeded, Spanish settlers accused Islanders from St Croix, Dominica, and Guadeloupe of allying with those in eastern Puerto Rico during attacks on their fledgling European settlement.⁷⁹

The archipelago's gommier forests and pockets of freshwater rivers and springs were the most important resource zones in the archipelago for Indigenous Islander communities. But they were also just one facet of a much larger, multi-island commons. Islanders had preferences for different tool-making resources, which were scattered unevenly across

the region. Archaeologists have discovered that St Martin, for example, possessed a rare source of recrystallised mudstone, or greenstone, which Islanders worked into the hand axes they needed for making canoes. Islanders carried the axes they fashioned from St Martin greenstone with them to distant islands such as Puerto Rico, St Kitts, Guadeloupe, and Martinique; all homes to the gommier. They also set up St Martin greenstone workshops on Anguilla, St Eustatius and Saba.⁸⁰

Other critical resources dotted the archipelago in an uneven fashion, and Islanders turned these spaces into shared harvesting grounds, too. Flint, an essential resource for making blades and arrows, forms within limestone, which, as noted above, is more prominent in the outer chain of the Lesser Antilles. Even before mainlanders began to migrate into the Lesser Antilles over two thousand years ago, First Islander mariners from Puerto Rico travelled far to their east to Long Island, near Antigua, to gather flint to make sharp knives and blades for use back west. Material culture suggests that First Islanders began to tap into natural resources at Long Island and Saba between 3,000 and 2,000 BCE. Both sites lay to the east of the broad channel linking the Caribbean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean, now known to sailors as the Anegada Passage. Travelling from the west, against the prevailing currents, First Islanders set up seasonal tool-making camps and short-term harvest grounds, which they abandoned and then reoccupied in a seasonal pattern.⁸¹

Islanders also established seasonal campsites in Anguilla, St Martin, Barbuda, Antigua and Montserrat.⁸² Inter-island travellers usually set up camps on the coastlines, which were convenient places for catching fish and gathering mollusks.⁸³ Passengers on Columbus's second voyage to the Caribbean recalled seeing fishing campsites in the Virgin Islands in 1494.⁸⁴ But the practice of coastal camps was not universal. First Islanders who visited Saba created temporary camps on the mountainside, away from the shoreline. This position enabled them to surveil the surrounding archipelago with ease.⁸⁵ They left behind flint scrapers and stone tools used for reworking their canoes, which they used to travel to Long Island and Antigua to gather more flint.⁸⁶

The tradition of harvesting flint from Long Island continued even after mainlanders introduced horticulture techniques to the region and settled more permanent villages along the archipelago's rivers and mountain springs. Although cassava was essential to their way of life, Islanders still needed to use the Long Island commons to gather flint, which they carried back to their cassava gardens and villages in better-watered Nevis, Guadeloupe and Martinique.⁸⁷ Recent archaeological research on La

Désirade, another flint-rich island, reveals a similar link between tool-making sites on the island and tools recovered in eastern Guadeloupe. Still, as archaeologists Maaïke de Waal and Sebastiaan Knippenberg note, as late as 1500, "eastern Guadeloupe inhabitants also obtained non-local rock from Antigua and St. Martin." Moreover, "the high quantity of Antigua flint suggests that this material was still preferred over La Désirade red chert."⁸⁸

Pottery vessels, a primary source of archaeologists' theories about cultural differentiation in the archipelago, also hint at the ways early Islanders turned islands into a mosaic commons. Archaeologists note that good clay for making pots is scattered across the region, but artefacts made from this sort of clay have been found in ancient settlements where local clay was prone to crumbling. Hence, Islanders either crafted their pots where they found resilient clay for firing and carried them to other islands or they traded with their archipelagic neighbours and kin for more resilient pots and cassava griddles.⁸⁹ Saba, a volcanic island, lacked good clay for making pots. As late as 1450 CE, Islanders on Saba used pots made of clay procured from nearby St Eustatius and Anguilla, a practice followed by Saban Afro-Caribbean potters generations later.⁹⁰

Indigenous Islanders also used the natural resources of the archipelago to beautify and adorn themselves with community signifiers. In Montserrat, artisans crafted reddish-brown carnelian beads with material obtained from Antigua. Farther south, in Grenada, Islanders fashioned amethyst beads.⁹¹ Scholars theorise that unique adornments such as amethyst and carnelian served as identity symbols that Islander communities used to distinguish themselves from one another across the archipelago.⁹² First Islanders even trafficked prestige goods that connected them to the far reaches of the Caribbean. Archaeologists have uncovered jade artefacts in St Eustatius and Antigua, but jade is not naturally occurring in the archipelago. The recovery of jade in Antigua tells us that, prior to 600 CE, Islanders traded in circuits that linked them to the coast of Guatemala, nearly 1,500 miles away.⁹³ Islander "exchange" traces back millennia, long before European conquistadors, settlers, and human traffickers poked and prodded their way into the archipelago and worked to divide Islanders into rival groups.

Islanders, "Hospitality" and The Commons

Having sketched out the "prehistory" of the archipelago, the discussion returns to Liamáiga in the 1620s. Unfortunately, sources detailing

Europeans residing in Liamáiga prior to 1624, when English settler Thomas Warner and his followers arrived, are rare.⁹⁴ Second-hand reports from Spanish officials hint that a French pirate anchored his crew at Liamáiga, perhaps at the northwest of the island now known as Dieppe Bay, in 1609.⁹⁵ Sources detailing the Indigenous presence in Liamáiga — sources that might reveal how Islanders responded to outsiders entering the commons — are even more elusive. Did Islanders simply treat outsiders like they treated extended kin, who gathered flint from Long Island and La Désirade, grew food crops on Marie-Galante, and harvested turtle eggs and shells from Barbuda? Or did they have rules about where European outsiders could go in the commons and what they could take?

Evidence does suggest, however, that sailors believed Liamáiga was a safe waypoint where they could temporarily gather water and refresh sick crewmembers. According to first-hand accounts collected by Elizabethan colonial propagandist Richard Hakluyt, Francis Drake's crew stopped to refresh his men at the island in 1595. Yet, his informants believed that "there were not any people at all" residing on the island when they anchored.⁹⁶ Nearly twenty-five years later, Walter Raleigh anchored offshore Liamáiga to refresh his crew in March of 1618. But, in his private letters written offshore, Raleigh did not mention any interactions with an Indigenous community; a striking omission given his larger aspirations of turning Indigenous people into allies against the Spanish.⁹⁷ Reflecting on the island's early history decades later, de Rochefort related that Islanders at Liamáiga actively extended haven to sick sailors from Spanish ships before the arrival of the English and French. Giving no dates, de Rochefort reported his belief that Spanish captains left sick crew members on the island "to be look'd to by the *Caribbians*, with whom they made a peace upon those terms".⁹⁸ Still, a clear chronology is lacking: an earlier source claimed that Spanish raiders massacred Islanders at Liamáiga twice.⁹⁹

Only a few years after the massacre at Bloody River, John Smith of the Virginia Company claimed that the inhabitants massacred by Thomas Warner's followers were part of an Islander group that "ranged" up and down the Leeward region of the archipelago.¹⁰⁰ Smith's writing contains edited first-hand testimony of several men who followed Thomas Warner to Liamáiga in 1624. They reference "Indians" and "Frenchmen" present on the island when they arrived.¹⁰¹ Two decades later, in 1647, two men from the ship *Marmaduke*, which supplied the early English colony with weapons and settlers in 1625, testified that no one lived on the island but "Indians" and three shipwrecked Frenchmen.¹⁰² Although an imprisoned ship pilot testified about "dozens of corsairs" gathering at Martinique

in 1625 (when war between Spain, England and the United Provinces was all but guaranteed), he said little about Islander-European trade at Liamáiga.¹⁰³ In fact, all the evidence, save de Rochefort's unsubstantiated stories about Islanders caring for sick Spanish sailors, suggests Liamáiga became a popular waypoint for European sailing crews only ten years before Warner and his financiers concocted a plan to claim the island for themselves. If anything, Liamáiga's transformation into a smuggling hub was both rapid and the product of calculated European violence.

Since the evidence about Liamáiga's Islanders is so scant and riven with ideological baggage, it is necessary to investigate sources that speak to Indigenous customs about hospitality and the commons elsewhere. Surveying accounts that span a century and a quarter, several practices stand out: when Islanders wanted to interact, they did not just allow Europeans onshore but rather tested them first by canoeing out to the deep-sea ships. If communities decided to allow European guests onshore, then communities forbade them from entering their mountainside gardens, sacred forests, or interacting with women without express permission. The only exceptions were African or European captives. Although Islanders eventually allowed outsiders to anchor near the flint commons, they almost never allowed European ships to water for long at the gommier islands such as Liamáiga. Finally, when English and French guests ignored the rules or overstayed their welcome, Islanders either drove them out of the commons by force or took them as captives.

Few if any sources indicate that Islanders in the Lesser Antilles offered long-term hospitality on the gommier islands to Spanish sailing crews in the sixteenth century. Instead, from 1494 through the 1560s and beyond, Islanders practised armed self-defence against the Spanish. As Mercado-Montero deftly illustrates in his study, despite dozens of petitions by settlers and slave traders to conquer the islands, the Spanish were never able to dislodge Islanders from the commons. Instead, Islanders' maritime skill, knowledge of the environment and martial expertise empowered them to keep the Spanish out for the entire sixteenth century.¹⁰⁴ This martial approach, undoubtedly shaped by their encounters with early Spanish slave-raiders, persisted despite the annual appearance of Spanish ships at Dominica and Guadeloupe, year after year.¹⁰⁵ Islanders occasionally allowed Spanish sailors to collect water from rivers, often hiding from view while the sailors desperately gathered water with guns and swords in hand.¹⁰⁶ But visitors who went too far from the mouths of the rivers were cut off and driven out by bowmen who intercepted them with their arrows drawn.¹⁰⁷ When Spanish sailors anchored too close to

the gommier islands, canoeists secretly paddled out to the ships at night and cut the cordage so the waves crashed the ships ashore.¹⁰⁸ In time, Spanish pilots of the treasure fleets — which started using the region as a dedicated rendezvous after their Atlantic crossing by the 1560s — chose to anchor their ships closer to La Désirade (*Oualîri*), farther away from the powerful carbets on the nearby gommier islands.¹⁰⁹ Although Islanders at Martinique and Dominica reached something of a détente with the Spanish treasure fleets by 1618, they still forbade Spanish-speakers from collecting water for more than a day.¹¹⁰

Around 1560, however, Islanders began to witness the arrival of new outsiders. These groups altered the balance of power across the Caribbean basin. The arrival of English- and French-speaking sailors meant that Islanders now had to negotiate what to do about the enemies of their enemies. Like the Spanish, the English and French possessed gunpowder and iron tools. English shipping outfits, funded in part by wool merchants involved in the English takeover of Le Havre in 1562, were some of the first to appear in the region.¹¹¹ In 1565, pirate John Hawkins captained the *Jesus of Lubeck* and three other ships along the popular Columbian route from West Africa to Dominica. Like the numerous deep-sea sailors before them, the crew were in desperate need of water after they had crossed the Atlantic.

But Islanders did not offer Hawkins's crew a welcome: when the freebooters sailed along Dominica's coastline, no canoeists approached. At least one passenger in the convoy was relieved. He feared that his fate would follow the fate of the *Green Dragon* of Le Havre, which sailed off course and had been forced to anchor in Grenada for water the previous March. Hawkins's crew heard that Islanders in Grenada assaulted the *Dragon* for two days after crew members attempted to take water without permission.¹¹² The English crew had also heard rumours from Spanish sailors that so-called "Caribes" near Margarita and Cumaná had tricked Europeans of all nations into rowing their boats to the coastline by offering to trade, whereupon they captured and ate them as a message to their enemies.¹¹³ Islanders, it seems, treated early English visitors much as they had the Spanish: as outsiders who needed to stay that way.

Islanders residing near the rivers of Dominica and Guadeloupe did, however, cautiously approach French ships in the early 1560s. The *táboûis* remained steadfast, however, about letting outsiders on shore for long. Huguenot René Laudonnière, who believed that the French should align with Indigenous allies against the Spanish, recalled that when his crew sailed by Dominica in early 1565, two canoeists approached his ships

and offered the crew pineapples. Although they approached peacefully, the French captured one of the canoeists and detained him on their ship, whereupon he promised them access to fresh water if they let him return to shore so he could tell his kinsmen the visitors were enemies of the Spanish. In turn, the villagers allowed Laudonnière's men to take water for two days, but only on the condition that they did not venture inland or approach any of the Indigenous women. When the Frenchmen disobeyed the orders and ventured inland and pillaged the Islanders' gardens, Islanders shot the Frenchmen with arrows, forced them back to their ships, and turned a man named Martin Chaveau into one of their captives.¹¹⁴ Historian Joseph Baromé concludes that by 1580, Islanders across the archipelago put some seventy-one Frenchmen to death for similar offences.¹¹⁵

Islanders' encounters with outsiders in the sixteenth century was seasonal and limited. As Hulme and Whitehead note, "it is not until twenty years later that we have a further description of the Amerindians by English voyagers."¹¹⁶ Slave trade statistics should provide insight into the numbers of non-Spanish ships that may have crossed paths with Islanders. As Schmitt notes, Le Havre had an active trade with Sierra Leone; French ships conducted some 123 voyages there between 1571 and 1595.¹¹⁷ But it is not clear how many of these sailed onward to the Caribbean. For the entirety of the sixteenth century, there are only twenty-one recorded instances of English and French ships transporting Africans for sale at Spanish Caribbean ports; and seventeen of them made their voyages in the 1560s, all of them from Plymouth, England.¹¹⁸ Instead, Islanders witnessed an increase in visitors at the end of the century. As Kenneth Andrews documents, dozens of the merchants involved in war against Spain sent their own ships, and ships they pirated, to the Caribbean in the 1580s and 1590s.¹¹⁹ Schmitt deftly shows that many of these ventures had no clear purpose but to make a profit for their backers. Piracy, smuggling with Spanish settlers, human trafficking; all were options for freebooters to pursue "beyond the line".¹²⁰ In turn, some of these sailing crews seized Islanders and sold them to Spanish settlers, a move that fostered Islander distrust and calls for revenge.¹²¹

But some sailors also arrived with directives to sack Spanish settlements, which Islanders viewed as havens for slave raiders. Harkening back to an older Huguenot spirit, English sailing convoys led by figures such as Francis Drake, Amias Preston, George Sommers, Walter Raleigh, and Lawrence Keymis arrived between the 1580s and 1590s. Nearly all of them anchored for relief at rivers that flowed down from the

mountains of Dominica or Guadeloupe. They arrived not only with the goal of challenging Spain's claim to Caribbean territory, but also with the intention of turning Indigenous peoples into wartime allies against Spain. Drake proved this strategy was possible when he sacked the Spanish treasure convoy at Nombre de Dios with the help of African maroons and Indigenous fighters in 1573. Given the long history of Spanish hostility against Islanders, it makes sense that some Islanders treated Spain's enemies with offers of hospitality. The shift in Islander treatment toward European outsiders prior to the conquest of Liamáiga must be understood within the context of regional violence and cycles of transatlantic war.

Islanders in the Lesser Antilles used reciprocal gift exchange to cautiously cultivate alliances with English and French visitors by the 1580s. After community deliberation, canoeists — bows in hand — approached the ships, offered foodstuffs in exchange for iron tools, beads and cloth, and upon receipt, guided sailors to safe anchorage near coastal riverbeds. Europeans then rowed their small boats to the shore for water and to drop off sick sailors and passengers. Francis Drake learned the important relationship between exchanging gifts and hospitality first-hand in 1586, when a disease outbreak afflicted hundreds of passengers in his war convoy. Desperate for water, the convoy anchored at Dominica. "In recompense" for the Islanders' permission to gather water, Drake's men "bestowed liberall rewards of glasse, coloured beades, and other things".¹²² Islanders, in turn, treated Drake's men "kindly for those few hours of time we spent with them, helping our folkes to fill and carry on their bare shoulders fresh water from the river to our ships and boates".¹²³ By the 1590s, one group of Islanders began holding a seasonal market for English and French sailors at LaSoye Point in the northwest of the island near a river. Islanders exchanged tobacco for knives, hatchets, saws and other iron goods; trade that brought in superior tools for making canoes but also undermined the long-standing use of the flint commons.¹²⁴ In 1595, the same year Raleigh liberated enslaved Indians in Trinidad and drove out Antonio de Berrio's Spanish outpost, Islanders cultivated relations with convoys under the command of Preston and Sommers after they tried to anchor at Dominica for water. Passenger Robert Davie recalled that dozens of canoeists approached their ships, offering plantains, pineapples and root crops in exchange for gifts of "hatchets, knives, & small bead-stones".¹²⁵ In September of 1595, the final Hawkins-Drake convoy elected to anchor near Marie-Galante, whereupon a few canoeists approached them cautiously. Islanders exchanged fruit for "flanell and a hankerchief",

and then paddled away. The fruit came from seedlings that Islanders "sow and plant in divers places" in Marie-Galante, "which they" kept "like gardens".¹²⁶ Still, Islanders only allowed sailors to gather water for limited periods. In 1596, Islanders allowed George Clifford's convoy to water and heal for a lengthy six days as they prepared to attack the Spanish at Puerto Rico. Most accounts of sailing crews watering at the gommier islands suggest Islanders believed a day or two was the limit.¹²⁷

Islanders distinguished between European outsiders seeking resources and those in need of help. The táboüis faced challenges when ships accidentally crashed ashore or when captains tried to rid their ships of sick passengers.¹²⁸ Islanders still decided who could stay, who must go and who might be turned into a captive or member of their táboüi. The well-known case of the *Oliphe Blossome* in 1605 is a case in point. The ship was headed to start a plantation in Guiana but crisis ensued when the captain took the ship in the wrong direction. Running out of water, desperate for food, and on the verge of mutiny, the group ended up at St Lucia. Islanders, led by an oubou-tonu known to outsiders as "Captain Anthony" approached the ship, engaged in the usual gift exchange, and then permitted the captain to leave some sixty-seven starving passengers onshore so they could find a way back to Europe. Anthony allowed them to camp near the shore after the leader of the group gave him a hatchet as a gift. However, soon after, a kinsman of Anthony's, "Captain Augraumart", arrived from St Vincent and scolded his kin for allowing the starving group to make camp.¹²⁹ Still, Captain Anthony's people continued to care for the ill by bringing them food from their gardens and allowing them to fish for upwards of a month. Things devolved, however, after members of the group pushed the limits of their welcome and ventured where they should not have.

According to passenger John Nicholl, members of the marooned European group marched a mile into the mountains of St Lucia, whereupon they came across large, lush gardens, which Nicholl compared to "a Bower". The gardens were surrounded by large green embankments, leading Nicholl to believe that they were meant to keep people out. At the top of a massive green mound was an unbelievably tall cluster of trees, perhaps a sacred gommier forest. "The toppe thereof did growe a companie of the most tallest Trees that ever I behelde," Nicholls wrote, "which did naturally grow so neere one to another, and so thicke from the roote to the toppe, that wee could not perceive the skie through them." Though amazed, the men plundered the Islanders' gardens for food and then returned to their camp on the shoreline. The next day, Captain

Anthony and his kinsmen from St Vincent executed a trap to drive the group out. After a week of intense bloodshed, they forced the visitors aboard a broken ship and sent them into the sea.¹³⁰

Conclusion

This essay began with the legend of Bloody River in order to look backwards, into overlapping temporalities of "prehistory" and history. The goal has been to better understand how Islander folkways about archipelagic land use informed the initial hospitality seemingly granted to Thomas Warner and the handful of shipwrecked Frenchmen said to have been present on Liamáiga in 1624. By examining the episode through the prism of the Islander Commons, it becomes clear that trade alone does not fully explain the dynamic. Whereas Islanders deemed certain harvesting areas such as La Désirade to be acceptable European anchorages, Islanders maintained strict rules about the presence of healthy visitors who landed for water at gommier islands such as Liamáiga. Once Europeans were finished gathering water and giving gifts to Islanders in return, they needed to go.

A financier of Warner's settlement claimed before the Crown that an "Indian" "king" "consented" to letting Warner's group raise a tobacco plantation on Liamáiga, but as illustrated above, this move from a carbet leader would have been both unusual and risky.¹³¹ As a former starving and shipwrecked Frenchman noted about his experience in Martinique in 1618, "no one" of their "nation does" "harm or good unless the council" of the táboüi "has been taken by all together".¹³² Moreover, as the French informant also underscored, when desperate outsiders such as himself were allowed to stay for weeks on end and demonstrated their willingness to follow local customs, Islanders often encouraged them to give up their European ways and recruited them to become members of their táboüis as part of their extended kin network.¹³³ Indeed, the presence of Africans and Europeans residing within the boundaries of Islander villages is well documented.¹³⁴ For Islanders and their canoe societies, land was surely not the sovereign property of kings, but labour was wealth and kinship was labour.

As for Thomas Warner, he learned about Islander hospitality at Liamáiga via his connections with Roger North of the Amazon Company. Warner was under North's command when he attempted to start a plantation near the Orinoco River Basin in 1620, but the enterprise created an imperial crisis and ended in starvation.¹³⁵ Left behind to fend

for themselves, Warner and fifteen others from North's company gained northbound passage to Liamáiga in 1622, where they remained for a year.¹³⁶ If it is true that Islanders at Liamáiga offered the marooned group hospitality, then Warner repaid it by returning to England, concocting a plan to turn Liamáiga into a plantation, and recruiting financial backing from slave trader Ralph Merrifield. Warner returned with settlers in early 1624. His group began felling trees, burning brush for tobacco fields, building huts, and proceeded to raise a small fort replete with loopholes for shortrange pistol warfare.¹³⁷

Although Islanders in Martinique and Dominica exchanged tobacco with foreigners, and while some historians theorise that Europeans left Indigenous labourers on outlying islands to raise tobacco for them, the presence of European tobacco fields and armed forts on the gommier islands was unheard of at the time. Islanders responded just as they had done over the previous century: they elected to drive the illicit visitors out. As Warner's fellow settlers Thomas Simons, Rowland Grascocke, and Nicholas Burge reported to John Smith, Islanders from across the archipelago began surreptitiously sacking their camps and killing men in 1625; more than a year before the events at Bloody River were said to have taken place. The cycle of violence lasted for two years. According to Grascocke and the others, Islanders remained on Liamáiga until late 1627, after years of coordinated raids. Some managed to flee, but others, including the son of a murdered ouboútonu, the supposed king of the island, were enslaved. His son was said to have been given as a gift to Merrifield.¹³⁸

In his study of comparative property formation in North America, historian Allan Greer makes a compelling observation regarding the enclosure of the Islander Commons and the development of English and French colonies. "Common property formed a central feature of both native and settler land tenures of the early modern period," he writes, and "dispossession came about to a significant degree through the clash of an indigenous commons and a colonial commons."¹³⁹ While the case of the English and the French in St Kitts does not easily fit Greer's thesis, it is nonetheless compelling that as soon as the settlers massacred and drove out the resident Islanders of Liamáiga, they set about mapping their own commons across the island landscape. As has been noted elsewhere, leaders of the English and French camps agreed in 1627 not only to divide the island, but also agreed to share the woodlands, roads, sea lanes, and salt ponds as common land in an agreement they styled the *Partage*. Not unlike the Islanders they displaced, they also agreed

that when any foreign ships anchored offshore, the leaders would gather and decide collectively how the trade would proceed.¹⁴⁰ The events at Liamáiga, it seems, suggest more work on comparative property formation in the early modern Caribbean remains.

Still, Islanders did not disappear when the Europeans arrived, nor did their commons evaporate. Islanders continued to rely on the same ocean currents and resource-rich enclaves as their ancestors had for generations, even after Europeans began slicing the mosaic harvest grounds into plantations and colonies. Although the takeover of St Kitts, Nevis, Antigua and Montserrat slowly boxed Islanders out of their harvest grounds to the north, Islander canoe parties still travelled to Barbuda, southeastern Antigua, and eastern Guadeloupe into the 1670s. Canoeists connected Barbuda (where First Islanders historically planted cotton and harvested turtle shells and eggs), eastern Antigua (where the rich mangroves led to Indian Creek), eastern Guadeloupe (rich with fresh water and close to the flint harvest grounds of La Désirade), and Dominica (by then an Islander defensive haven).¹⁴¹ In short, the environmental and material dynamics that contoured oubaobonom consciousness had ancient antecedents. Regardless of their origins, Islanders were, after all, “people of the Islands”.

NOTES

1. For an overview, see Reid et al.; Hanna.
2. “A Geometrical Plan of the Isle of St. Chrisophle by Pierre Bour”, British Library (hereafter BL), Maps K.Top.123.79.2, 1714; See also Map of St Kitts, National Archives of the United Kingdom (hereafter NAUK), MPG 1/191, 1734.
3. Dunn, 119; Dyde, 26.
4. Breton, *Caraïbe-François*, 413; Edwards, 1:454.
5. “Petition of Clement Everard, et. al., the inhabitants of the island of Saint Christopher’s to the King”, 13 November 1667, NAUK, Colonial Office (hereafter CO), 1/21/145. Spelling and grammar of all original source material, except as cited from *Wild Majesty*, is retained hereafter, without the use of [sic].
6. Andrews, *The Spanish Caribbean*, 234; Schmitt, 284.
7. Garraway, 78–80, 87.
8. du Tertre, *Histoire Générale des Îles*, 6.
9. du Tertre, *Histoire Générale des Antilles*, 5–6.
10. Anonymous [Charles de Rochefort], 268; Rochefort, 159–60.
11. Dunn, 119.

12. One stellar exception is Millard.
13. Schmitt, 286.
14. Boucher; Honychurch, *The Dominica Story*; Honychurch, "Crossroads in the Caribbean".
15. Whitehead, *Cannibals and Kings*, 1–47; Hulme and Whitehead, 3; Badillo, "The Island Caribs"; Badillo, "Guadalupe". All printed primary sources reproduced in *Wild Majesty* have been double-checked against the originals for accuracy. Spelling in *Wild Majesty* is maintained.
16. Stone; Mercado-Montero. As Andrews notes, "Often used in the singular, and often abusively," *rescate* "is almost impossible to define because the phenomenon itself was so elusive, lying on the border between crime and lawful business." Andrews, *The Spanish Caribbean*, 74.
17. On the question of "the commons" and Indigenous "enclosure" in Atlantic history, see Greer, 1–23, especially 5–7, 11–18; Cronon; Linebaugh and Rediker, 44; Seed, 31–37.
18. Shearn, 2.
19. Fitzpatrick, 125–26.
20. Fernandes et al., 2–3.
21. Ibid., 2, 6.
22. Ibid., 5.
23. Stone, 184, n.28; Mercado-Montero, 3.
24. Boucher, 33–35.
25. Fernandes et al., 5, 7; Reich and Patterson. See also, Nägele et al.
26. Cooke and Borah, 401.
27. Whitehead, "Carib Ethnic Solidiering"; Whitehead, "Tribes Make States"; Badillo, "The Island Caribs"; Badillo, "Guadalupe".
28. Hulme, 199–200.
29. Stone, 32–39.
30. Whitehead, *Cannibals and Kings*, 15.
31. Schmitt; Hofman, Borck, et al., 21; Murphy.
32. Feliciano-Santos, "Prophetic Repairs"; Feliciano-Santos, "How do you".
33. Mercado-Montero, 3.
34. Anonymous [Charles de Rochefort], 325; Rochefort, 205. For *Oubaobonom* in Breton's work, see Breton, *Caraïbe-François*, 219–20, 416.
35. Anonymous, "Relation d'un voyage infortuné fait aux Indes occidentales par le capitaine Fleury, avec la description de quelques isles qu'on y rencontre", n.d., Bibliothèque Inguimbertaine de Carpentras de France, cote 590. The manuscript, as cited hereafter, is reprinted in Grunberg et al.
36. Anonymous [Charles de Rochefort], 325; Rochefort, 205.
37. Breton, *Caraïbe-François*, 310, 423–24; Rochefort, 354.
38. Shearn, 3.
39. Rochefort, 39.

40. Shearn, 5; Taylor, "The Caribs", 136, 42.
41. Grunberg et al., 20; Breton, *Caraïbe-François*, 109, 84; Shearn, 5–6, Mercado–Montero.
42. Rochefort, 292.
43. Breton, *Caraïbe-François*, 444.
44. Grunberg et al., 53.
45. Rochefort, 313.
46. Breton, *Caraïbe-François*, 87.
47. Grunberg et al., 20.
48. Breton, *Caraïbe-François*, 87.
49. Grunberg et al., 88–93.
50. Ibid., 93–98.
51. Breton, *Caraïbe-François*, 87.
52. Grunberg et al., 92.
53. Rochefort, 313; Breton, *Caraïbe-François*, 27.
54. Wolf, 96–99.
55. Rochefort, 314.
56. Baromé, 31; Mercado-Montero, 24.
57. Grunberg et al., 93.
58. Ibid., 20.
59. Hulme and Whitehead, 70.
60. Anonyme de Saint-Vincent, *Description de l'île de Saint-Vincent*, n.d., reprinted in Grunberg et al., 131.
61. Cherry, Ryzewski, Guimarães et al.
62. Peterson and Watters.
63. Hofman, Bright et al., 24.
64. Shearn, 4.
65. Hofman, Mol, Ramos et al., 123.
66. Rochefort, 207.
67. "Con la declaración que se ha tomado a Manuel Franco Camarino", Seville, Archivo General de Indias, Seville (hereafter AGI), Indiferente, 1153, 24 April 1629; "Declaración de Tomás Cordero", Seville, AGI, Indiferente, 1153, 3 April 1629.
68. Watts, 11–14; Keegan and Hofman, 197, 202, 36; Brughmans et al.
69. Watts.
70. Hanna, 653; Cooper.
71. Hakluyt, 228; Grunberg et al., 25.
72. Breton, *François-Caraïbe*, 251; Breton, *Caraïbe-François*, 410; Breton, *Dictionnaire Caraïbe-Français [1665]*, 204; Dick; Taylor, "Names", 109, n.1.
73. Shearn, 5–7.
74. Cited by Shearn, 12. On Ajiti, see Breton, *Caraïbe-François*, 410.
75. Grunberg et al., 20; Anonymous [Charles de Rochefort], 453; Rochefort, 306.

76. Grunberg et al., 88–93; Shearn, 12.
77. d'Anghiera and de Nebrija, "Book Eight of the Second Decade", n.p.; d'Anghiera, *The Historie of the West Indies*, 86–88; d'Anghiera, *The Eight Decades*, 1:256–58.
78. d'Anghiera and de Nebrija, "Book Eight of the Second Decade", n.p.; d'Anghiera, *The Historie of the West Indies*, 86–88; d'Anghiera, *The Eight Decades*, 1:256–58.
79. Southey, 1:160–63, 67. Warriors from Dominica and Guadeloupe may have used St Croix as a staging area, see Díaz Soler, 36; Baromé, 43, n.29; Hulme and Whitehead, 40.
80. Hofman, Bright et al., 248–49, 53.
81. Keegan and Hofman, 202; Hofman, Mol, Ramos et al., 123–24; Knippenberg.
82. Keegan and Hofman, 201–2; Cherry, Ryzewski and Leppard.
83. Hofman, Mol, Ramos et al., 123; Davis.
84. Hulme and Whitehead, 36.
85. Hofman, Mol, Ramos et al., 123–24.
86. Hofman and Hoogland; Hofman, Mol, Ramos et al., 123.
87. Hofman, Hoogland et al.; Ramos et al.; Hofman, Bright et al., 249; Hofman, Mol, Hoogland et al.
88. de Waal and Knippenberg, 15.
89. Keegan and Hofman, 74–75.
90. Mol et al., 286; For a survey of Pre-Columbian network analysis in the Lesser Antilles, consult Hofman, Bright et al.; Hofman, Mol, Ramos et al.; Hofman, Mol, Hoogland et al.; Brughmans et al.; Hofman, Borck et al.
91. Watters and Scaglion; Keegan and Hofman, 54–55.
92. Keegan and Hofman, 54–55.
93. Bérard et al.; Fitzpatrick, 121–22; Harlow et al.
94. Building on the work of Moreau, Schmitt cites one source relative to St Kitts in late 1624, which was taken in 1625: "Carta de Diego de Acunã, presidente de la Audiencia de Santo Domingo", Santo Domingo, AGI, Santo Domingo 55, ramo 5, no. 32, 12 October 1625. This source, however, details Islander exchange in Martinique, Schmitt, 284; Moreau, 188–89.
95. "Gaspar de Pereda to Crown", AGI, Santo Domingo, 100, r.4, 11 April 1609; "Información before Diego Gómez de Sandoval, AGI, Santo Domingo, 54, 23 November 1609; Andrews, *The Spanish Caribbean*, 234–35.
96. Hulme and Whitehead, 53.
97. Oldys and Birch, 638–39.
98. Rochefort, 160.
99. Rennard, 48.
100. Smith, 54.
101. Ibid., 51.
102. Harlow, 24–25.

103. Schmitt, 283–84.
104. Mercado-Montero, 9–11; Baromé, 35–36, 44, n.44, 45, n.61.
105. Baromé, 33, *passim*.
106. See sixteenth-century examples cited in Mercado-Montero, 1–2, 20–21, *passim*; Baromé, 31–33, *passim*; Hulme and Whitehead, *passim*.
107. Hulme and Whitehead, 51–52.
108. Baromé, 37; Hulme and Whitehead, 49.
109. Baromé, 17; Andrews, *The Spanish Caribbean*, 65–70.
110. Grunberg et al., 28.
111. Mattingly.
112. Hulme and Whitehead, 49.
113. *Ibid.*, 43.
114. *Ibid.*, 51–52.
115. Baromé, 39.
116. Hulme and Whitehead, 52.
117. Schmitt, 288.
118. SlaveVoyages, accessed 30 September 2025, <https://legacy.slavevoyages.org/voyages/lvgoLjbz>
119. Andrews, *English Privateering Voyages*, 16; Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, 32–33, 37–39, 128, 230–31.
120. Mattingly.
121. Hulme and Whitehead, 53; Grunberg et al., 21.
122. Hulme and Whitehead, 53.
123. *Ibid.*
124. Hulme and Whitehead, 55–6; Hauser et al.
125. Hulme and Whitehead, 55–56.
126. *Ibid.*, 56.
127. *Ibid.*, 58–61.
128. Grunberg et al., 19–21.
129. Hulme and Whitehead, 70.
130. *Ibid.*, 71–72.
131. Commission, reciting the discovery of St Christopher, as Merwar's Hope, Nevis, Barbadoes, and Montserrat, by Thos. Warner, Southampton, NAUK, CO 1/3, No. 45, ff. 212, 13 September 1625; Another copy of the preceding, Southampton, NAUK, CO 1/3, No. 45, f. 222, 13 September 1625.
132. Grunberg et al., 21.
133. *Ibid.*, 31.
134. Mercado-Montero, 8; Hulme and Whitehead, 85; Rochefort, 295, 324.
135. Lorimer, 61–68.
136. Lorimer, 71; Smith, 50.
137. Hilton, 2; Smith, 52.
138. Smith, 52.
139. Greer, 242.

140. Dator, 38.
141. "Coppie of Intelligence of an Indian Design about the time of the people of Antegos goeing against the Indians", 23 December 1672, NAUK, CO 1/31, f.229.

WORKS CITED

- Andrews, Kenneth R. *English Privateering Voyages to the West Indies, 1588–1595*. Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1959.
- . *Elizabethan Privateering: English Privateering during the Spanish War, 1585–1603*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964.
- . *The Spanish Caribbean: Trade and Plunder, 1530–1630*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978.
- Anonymous [Charles de Rochefort]. *Histoire Naturelle & Morale des Îles Antilles de l'Amerique*. Rotterdam: Chez Arnout Leers, 1658.
- Badillo, Jalil Sued. "The Island Caribs: New Approaches to Question of Ethnicity in the Early Colonial Caribbean". In *Wolves from the Sea: Readings in the Anthropology of the Native Caribbean*, edited by Neil L. Whitehead. Leiden: KITLV Press, 1995.
- . "Guadalupe: ¿Caribe o Taíno? La Isla de Guadalupe y su Cuestionable Identidad Caribe en La Época Pre-Colombina: Una Revisión Etnohistórica y Arqueológica Preliminar". *Caribbean Studies* 35, no. 1 (2007): 37–85.
- Baromé, Joseph. "Spain and Dominica 1493–1647". *Caribbean Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (1966): 30–46.
- Bérard, Benoit, Jean-Yves Billard, and Bruno Ramstein. "Ioumoúlicou". In *Proceedings of the 23rd Congress of the International Association for Caribbean Archaeology*, edited by Reg Murphy and S.A. Rebovich, 577–89. English Harbour, Antigua: Dockyards Museum, 2011.
- Boucher, Philip. *Cannibal Encounters: Europeans and Island Caribs, 1492–1763*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992.
- Breton, Raymond. *Dictionnaire Caraïbe-François*. Auxerre: Gilles Bouquet, 1665.
- . *Dictionnaire François-Caraïbe*. Auxerre: Gilles Bouquet, 1666.
- . *Dictionnaire Caraïbe-Français [1665]*. Paris: Karthala, 1999.
- Brugmans, Tom, Maaikje S. de Waal, Corinne L. Hofman, and Ulrik Brandes. "Exploring Transformations in Caribbean Indigenous Social Networks through Visibility Studies: the Case of Late Pre-Colonial Landscapes in East-Guadeloupe (French West Indies)". *Journal of Archaeological Method & Theory* 25, no. 2 (2018): 475–519.
- Cherry, John F., Krysta Ryzewski, Susana Guimarães, Christian Stouvenot, and Sarita Francis. "The Soldier Ghaut Petroglyphs on Montserrat, Lesser Antilles". *Latin American Antiquity* 32, no. 2 (2021): 422–30.
- Cherry, John F., Krysta Ryzewski, and Thomas P. Leppard. "Multi-Period Landscape

- Survey and Site Risk Assessment on Montserrat, West Indies". *Journal of Island & Coastal Archaeology* 7, no. 2 (2012): 282–302.
- Cooke, Sherburne F., and Woodrow Borah. *Essays in Population History, Volume 1: Mexico and the Caribbean*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2023.
- Cooper, Jago. "The Climatic Context for Pre-Columbian Archaeology in the Caribbean". In *The Oxford Handbook of Caribbean Archaeology*, edited by William Keegan, Corinne Hofman, and Reniel Rodríguez Ramos, 47–58. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Cronon, William. *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2003.
- d'Anghiera, Pietro Martire. *De Orbe Novo: The Eight Decades of Peter Martyr d'Anghiera*. Translated by Francis Augustus MacNutt. 2 vols. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1912.
- . *De Novo Orbe, or The Historie of the West Indies*. Translated by Michael Lok. London: Printed for Thomas Adams, 1612.
- d'Anghiera, Pietro Martire, and Antonio de Nebrija. *P. Martyris Angli Mediolanensis Opera: Legatio Babylonica; Oceani Decas; Poemata; Epigrammata*. Impressum Hispali: cu[m] summa diligencia per Jacobu[m] Corumberger Alemanu[m]. 1511.
- Dator, James. "Search for a New Land: Imperial Power and Afro-Creole Resistance in the British Leeward Islands 1624–1745". PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2011.
- Davis, Dave D. "Jolly Beach and the Preceramic Occupation of Antigua, West Indies". *Yale University Publications in Anthropology*, no. 84 (2000).
- de Waal, Maaïke, and Sebastiaan Knippenberg. "On the Reconstruction of Prehistoric Social Territories: The La Désirade Lithic Workshops and the Distribution of La Désirade Chert (French West Indies)". *Journal of Lithic Studies* 7, no. 2 (2020): 1–22.
- Díaz Soler, Luis M. *Historia de la Esclavitud Negra en Puerto Rico (1493–1890)*. 3rd. ed. Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1953.
- Dick, Kenneth C. "Aboriginal and Early Spanish Names of Some Caribbean, Circum-Caribbean Islands and Cays". *Virgin Islands Archaeological Society Journal* 4 (1977): 17–41.
- du Tertre, Jean-Baptiste. *Histoire Générale des Îles des S. Christophe, de la Guadeloupe, de la Martinique, et autres dans l'Amérique*. Paris: Jacques l'Anglois, Iprimeur Ordinaire du Roy et Emmanuel l'Anglois, dans la grand Salle du Palais, 1654.
- . *Histoire Générale des Antilles Habitées par les François*. 4 vols. Paris: T. lolly, 1667–1671.
- Dunn, Richard. *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise and Fall of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713*. New York: Norton, 1972.
- Dyde, Bryan. *Out of the Crowded Vagueness: A History of the Islands of St. Kitts, Nevis, and Anguilla*. Oxford: Macmillan Caribbean, 2005.

- Edwards, Bryan. *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*. London: Printed for John Stockdale, 1793.
- Feliciano-Santos, Sherina. "How do you speak Taíno?: Indigenous Activism and Linguistic Practices in Puerto Rico". *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 27, no. 1 (2017): 4–21.
- . "Prophetic Repairs: Narrative and Social Action among Puerto Rican Taíno". *Language & Communication* 56 (2017/09/01/ 2017): 19–32.
- Fernandes, Daniel M., Kendra A. Sirak, Harald Ringbauer, et al. "A Genetic History of the Pre-Contact Caribbean". *Nature* (2020/12/23 2020).
- Fitzpatrick, Scott. "Seafaring Capabilities in the Pre-Columbian Caribbean". *Journal of Maritime Archaeology* 8, no. 1 (2013): 101–38.
- Garraway, Doris. *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.
- Greer, Allan. *Property and Dispossession: Natives, Empires and Land in Early Modern North America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Grunberg, Bernard, Benoît Roux, and Josiane Grunberg. *Voyageurs anonymes aux Antilles*. Corpus Antillais. Paris: Harmattan, 2013.
- Hakluyt, Richard. *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, & Discoveries of the English Nation*. 12 vols. Vol. 10, Glasgow: James MacLehose & Sons, 1903–1905.
- Hanna, Jonathan A. "Grenada and the Guianas: Mainland Connections and Cultural Resilience during the Caribbean Late Ceramic Age". *World Archaeology* 50, no. 4 (2018): 651–75.
- Harlow, George E., A. Reg Murphy, David J. Hozjan, Christy N. De Mille, and Alfred A. Levinson. "Pre-Columbian Jadeite Axes from Antigua, West Indies: Description and Possible Sources". *Can Mineral* 44, no. 2 (2006): 305–21.
- Harlow, Vincent T. *Colonising Expeditions to the West Indies and Guiana, 1623–1667*. London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1925.
- Hauser, Mark W., Douglas V. Armstrong, Diane Wallman, Kenneth G. Kelly, and Lennox Honychurch. "Where Strangers Met: Evidence for Early Commerce at LaSoye Point, Dominica". *Antiquity* 93, no. 371 (2019): 1–8.
- Hilton, John. "Relation of the First Settlement of St. Christophers and Nevis [1675]". In *Colonising Expeditions to the West Indies and Guiana, 1623–1667*, edited by Vincent T. Harlow. London: Hakluyt Society, 1925.
- Hofman, Corinne, and Menno Hoogland. "Plum Piece: Evidence for Archaic Seasonal Occupation on Saba, Northern Lesser Antilles around 3300 BP". *Journal of Caribbean Archaeology* 4 (2003): 12–27.
- Hofman, Corinne L., Lewis Borck, Jason E. Laffoon et al. "Island Networks: Transformations of Inter-Community Social Relationships in the Lesser Antilles at the Advent of European Colonialism". *Journal of Island and Coastal Archaeology* (2020): 1–27.
- Hofman, Corinne L., Alistair J. Bright, Arie Boomert, and Sebastiaan Knippenberg. "Island Rhythms: The Web of Social Relationships and Interaction Networks

- in the Lesser Antillean Archipelago between 400 B.C. and A.D. 1492". *Latin American Antiquity* 18, no. 3 (2007): 243–68.
- Hofman, Corinne L., Menno L. P. Hoogland, Alistair J. Bright, and William F. Keegan. "Attractive Ideas, Desirable Goods: Examining the Late Ceramic Age Relationships between Greater and Lesser Antillean Societies". *Journal of Island & Coastal Archaeology* 3, no. 1 (2008): 17–34.
- Hofman, Corinne, Angus Mol, Menno Hoogland, and Roberto Valcárcel Rojas. "Stage of Encounters: Migration, Mobility and Interaction in the Pre-Colonial and Early Colonial Caribbean". *World Archaeology* 46, no. 4 (2014/08/08 2014): 590–609.
- Hofman, Corinne, Angus Mol, Arthur Ramos, and Sebastiaan Knippenberg. "Networks Set in Stone: Archaic-Ceramic Interaction in the Early Pre-Colonial Northeastern Caribbean". In *Archéologie Caraïbe*, edited by Benoît Bérard and C. Losier, 119–32. Leiden: Sidestone, 2014.
- Honychurch, Lennox. *The Dominica Story: A History of the Island*. Roseau: Dominica Institute, 1984.
- . "Crossroads in the Caribbean: A Site of Encounter and Exchange on Dominica". *World Archaeology* 28, no. 3 (1997): 291–304.
- Hulme, Peter. "Making Sense of the Native Caribbean". *New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 67, no. 3–4 (1993): 189.
- Hulme, Peter, and Neil L. Whitehead, eds. *Wild Majesty: Encounters with Caribs from Columbus to the Present Day*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Keegan, William F., and Corinne L. Hofman. *The Caribbean Before Columbus*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Knippenberg, Sebastiaan. "Flint Collecting Strategies on Long Island". *XIX International Congress for Caribbean Archaeology*, edited by Luc Alofs and Raymundo A.C.F. Dijkhoff, 88–98, Aruba: Archaeological Museum, 22–28 July 2001.
- Linebaugh, Peter, and Marcus Rediker. *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2000.
- Lorimer, Joyce. *English and Irish Settlement on the River Amazon, 1550–1646*. London: Hakluyt Society, 1989.
- Mattingly, Garrett. "No Peace beyond What Line?". *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 13 (1963): 145–62.
- Mercado-Montero, Ernesto. "Indigenous Raiding, Captive Taking, and the Politics of Maritime Violence in the Long Sixteenth-Century Lesser Antilles". *Hispanic American Historical Review* 105, no. 1 (2025): 1–34.
- Millard, Mark E. "The English Settlement of St. Christopher, 1624–1629". MA thesis, University of Plymouth, 2017.
- Mol, Angus, Menno Hoogland, and Corinne Hofman. "Remotely Local: Ego-networks of Late Pre-colonial (AD 1000–1450) Saba, North-eastern Caribbean". *Journal of Archaeological Method & Theory* 22, no. 1 (2015): 275–305.

- Moreau, Jean-Pierre. *Les Petites Antilles de Christophe Colomb à Richelieu: 1493–1635*. Paris: Karthala, 1992.
- Murphy, Tessa. "Kalinago Colonizers: Indigenous People and the Settlement of the Lesser Antilles". In *The Torrid Zone: Caribbean Colonization and Cultural Interaction in the Long Seventeenth Century*, edited by L.H. Roper, 17–30. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2018.
- Nägele, Kathrin, Cosimo Posth, Miren Iraeta Orbegozo, et al. "Genomic Insights into the Early Peopling of the Caribbean". *Science* 369, no. 6502 (2020): 456.
- Oldys, William, and Thomas Birch, eds. *The Works of Sir Walter Raleigh*. 8 vols. Vol. 8. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1829.
- Peterson, James, and David Watters. "Archaeological Testing at the Early Saladoid Trants Site, Montserrat, West Indies". *IACA: Proceedings of the Fourteenth Congress of The International Association for Caribbean Archaeology*, edited by Aissandra Cummins and Phillippa King, 286–305. Bridgetown: Cultural Resource Solutions, 22–28 July 1991.
- Ramos, Reniel Rodríguez, Elvis Babilonia, L. Antonio Curet, and Jorge Ulloa. "The Pre-Arawak Pottery Horizon in the Antilles: A New Approximation". *Latin American Antiquity* 19, no. 1 (2008): 47–63.
- Reich, David, and Orlando Patterson. "Ancient DNA Is Changing How We Think About the Caribbean". *New York Times*, 23 December 2020.
- Reid, Basil A., Corinne Hofman, Grant Gilmore III, and Douglas Armstrong. "Caribbean Prehistoric and Historical Archaeology". In *Encyclopedia of Caribbean Archaeology*, edited by Basil A. Reid, 1–30. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014.
- Rennard, Joseph, ed. *Les Caraïbes, La Guadeloupe: 1635–1656*. Paris: G. Flicker, 1929.
- Rocheport, Charles de. *The History of the Caribby-Islands*. Translated by John Davies. London: Printed by J.M. for T. Dring and J. Starkey, 1666.
- Schmitt, Casey. "'Betwixt Ye Two Rivers': Trafficking and Colonization in Early Seventeenth-Century Saint Christopher". *Hispanic American Historical Review* 103, no. 2 (2023): 283–312.
- Seed, Patricia. *American Pentimento: The Invention of Indians and the Pursuit of Riches*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Shearn, Isaac. "Canoe Societies in the Caribbean: Ethnography, Archaeology, and Ecology of Precolonial Canoe Manufacturing and Voyaging". *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 57 (2020): 101140.
- Smith, John. *The True Travels, Adventures and Observations of Captain John Smith*. London: Printed by J.H. for Thomas Slater, 1630.
- Southey, Thomas. *Chronological History of the West Indies*. 3 vols. London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, & Green, 1827.
- Stone, Erin. *Captives of Conquest: Slavery in the Early Modern Spanish Caribbean*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021.
- Taylor, Douglas. "The Caribs of Dominica". *Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin* 119 (1938): 103–66.

- . "Names on Saint Vincent". *De West-Indische Gids* 38, no. 1/2 (1958): 106–10.
- Watters, David, and Richard Scaglion. "Beads and Pendants from Trants, Montserrat: Implications for the Prehistoric Lapidary Industry of the Caribbean". *Annals of Carnegie Museum* 63 (1994): 215–37.
- Watts, David. *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture, and Environmental Change since 1492*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Whitehead, Neil L. "Carib Ethnic Soldiering in Venezuela, the Guianas, and the Antilles, 1492–1820". *Ethnohistory* 37, no. 4 (1990): 357–85.
- . "Tribes Make States and States Make Tribes." In *War In The Tribal Zone: Expanding States and Indigenous Warfare*, edited by R. Brian Ferguson and Neil L. Whitehead, 127–50. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992.
- . *Of Cannibals and Kings: Primal Anthropology in the Americas*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011.
- Wolf, Eric. *Europe and the People Without History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

“The Best of All the Virgins”:

Crab Island as a Contested Commons from the Late Seventeenth to the Mid-Nineteenth Century

RASMUS CHRISTENSEN*

On 10 July 1680 — a day with dry and hot weather cooled by the persistent trade wind blowing in from the east — a boat entered the harbour of Charlotte Amalie on St Thomas and moored at the quay close to the fortress that overlooked the harbour. The boat had just returned from a trip to a nearby island known by the colonists as Crab Island, and carried a cargo of nine full-grown turtles. Four days later, the boat set sail for Crab Island again and returned after another eight days with seventeen living and two salted turtles. Over the next few months, at least three similar trips were undertaken.¹ These and other similar and seemingly insignificant events were meticulously recorded by Jørgen Iversen, the first governor of the Danish colony of St Thomas, and his successors. While the earliest testimonies of the regular shuttling between Crab Island and St Thomas appear in the governor's journal on 2 July 1680, islanders had likely taken similar trips to Crab Island since the Danish colonisation of St Thomas began in 1672. Remarks on trips to Crab Island are recorded alongside entries about other small and quotidian events, such as the death of an ox; the birth of a calf; the planting of black-eyed peas, cassava and potatoes; and meteorological observations. Entries such as these were not just the records of pedantic colonial administrators, but reflected a keen concern with supplying and supporting the young and fragile colony. Everything that mattered for the stability of the colony was recorded. In the following years, many boats and small ships would

* The research for this article was supported by the European Research Council, under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No. ERC-2019-COG 863671).

make their way to Crab Island not only to catch turtles but also to fish, hunt, collect freshwater and cut timber.

While events such as the regular trips to Crab Island may initially seem to have played little part in the grand imperial schemes and economic ambitions that prompted the European colonisation of the Eastern Caribbean, such events were important for colonial era islanders in their everyday lives. Events like these are pieces in the larger story of the everyday struggle to secure a livelihood on the Virgin Islands and the nearby Leeward Islands. As colonisation on these small islands intensified, natural resources and foodstuffs became increasingly scarce, leading to the overexploitation of island environments. Thus, people of lesser means, white and Black, free and enslaved, especially benefited from resources freely available on the many uninhabited islands and cays in their local surroundings and beyond. These resources were within the reach of ordinary islanders because of the ubiquitous small boats that were crucial for the archipelagic infrastructure.² Merchants also used Crab Island to enrich their businesses by procuring turtle meat and hardwood for local and regional markets. However, when islanders navigated between the islands for resources and livelihoods, they risked getting intertwined in imperial politics and ambitions. At times, their archipelagic movements even prompted violent diplomatic conflicts.

This article uncovers how people from the Virgin Islands and the Leeward Islands used Crab Island to gather resources. It shows how Crab Island emerged as a commons and operated as an entangled space where islanders' search for resources fed imperial dreams and clashed with questions of imperial dominium.³ It traces the connections between fishermen from Nevis and turtlers from St Thomas who went to Crab Island to carve out a viable existence in the region, and the imperial politics and diplomatic disputes set in motion by their activities. In other words, it shows how the everyday search for resources nurtured imperial ambitions and sustained imperial presence and claims in the region.

During the seventeenth century and lasting well into the nineteenth century, Crab Island developed into a commons where people from around the region could supply themselves with critical natural resources such as food, timber and fresh water. By centring on the livelihoods, dreams and conflicts surrounding Crab Island, this article responds to a recent urge to "take the notion of the commons seriously and search for the ways people of American, African, and European heritage divided and distributed the means of subsistence, profit, and power".⁴ The article builds on existing scholarship on Atlantic commons and maritime

hinterlands that have been defined as "extraimperial frontier zones" or "neighboring islands and nearby waterscapes where colonists turtle, timber, hunt, and fish".⁵ In these spaces outside complete imperial control, Mary Draper has noted that "planting permanent settlements made little sense, as they were characterized by little arable land, [and] forested, mountainous terrain".⁶ Yet, this article shows that, in the case of Crab Island, the historical narratives of Atlantic commons, settlement and imperial presence are not necessarily competing and successive narratives following each other in a linear historical progression, from frontier or borderland to colonial territory under imperial sovereignty, but rather that these narratives intertwine, and wax and wane. Crab Island was a place that some islanders used as a commons, others tried to settle, and imperial officials wanted to exploit; never just one thing or the other.

The Making of Scarcity

In the late seventeenth century, colonies across the Leeward Islands and Virgin Islands faced irregular supplies of foodstuff and other goods from Europe. When trans-Atlantic shipments were unreliable or insufficient, islanders depended on local and regional supply chains, connecting to other colonies in the region, or on surrounding uninhabited islands and cays, which offered resources crucial for sustaining life in the colony. At times, even one missing ship could push island populations into a state of desperation. On 8 January 1689, when supplies from Europe had not arrived on time at Antigua in the English Leeward Islands, Governor Nathanael Johnson wrote to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, observing that:

we have of late had very seasonable weather which gives us a Comfortable Prospect of Plenty this following yeare, tho as yet we still feele the Severe Effects of that great drought under which we have so long suffered, and our scarcitie at present is extremely encreased by want of our usuall supplies from Ireland, the Provision-Magazine on which these Islands principally depend, and being now out of hopes this year of any thing from there the rates of beefe and Porke are double and triple what they were about 2 or 3 months agoe.⁷

The vulnerability caused by weak supply chains also affected Danish St Thomas. In the 1670s and 1680s, colonists faced prolonged periods of shortage because of unreliable supplies of food provisions from the metropole. During the most critical times, when hunger threatened, Governor Jørgen Iversen was forced to ration the food for the Danish

West India and Guinea Company's servants.⁸ To create better conditions for themselves, islanders also traded with nearby colonies and exploited local resources in the region. In the case of St Thomas, the inhabitants traded with nearby French St Croix to get goods and provisions that were not sufficiently supplied from Copenhagen.⁹ Crab Island was one of the places where islanders in the Virgin Islands and the Leeward Islands went to mitigate such critical conditions.

Imports from Europe and later North America were regularly hampered in periods of political upheaval, such as wars, hurricanes and droughts, which could ruin local produce, cause famine and force hungry islanders to desperately try to secure supplementary food supplies. The enslaved population suffered the most during these hardships. After the hurricane that hit the Leeward Islands and Virgin Islands in September 1707, eighty people on St Thomas, "grown-ups and children, foreigners and residents", died from hunger and diseases. This number seems to only count deaths among the free population. The death toll among the enslaved population was probably higher, since "all the slave food here on the island, such as potatoes, yams, maize, etc., [had been] spoiled and destroyed", and the colony could not procure sufficient supplies elsewhere.¹⁰ During the American War of Independence (1775–1783), Governor William Burt of St Kitts reported to the Board of Trade and Plantations that the British Leeward Islands had sustained great losses "from the Want of Provisions". The lack of provisions meant that "Antigua has lost above a thousand Negroes, Montserrat near twelve Hundred, & some whites, Nevis three or four hundred, & This Island [St Kitts] as many." He had sent out public letters, in which he had "begg'd for Vessels being sent to this Government with Provisions". He lamented, "unless these Ships are sent, the Ground & Colonial Provisions will not half supply us."¹¹

Plantation islands, or "chief islands" as contemporaries referred to them, came to be characterised by overexploitation, deforestation, and high population density as colonists laid out more and more acres to cash crops and applied an ever-increasing enslaved workforce to cultivate them.¹² This allowed little land to produce foodstuff and hardly any forests that could supply the population with timber.¹³ Deforestation also caused a reduction in precipitation and increased soil desiccation, which strained the islands' freshwater resources. Water scarcity varied from island to island, but most of the Virgin Islands and Leeward Islands lacked considerable freshwater reservoirs.¹⁴ Furthermore, an increasing conglomeration of plantations, and little hope of upward mobility, pushed people of lesser means (poor whites, free people of colour and enslaved

people) away from the fertile fields to marginal lands mostly suited for small-plot cultivation, and to seashores, the vast sea, and islands and cays further afield.¹⁵ Just as people of lesser means were pushed before the sugar frontier, so were the animals and plants on which they depended. These included turtles that had returned year after year to lay their eggs on peaceful beaches and birds that sought lush woods or sheltering mangroves to nest. Similarly, calm littoral waters became exploited, occasionally leading to diminishing coastal fish stocks. Thus, small and uninhabited satellite islands offered refuge for species that islanders had limited access to on their islands of habitation. Crab Island was one of these islands and provided many vital resources to people in the region.

Crab Island, today known as Vieques, is situated at the westernmost fringe of the Virgin Islands archipelago, in the borderland between the Greater and the Lesser Antilles, lying some 12 km from Puerto Rico, 40 km from St Thomas, and 75 km from Tortola (see fig. 1). Crab Island was known as *Krabben Eiland* to Danish and Dutch colonists, *Île aux Crabs* or *Isle à Crabes* in French, or *Isla de Vieques* to the Spanish. The latter derives from the Taíno name *Bieque* or *Biké* meaning "small island".¹⁶ It is the second largest island in the Virgin Islands archipelago, approximately two-thirds the size of St Croix. Crab Island was a place of imperial contestation from the mid-seventeenth century until well into

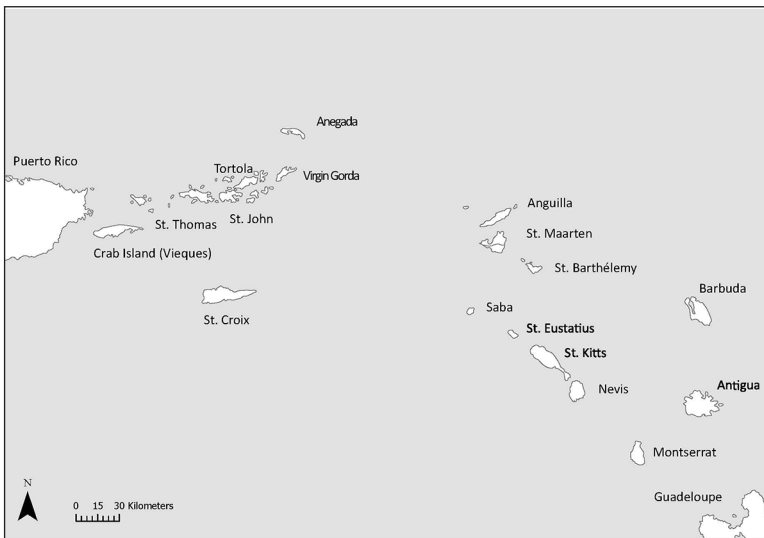


Figure 1: Map of the Virgin Islands and Leeward Islands.

Source: Gabriëlle La Croix

the nineteenth century. The Spanish, English/British and Danish empires all made official claims to the island, and Dutch and French colonists, as well as the Swedish empire, also showed interest.¹⁷ However, it was not until 1811 that it became one of the last islands in the Eastern Caribbean to be permanently settled by a European power, when the Spanish from Puerto Rico established a new military base.¹⁸

Despite these circumstances, Crab Island has received little attention from historians, likely because no imperial power managed to establish formal colonial institutions on the island before the *de facto* Spanish colonisation in 1811. The absence of a colonial administration meant a lack of historical records. Consequently, the island's history has been chiefly inscribed in narratives of sovereignty and imperial contestation. These stories have focused on diplomatic conflicts between the English/British and Spanish empires, with very little attention to the role of the Danish empire and people from other European empires.¹⁹ In these narratives, the *raison d'être* of Crab Island has been what it never was or became in the eighteenth century — an island with a permanent European settlement — and not what it actually was, a place that offered various possibilities to and engendered many dreams among islanders and imperial officials alike. When locals and other travellers visited Crab Island, they found a place that was "beautiful and quite large [with] mountains and a flat country and consequently springs and streams" and where "the soil is very good [. . .] all full of Trees, all the south side full of Bays very fit for anchoring".²⁰

In the historiography of the Virgin Islands and the Leeward Islands (and beyond), the islands that came to play a role as administrative centres, sugar islands and trade hubs have received sustained attention. This is, of course, mainly due to their presence in the various imperial and colonial archives. The islands that mattered most to colonial administrators and the imperial economy have left more extensive paper trails than those without large enslaved populations, vibrant trade ports and intensive plantation agriculture. As a result, there is a positive correlation between an island's importance, seen from the imperial metropole, and its presence in the historiography. Islands at the periphery of colonial economic centres only figure to a small extent.²¹ Accordingly, islands such as Anguilla, Montserrat, and Barbuda in the British Leeward Islands, the British Virgin Islands as a whole, St John in the former Danish West Indies, and Dutch Saba and St Maarten, have a limited presence in their respective historiographical traditions. But, of course, these islands were important to the people who inhabited them, and the same goes for even smaller

islands and cays, which rarely, if ever, entered the minds of imperial officials or trans-Atlantic merchants.

However, if we turn our focus to these smaller and presumably marginal islands, we can begin to appreciate the way islanders made use of their archipelagic surroundings to offset the fragility of living on overexploited islands and, in turn, how the societies of these islands endured.²² Many of the uninhabited islands and cays, and the waters between them, abounded with resources for the taking. As the eighteenth-century geographer Jacques Nicolas Bellin soberly noted regarding the Virgin Islands, "the small [islands] are full of large amounts of land and sea birds. Fish are quite abundant around them."²³ From this vantage point, we access a narrative of the region that runs below, but is deeply intertwined with, the larger narratives of imperial contestation, long-distance trade, plantations and colonial administration. It is a story that brings attention to local and regional archipelagic geographies and the people who navigated them in search of resources and livelihoods. These were often non-elite islanders who struggled to establish viable existences on their own islands. While islands not developed into bustling trade ports and widespread plantation landscapes may have been considered peripheral by imperial officials, they ensured the survival of many people.²⁴ These locations were vital in making life on the larger islands habitable and, as a result, helped empire to endure.

As island residents plied the hinterlands of the main colonies in search of food and timber, they developed their own vernacular knowledge of the local and regional environments. They learned about good fishing spots, turtle nesting grounds, salt ponds, forests with good timber and remote locations favoured by migratory birds. Indeed, colonists probably benefited from the environmental knowledge and navigational skills of the Kalinago and Taíno who already inhabited the Caribbean when Europeans arrived. European settlers added their own vernacular names to islands and cays, often based on what they experienced and observed there or on what the islands were used for.²⁵ Crab Island got its name "from the multitude of Land Crabs there"; the small islet called Prickly Pear just northeast of Anguilla got its name from its dominant vegetation; Bokken Island just at the mouth of the harbour of Charlotte Amalie on St Thomas got its name from the goats that settlers put there to breed and hunt; and the solitary island of Isla de Aves (Bird Island), situated far out in the Caribbean Basin some 230 km west of Dominica, offered birds to shoot and eggs to collect.²⁶ Knowledge about the region's resources was crucial to islanders' survival. It was an expertise that not only helped

to put food on the table or provide goods to sell; it also fed expansionist dreams and gave content to imperial ambitions.

Colonial Ambitions and Imperial Rivalry

Many colonists and visitors throughout the Virgin Islands and the Leeward Islands who travelled to or heard about Crab Island imagined the island as suitable for hosting a prosperous and wealthy colony. The island held promise for those who could settle it and use its allegedly rich soil and resources, prompting islanders and visitors alike to praise its prospects in grandiose wording. Thus, the first governor of the English Leeward Islands colony, William Stapleton, wrote that "Crab Island is the best of all the Virgins, if not better than them all together" in a letter to the Lords of Trade and Plantations.²⁷ While this was a way to emphasise to metropolitan officials that the island was too valuable to be left to the Danish, as had happened with St Thomas, it was not a far-fetched statement.²⁸ Praise for Crab Island echoed throughout the region during the following century. During his travels in the Eastern Caribbean, the German-Danish doctor Paul Erdmann Isert encapsulated the century-long conflicts over and pretensions to the island in one poetical sentence, stating that it had "to the honor of jealousy, so ever unused [lain] there".²⁹ Despite the alleged riches of the island, it remained without any permanent settlement until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

As relative newcomers in the European scramble for Caribbean colonies in the late seventeenth century, the Danish soon found Crab Island suitable for expanding their colonial ventures beyond St Thomas. In the first charter of the Danish West India and Guinea Company, the Danish king had given the company the right to settle other uninhabited islands close to St Thomas. Soon, dreams of colonizing Crab Island crystallised in the minds of company officials. In 1686, Michel Michelsen, sent by the company to St Thomas, noted the potential of nearby Crab Island, situated a short distance downwind:

In my opinion, it would be a greater advantage to the Company if one decided to take possession of Crab Island instead of St. John, for this island promises greater advantages than any of the others because of its beauty, size, and accessibility to be cultivated and settled compared to St. Thomas, St. John, and other islands. I am sure that one could achieve great things there. Had the gentleman who praised St. Thomas before the Royal Company suggested Crab Island, he had, in my opinion, done much better. It seems to me that Crab Island is superior to St. Thomas because it is far bigger and plainer, without mountains; it has good soil and freshwater of good quality, which St. Thomas lacks.³⁰

For Michelsen, Crab Island promised good fortune because of its cultivability and natural resources. It was even better than St Thomas, which had yet to yield significant economic benefits, and better than the island of St John, to which the Danish made pretensions. It is unclear whether Michelsen had ever set foot on Crab Island, but he had undoubtedly heard promising stories about it. Fifteen years after the colonisation of St Thomas, cash crop agriculture had not developed as hoped by the company. Crab Island, with its virgin soil, promised larger revenue for the company and its shareholders. Islanders had experienced the challenges of limited fresh water sources and low precipitation, which forced them to collect rainwater in cisterns.³¹ On top of that, establishing a well-functioning colonial society on St Thomas had proven more complicated than expected.³² No regular shipping of goods and enslaved Africans had been accomplished. Since 1680, the governors Nicolai Esmit and Adolph Esmit had worked against the wishes of the company's directors, taking a liberal view on the company's mercantilist policy, and dealing and trading with smugglers and pirates. Furthermore, it had proven difficult to attract a proper and reliable workforce from the Danish prisons and amongst the rural Danish population.³³

According to Michelsen, the large flat stretches of good land on Crab Island were more suitable for cane cultivation than the hillier St Thomas and thus promised larger economic gains in the long term. But, just as importantly, Crab Island had sources of fresh water, which St Thomas did not. While Michelsen was an outsider from Copenhagen, who spent little time in the Caribbean, he had clearly learned about Crab Island from local residents visiting the island. He used their input to craft his own imperial dreams, which he was to report to the company's board of directors. As the promise of Crab Island reverberated across the region and the Atlantic Ocean throughout the following century, it reached the ears of colonial dreamers in both the British Leeward Islands and (later) Swedish St Barthélemy and the European metropolises.

From the turn of the eighteenth century, enterprising metropolitan and colonial officials began to craft plans to settle and extract profit from this Virgin Island. The Danish geographer and estate manager, Henrich Ovesen Pflug, included a description of Crab Island in his geographical work *Den danske Pillegrim* (*The Danish Pilgrim*), published in 1707. He drew attention to Crab Island's flat topography, which made it suitable for cultivation ("far better than St. Thomas"), its two freshwater lakes, and its abundance of wood, fruits, animals, birds, fish and sea turtles. He was so eager to take possession of the island that he petitioned the

Danish king and got permission to settle there. Yet, he did not succeed because of "economic and logistical reasons", presumably being unable to raise capital and settlers in Denmark.³⁴ The same enthusiastic spirit regarding Crab Island also rose among the British in the following decades, and was embodied in more or less concrete plans to colonise the island. In 1735, an agent on St Kitts, Richard Coope, submitted a proposal for settling Crab Island to the Lords of Trade and Plantations. The reason was that, according to Coope, four hundred families had relocated from Antigua, St Kitts, Nevis and Montserrat to Anguilla, Tortola, Spanish Town (today Virgin Gorda), St Martin, St Croix and St Thomas "for want of Land & Encouragement there [. . .] or for debt". To Coope, it would be better to move the families to Crab Island, to act upon British claims to the island. He tried to animate the Lords to support the plan and protect the settlers against "Spanish Piracy & Murders from Puerto Rico". The return, he ensured, would be beneficial to the British Empire as "the Sugar Colonies would be relieved from an unsufferable want they are reduced to for want of Timber for Mills Houses &ca."³⁵ Despite these promising scenarios, the British plan was never carried out. No empire took any permanent measures to extract the island's resources during the eighteenth century. However, islanders in the region did not hesitate to benefit from this island of plenty.

An Archipelagic Commons

The story of imperial dreams about and conflicts over Crab Island is intimately connected to the use of the island's resources. The rumours of this bountiful island travelled near and far, and even reached the perimeters of the Caribbean seaboard.³⁶ While diplomatic mudslinging occurred between Spanish, English and Danish colonial officials throughout the period, islanders went to the island repeatedly because it helped them materialise and secure their visions of a viable existence on small, fragile islands. The way settlers used, and dreamt of, Crab Island's resources tells a story of how needy islanders navigated the local and regional environment to ease the predicaments of living in scarcity-ridden island societies. Because Crab Island was not permanently settled, it offered plenty of natural resources for people in nearby colonies, already heavily cultivated and deforested in the late seventeenth century. As a result, it functioned as a fish basket, water reservoir and lumber supply for colonists.

While islanders in the Virgin Islands and Leeward Islands were

undoubtedly aware of imperial disputes over Crab Island, and sometimes were victims of the same, the island's economic potential for sugar production mattered less to them. Instead, Crab Island was a means of securing their existence in the archipelago. As islanders saw their own islands gradually being depleted of natural resources, with white indentured servants and enslaved Africans forced to cut down large areas of forest to make way for planters to profit from sugar, cotton and tobacco, the islands' ecological balance was severely disrupted and habitats were destroyed. Shorelines that had functioned as havens for nesting turtles were disturbed by the intensified traffic of small fishing boats and transportation vessels, and by people either hunting turtles or collecting their nutritious eggs. Shallow coastal waters were fished intensively. Thus, islanders had to travel further ashore to extract and enjoy such natural riches on smaller, unsettled islands and cays. Crab Island came to be one of these locations.

Despite imperial disputes and occasional encounters between islanders and ships of various nations, no empire exerted complete control over Crab Island, and none had the power or the willingness to monitor it constantly. The obstinate yet half-hearted insistence on sovereignty over the island by the various colonial powers made settling it difficult. On their way to colonise the isthmus of what later became Panama, colonists from the Scottish Darien Company made a short stop at Crab Island. During their stay, the Scots tried to take possession of the island but were ousted by settlers from St Thomas, who had already hoisted the Danish flag. After leaving the island, one of the Scots lauded its fertile soil and abundance of trees. Still, he found himself in the middle of an ongoing diplomatic feud between the Spanish, English and Danish empires. He noted that "[Crab Island] has this inconvenience that nothing but strength of men, or peace with every body can render it secure."³⁷

Inhabitants from nearby colonies knew that Spanish surveillance around Crab Island was irregular, and frequented the island to retrieve fresh water, food and timber.³⁸ As late as 1824, after the Spanish colonisation of the island, fishermen from St Thomas still went to fish on and near its shores. On 30 September 1824, three fishermen who had camped on the eastern shore of the island fled in their boat when they saw a Spanish patrol approaching. They left behind "one barrel with 15 or 20 pounds of flour, one barrel of water, an iron pot, a seine for turtle, a net, and two other fishing things," suggesting that they had hoped to stay longer to ensure a plentiful catch.³⁹ Indeed, Crab Island developed into a commons for islanders from many colonies, offering ample means for

them to support themselves, and it remained so after Spanish imperial control had intensified.

Crab Island lacked any permanent and well-developed settlement and looked desolated to travellers in the region.⁴⁰ However, some accounts reveal occasional semi-permanent activities from the late seventeenth century onwards.⁴¹ When Père Labat visited the island in 1701, he noticed evidence of more permanent activities. He ascribed the many orange and lemon trees he and his men found everywhere to the previous Spanish presence because, as he concluded, "it is impossible that the English have planted and grown it all during the short time they stayed there."⁴² Indeed, the island's dense forest, its sources of fresh water, and its abundance of animals, could provide shelter and food for people wanting to remain outside the scope of the Spanish *guarda costas* or other colonial authorities for an extended period of time. In the 1780s, the Danish principal of the school in Christiansted, St Croix, named Hans West, visited the island and met "a single colored man without wife and children" living on the island. He had erected several small huts and grew yams and other root crops to supplement the meat that hunting the island's animals provided.⁴³ This anonymous man was likely one of the many hundred enslaved people from the Virgin Islands and Leeward Islands who escaped to Puerto Rico in search of a better future, from the late seventeenth century onwards. Some used Crab Island or the nearby Passage Islands (today, the island of Culebra and its surrounding cays) as a stepping stone in that process. From the late seventeenth and throughout the eighteenth century, the Spanish Crown issued several decrees that granted freedom to fugitives from rival empires, and hundreds of enslaved people from British, Danish and Dutch colonies succeeded in escaping to Puerto Rico.⁴⁴

For some residents in the Virgin Islands and Leeward Islands, Crab Island was more than a commons to occasionally visit. It was a place that promised survival from hunger and famine, and thus a future in the region. Its alleged abundance and fertility prompted attempts at more permanent settlement by islanders desperately seeking viable environments. In the last decades of the seventeenth century and the first decades of the eighteenth century, the island attracted special attention from inhabitants of the English island of Anguilla in the far north-eastern corner of the archipelago. The particular geology of Anguilla made the island prone to drought and allowed for limited agriculture. Governor William Stapleton described the island as "fit for little but goats". Here, at the periphery of the English Leeward Islands, islanders faced circumstances that could threaten their very existence and destabilise

imperial presence in the region. Though the island of Anguilla had never promised great fortunes or significant cash crop exports, Anguillians could at least make a living from growing food crops and from herding sheep, goats and cattle, which could put food on the table and provide some revenue through exports to the nearby plantation islands.⁴⁵ However, in 1683, life on Anguilla had become so precarious that islanders started to scout for a more suitable place to live. They had fixed their eyes on Crab Island and petitioned Governor Stapleton to let them settle it. Ideally, Stapleton noted, he would have gladly seen English settlers on Crab Island because it would be a decisive move against the Danes on St Thomas, who, in Stapleton's eyes, had recently made unjust claims to the island. He decided, however, to reject the petition because he feared that "the Spaniards and cow-killers of Porto Rico [sic] might go and cut them off in one night". Stapleton estimated that had he been able to send two to three hundred settlers to Crab Island without weakening the other English colonies, a settlement would likely succeed.⁴⁶ For the time being, Anguillians had to survive on their island of scarcity.

Some decades later, Anguillians suffered severe hardships again. At the end of the 1710s, a drought spanning several years had made life difficult on the British Virgin Islands and Anguilla, with the soil "not capable of Production sufficient for the Inhabitants thereof to Subsist on". Until 1717, the island had been able to support some 1,400 people, both free and enslaved, but this was no longer the case.⁴⁷ From hunger and desperation, local families planned to migrate to Crab Island "to cultivate [. . .] necessary food for Relief and Sustenance".⁴⁸ As neither the local deputy governor, George Leonard, nor the colonial government in Antigua, nor the lords in the imperial metropole in London, could initiate any measures to relieve islanders of the danger of severe famine, they took the matter into their own hands. At the end of 1717, forty-six white men and sixty-two enslaved people had begun establishing a settlement on Crab Island.⁴⁹

Their initiative shocked colonial authorities and metropolitan officials because the pull from Crab Island could weaken the other British possessions in the Leeward Islands by absorbing settlers from colonies already weakened during Queen Anne's War (1702–1713) with France. It could also ignite an open conflict with Spain over which empire had the right to possess Crab Island. The Anguillians had previously made petitions to Governor Hamilton of the Leeward Islands in the hope that their pleas would make it to the Lord Commissioners in London. Now, they crafted a plan to settle Crab Island despite objections by Deputy

Governor George Leonard. It was their hope that the government of the British Leeward Islands would protect them when they made the move.⁵⁰ However, the colonial authorities in Antigua failed to do so, because they feared diplomatic repercussions. Consequently, the Anguillians' hopes of a sustainable existence on Crab Island were most definitively crushed on 10 February 1718, when Spanish ships attacked and drove them off, killing some and taking others prisoner. Anguillians had known this risk because they had heard stories about other hopeful islanders trying to settle on the island.⁵¹ Thus, while the diplomatic deadlock between the British and the Spanish empires regarding sovereignty over Crab Island remained unresolved, people on the ground were willing to face the possibility of adverse consequences. For the Anguillians, settling Crab Island had not been about economic prospects through agricultural outputs, but about survival.

Despite the tragic stories that circulated among islanders in the region, people continued to visit Crab Island and enjoy its resources throughout the eighteenth century. While attempts to settle the island did not go unnoticed by the Spanish *guarda costas*, small trips had better chances of succeeding. Yet, even small groups going there on seasonal fishing trips took significant risks. At the end of July 1698, a group of fishermen from Nevis was attacked by Spanish ships while turtling on Crab Island. They had hoped to make considerable catches during their extended stay, returning to Nevis after the hurricane season.⁵² By going there during this period, they wanted to take advantage of the many turtles that came ashore during the breeding season, which ran from June to September. When the Nevis fishermen saw an approaching Spanish vessel, they jumped into the sea to swim ashore, but were shot at while in the water. One, his "jawbone shot to pieces", was taken by the Spanish.⁵³

Some decades later, a Danish subject, Robert Basilio, was caught fishing around the island by a Spanish corsair and brought to trial in Santo Domingo.⁵⁴ In 1724, the Spanish seized a sloop belonging to the Duke of Montagu lying at anchor just off the island. Ten crew members had been sent ashore to cut timber, but were taken as prisoners to Puerto Rico. Only two of them were later released.⁵⁵ Half a century later, in the 1780s, a hopeful islander from St Thomas was attacked, presumably by the Spanish, in the vicinity of Crab Island. Though he was able to escape, he lost his canoe and, thus, a crucial means of supporting himself.⁵⁶ The pull of the Crab Island commons was so strong that islanders in the region risked their lives and livelihoods to share in its natural abundance.

An Island of Livelihood, Dreams and Conflict

From the late seventeenth century and continuing until well into the nineteenth century, Crab Island served as a commons for islanders in the region and was an object of imperial desire. Its fertile soil and rich littoral waters abounded in natural resources and foodstuffs such as timber, turtles and fish. News of the island's rich resources reached the ears of colonial and metropolitan officials and gave content to imperial dreams of turning the island into a prosperous plantation colony. The British, Danish, and Spanish empires all laid claims of sovereignty over the island, but none of them was willing to turn these claims into proper colonisation. However, ordinary people from near and far knew the island's worth and came to harvest its resources to make life viable on their respective islands, often characterised by monoculture, overpopulation and overexploitation. Some islanders even considered it a place for a new start and a brighter future because of the ill prospects they faced on their own islands. To enjoy Crab Island's natural abundance, people took serious risks. While many fishermen, turtlers and woodcutters successfully brought back valued goods to their home colonies, many were caught in imperial disputes and were either killed or taken as prisoners.

From this story of Crab Island emerges a narrative that brings together islanders' everyday lives and needs, imperial ambitions, and politics in the Leeward Islands and the Virgin Islands. It shows how the narratives of the commons and of increased imperial presence intersect and are mutually co-constituted. Small and mostly uninhabited islands in the vicinity of plantation colonies were part of islanders' regional geographies, which defied imperial presence and ambitions. The story of Crab Island underlines the importance of local and regional natural resources and supply chains to fragile colonial economies. As a result, it deepens our understanding of the role of the commons in the development of Caribbean colonies, by showing how spaces that eluded effective imperial control helped sustain livelihoods elsewhere. Islands like Crab Island offered resources that ordinary people could not procure on their home islands. Just as people with little or no means shared the common fate of living on islands challenged by scarcity, they shared the dreams of a better future that could be found on Crab Island.

NOTES

1. Danish National Archives (hereafter DNA), Vestindisk-guineisk Kompagni 495, Guvernemetet for Skt. Thomas og Skt. Jan, Journal over det på St. Thomas passerede 1680–1681, entry of 22 July 1680.
2. Simonsen and Christensen, 617–23; Zahedieh.
3. On dominium, see Benton, 4–5. See also Benton and Mulich, 151–71.
4. Morgan et al., 116–17.
5. Jarvis, 185–254; Draper, "Timbering and Turtling", 769–800. On other Atlantic commons, see Crawford; Crawford and Márquez-Pérez.
6. Draper, "Timbering and Turtling", 771.
7. National Archives, UK (hereafter NAUK), Colonial Office (hereafter CO) 152/37, Governor Nathaniel Johnson to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, 20 April 1689.
8. Bro-Jørgensen, 56, 58.
9. Highfield, 289–96; Bro-Jørgensen, 71–76.
10. All translations are made by the author. Translated from Danish, DNA, Vestindisk-guineisk Kompagni 92, Breve og dokumenter fra Vestindien 1708–1711, Letters from the privy council (Sekrete Råd) on St Thomas and Governor Jockum von Holten to the board of directors, 21 March 1708. For accounts on the 1707 hurricane in the English Leeward Islands, see Mulcahy, 91; Zacek, 21.
11. NAUK, CO 152/57, William Burt to Lords of Trade and Plantations, 17 March 1778; and NAUK, CO 152/58, William Burt to Lord George Germain, 17 June 1778.
12. Calendar of State Papers Colonial (hereafter CSPC), 6 January 1718, no. 298.
13. See, for example, Pulsipher.
14. Richardson, 13–37; Morgan et al., 71–129.
15. For this process on St Croix, see Bach Christensen, 134–51; Olsen; for the Leeward Islands see, e.g. Pulsipher, 31; Curtin, 84. See also Webber, 29–42; Mulcahy, 67.
16. Soto, 26.
17. Hildebrand, 21, 24, 56, 107–8; Highfield, 550–52, 558.
18. Dookhan, "Vieques or Crab Island", 9.
19. Dookhan, "Vieques or Crab Island"; Torres, 449–66. See also Pearce, 55; Brown, 470–78; Gutiérrez de Arce, 33–34, 36; Morales Carrión, e.g. 49–52, 62–66; Westergaard, e.g. 87–88, 107, 119; Bro-Jørgensen, esp. 151–53; Soto, 71–108; Langhorne.
20. Translated from French, Labat, vol. 5, 309; NAUK, CO 152/3, "Extract of a Journal of the Scotch Voyage to Darien, containing something relating to Crab Island, 1698".
21. Zacek, 7.

22. See, for example, Anderson, 55–67.
23. Translated from French, Bellin, 133.
24. See e.g. Ryden, 539–70; Draper, "Timbering and Turtling", 769–800; Murphy, 48–79.
25. Dator, 60, 72; Price, 1367–70; Draper, "Aeolian Geographies", 675.
26. NAUK, CO 152/3, "Extract of a Journal of the Scotch Voyage to Darien, containing something relating to Crab Island", 1698; Smith, 304; Bro-Jørgensen, 58; Labat, 6, 401–19; Wesche, 74–98; Berleant-Schiller, 92–101.
27. CSPC, 28 October 1684, no. 1909.
28. See e.g. Dookhan, *History of the British Virgin Islands*, 7–8.
29. Translated from German, Isert, 345.
30. Translated from Danish, DNA, Vestindisk-guineisk Kompagni 366, Bilag til Negotiejournal 1688.
31. Bro-Jørgensen, 89.
32. Christensen, 476–92.
33. Hvid, 541–64; Heinsen, "Escaping St. Thomas", 40–57; Heinsen, *Mutiny in the Danish Atlantic*.
34. Pflug, 1174–75. For other Danish plans to settle Crab Island, see Gøbel, 243; Christensen and Villumsen.
35. NAUK, CO 152/22, "Scheme & reason proposed to the Settlement of Crabb Island. . .", 1735.
36. Dutch National Archives, 1.05.01.02, Inventaris van het archief van de Tweede West-Indische Compagnie 1674–1791. C.2.2. Van Curacao, Bonaire en Aruba, 566 Ingekomen brieven met bijlagen van Curacao, met tafels, 1700 sep. 18 - 1702 mei 30, "Instructie Voor Hans Boeckholt Coopman. . .", 15 October 1700.
37. NAUK, CO 152/3, "Extract of a Journal of ye Scotch Voyage to Darien, containing something relating to Crab Island", 1698. See also Prebble, 127, 131–34.
38. Brown, 471. See also Torres; Dookhan, "Vieques or Crab Island"; Hall, 476–98; Chinae, "A Quest for Freedom", 51–87; Vibæk, 191; West, 354; Morales Carrión, 49–52.
39. DNA, Generalguvernementet, Det Sekrete Råd, 11.27.36, Sager til referatprotokoller for kommandanten/guvernøren 1824, 9 October 1824, no. 833.
40. Ledru, 4.
41. Highfield, 24.
42. Translated from French, Labat, 5, 309–10.
43. Translated from Danish, West, 355.
44. Rupert, 199–231; Chinae, "A Quest for Freedom", 76; Simonsen and Christensen, 611–46; Hall; Tyson and Olsen; Chinae, "Irish Indentured Servants", 171–82.
45. NAUK, CO 157/1, An account of the imports made by sundry vessels to this island [Antigua] from Anguilla between 6 June 1704 and 25 December 1715.

46. CSPC, 30 August 1683, no. 1223. See also CSPC, 20 February 1688; CSPC, 4 May 1688, no. 1740; CSPC, 2 June 1688, no. 1773; CSPC, 6 July 1688, no. 1819.
47. NAUK, CO 152/12, "A true List of the Inhabitants of this Island and their Negroes", 22 November 1717. See also Smith, 304.
48. NAUK, CO 152/12, "Copy of an Address from the Inhabitants of Anguilla to Genl. Hamilton Gouv. of the Leeward Islands desiring to remove to Crabb Island", n.d.
49. NAUK, CO 152/12, "A List of Men able to bear Armes, and of Negroes on Crabb Island", n.d.
50. "Copy of an Address from the Inhabitants of Anguilla to Genl. Hamilton Gouv. of the Leeward Islands desiring to remove to Crabb Island", CO 152/12, n.d.
51. NAUK, CO 152/12, Letter from Governor Walter Hamilton to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, 15 March 1717/8.
52. CSPC, 27 March 1699, no. 211.
53. CSPC, 24 December 1698, no. 85. I.
54. DNA, Vestindiske-guineisk Kompagni, Direktionen 94, Breve og dokumenter fra Vestindien 1715–1719.
55. NAUK, CO 152/14, Report from Governor William Hart to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, 23 May 1724.
56. DNA, Generalguvernementet 693, Sekretrådet, Gruppeordnede sager - Diverse, 11.53.270. Protokol over kanoer 1771–1808.

WORKS CITED

- Anderson, Jennifer L. "Barbuda and the Provisioning of the Codrington Estates on Antigua". In *An Archaeology and History of a Caribbean Sugar Plantation on Antigua*, edited by Georgia L. Fox, 55–67. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2020.
- Bach Christensen, Jørgen. "Jord, slaver og plantere. Kolonisamfundet på St. Croix 1742–1804". In *Dansk Kolonihistorie. Indføring og studier*, edited by Peter Hoxcer Jensen, 134–51. Aarhus: Historia, 1983.
- Bellin, Jacques Nicolas. *Description géographique des isles Antilles possédées par les anglois*. Paris: De l'imprimerie de Didot, 1758.
- Benton, Lauren. *A Search for Sovereignty. Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Benton, Lauren, and Jeppe Mulich. "The Space between Empires: Coastal and Insular Microregions in the Early Nineteenth-Century World". In *The Uses of Space in Early Modern History*, edited by P. Stock, 151–71. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015.

- Berleant-Schiller, Riva. "Hidden Places and Creole Forms: Naming the Barbudan Landscape". *Professional Geographer* 43, no. 1 (1991): 92–101.
- Bro-Jørgensen, J.O. *Dansk Vestindien indtil 1755: kolonisation og kompagnistyre*. Copenhagen: Fremad, 1966.
- Brown, Vera Lee. "Anglo-Spanish Relations in America in the Closing Years of the Colonial Era". *Hispanic American Historical Review* 5, no. 3 (August 1922): 329–483.
- Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 11, 1681–1685*, edited by J.W. Fortescue. London, 1898.
- Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 12, 1685–1688 and Addenda 1653–1687*, edited by J.W. Fortescue. London, 1899.
- Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 16, 1697–1698*, edited by J.W. Fortescue. London, 1905.
- Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 17, 1699 and Addenda 1621–1698*, edited by Cecil Hedlam. London, 1908.
- Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 30, 1717–1718*, edited by Cecil Hedlam. London, 1930.
- Chinea, Jorge Luis. "Irish Indentured Servants, Papists and Colonists in Spanish Colonial Puerto Rico, ca. 1650–1800". *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America* 5, no. 3 (2007): 171–82.
- . "A Quest for Freedom: The Immigration of Maritime Maroons into Puerto Rico, 1656–1800." *Journal of Caribbean History* 31, no. 1/2 (June 1997): 51–87.
- Christensen, Rasmus. "'Against the Law of God, of Nature and the Secular World': Conceptions of Sovereignty in Early Colonial St. Thomas, 1672–1680". *Scandinavian Journal of History* 46, no. 4 (2021): 476–92.
- Christensen, Rasmus and Jens Villumsen. "Forslag til koloniseringen af Krabben Eyland eller Vieques." *Danske Magazin* 56 (2025): 113–170.
- Crawford, Sharika D. *The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020.
- Crawford, Sharika D., and Ana Isabel Márquez-Pérez. "A Contact Zone: The Turtle Commons of the Western Caribbean". *International Journal of Maritime History* 28, no. 1 (2016): 64–80.
- Curtin, Philip D. *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex. Essays in Atlantic History* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 [second edition].
- Dator, James F. "Between the Mountains and the Sea: Knowledge, Networks, and Transimperial Desertion in the Leeward Archipelago, 1627–1727". In *A Global History of Runaways*, edited by Marcus Rediker, Titas Chakraborty, and Matthias van Rossum, 58–76. Oakland: University of California Press, 2019.
- Dookhan, Isaac. *History of the British Virgin Islands 1672 to 1970*. Epping: Caribbean Universities Press, 1975.
- . "Vieques or Crab Island: Source of Anglo-Spanish Colonial Conflict". *Journal of Caribbean History* 7 (November 1973): 1–22.

- Draper, Mary. "Aeolian Geographies, Daily Life, and Empire Building in the English Caribbean". *Early American Studies* 20, no. 4 (2022): 673–94.
- . "Timbering and Turtling: The Maritime Hinterlands of Early Modern British Caribbean Cities". *Early American Studies* 15, no. 4 (2017): 769–800.
- Gutiérrez de Arce, Manuel. *La Colonización Danesa En Las Islas Virgenes. Estudio Historico-Juridico*. Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios-Americanos de la Universidad de Sevilla, 1945.
- Gøbel, Erik. *Vestindisk-guineisk Kompagni 1671–1754. Studier og kilder til kompagniet og kolonierne, med Peder Mariagers beretning om kompagniet*. Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2015.
- Hall, Neville A.T. "Maritime Maroons: 'Grand Marronage' from the Danish West Indies". *William and Mary Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (1985): 476–98.
- Heinsen, Johan. "Escaping St. Thomas: Class Relations and Convict Strategies in the Danish West Indies, 1672–1687". In *Global History of Runaways: Workers, Mobility, and Capitalism 1600–1850*, edited by Matthias van Rossum, Marcus Rediker, and Titas Chakraborty, 40–57. Oakland: University of California Press, 2019.
- . *Mutiny in the Danish Atlantic World: Convicts, Sailors and a Dissonant Empire*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.
- Highfield, Arnold R. *Sainte Croix, 1650–1733: A Plantation Society in the French Antilles*. Christiansted, St Croix: Antilles Press, 2013.
- Hildebrand, Ingegerd. *Den svenska kolonin St Barthélemy och Västindisk Kompaniet fram till 1796*. Växjö: Smålandspostens Boktryckeri A.-B., 1951.
- Hvid, Mirjam Louise. "Indentured Servitude and Convict Labour in the Danish-Norwegian West Indies, 1671–1755". *Scandinavian Journal of History* 41, no. 4–5 (2016): 541–64.
- Isert, Paul Erdmann. *Reise nach Guinea und den Caribäischen Inseln in Columbien, in Briefen an seine Freunde beschrieben*. Copenhagen: Morthorst, 1788.
- Jarvis, Michael. *In the Eye of All Trade Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680–1783*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Labat, Jean Baptiste. *Nouveau voyage aux isles de l'Amerique* 5–6. Paris: chez Pierre-François Giffart, 1722.
- Langhorne, Elizabeth Coles. *Vieques: History of a Small Island*. Vieques, PR: Vieques Conservation and Historical Trust, 1987.
- Ledru, André-Pierre. *Voyage aux îles de Ténériffe, la Trinité, Saint-Thomas, Sainte-Croix et Porto-Ricco* 2. Paris: chez Arthus Bertrand, 1810.
- Morales Carrión, Arturo. *Puerto Rico and the Non Hispanic Caribbean: A Study in the Decline of Spanish Exclusivism*. Rio Piedras, PR: University of Puerto Rico Press, 1952.
- Morgan, Philip D., John Robert McNeill, Matthew Mulcahy, and Stuart B. Schwartz. *Sea and Land: An Environmental History of the Caribbean*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.

- Mulcahy, Matthew. *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean, 1624–1783*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.
- Murphy, Tessa. *The Creole Archipelago: Race and Borders in the Colonial Caribbean*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021.
- Olsen, Poul Erik. "Godserne på St. Croix 1733–1800". *Bol og by* 12, no. 2 (1996): 80–93.
- Pearce, Adrian J. *British Trade with Spanish America, 1763–1808*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014.
- Pflug, Henrich Ovesen. *Den Danske Pillegrim Eller en Almindelig geografisk og der hos Kort Historisk Beskrivelse Over den heele Bekiendte Verden*. Copenhagen, 1707.
- Prebble, John. *The Darien Disaster. A Scots Colony in the New World 1698–1700*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968.
- Price, Richard. "Caribbean Fishing and Fishermen: A Historical Sketch". *American Anthropologist* 68, no. 6 (1966): 1363–83.
- Pulsipher, Lydia M. *Seventeenth Century Montserrat: An Environmental Impact Statement*. Norwich: Geo Books, 1986.
- Richardson, Bonham C. *The Caribbean in the Wider World, 1492–1992. A Regional Geography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Rupert, Linda M. "Seeking the Water of Baptism: Fugitive Slaves and Imperial Jurisdiction in the Early Modern Caribbean". In *Legal Pluralism and Empires, 1500–1850*, edited by Richard J. Ross and Lauren Benton, 199–231. New York: New York University Press, 2020.
- Ryden, David Beck. "One of the Finest and Most Fruitful Spots in America': An Analysis of Eighteenth-Century Carriacou". *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 43, no. 4 (2013): 539–70.
- Simonsen, Gunvor, and Rasmus Christensen. "Together in a Small Boat: Slavery's Fugitives in the Lesser Antilles". *William and Mary Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (July 2023): 611–46.
- Smith, William. *A Natural History of Nevis, and the Rest of the English Leeward Charibee Islands in America: With Many Other Observations on Nature and Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Soto, Marie Cruz. "Inhabiting Isla Nena, 1514–2003: Island Narrations, Imperial Dramas and Vieques, Puerto Rico". PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008.
- Torres, Bibiano. "La Isla de Vieques". *Anuario de estudios americanos* 12 (1955): 449–66.
- Tyson, George F., and Poul Erik Olsen. *Maritime Marronage from St. Croix to Puerto Rico 1734.1848*. Virgin Islands Social History Associates, 2012.
- Vibæk, Jens. *Dansk Vestindien 1755–1848: Vestindiens Storhedstid*. Copenhagen: Fremad, 1966.
- Webber, Oscar. "The Plantation's Role in Enhancing Hurricane Vulnerability in the Nineteenth-Century British Caribbean". *Alternautas* 5, no. 2 (2018): 29–42.
- Wesche, Marjorie Bingham. "Place Names as a Reflection of Cultural Chance: An Example from the Lesser Antilles". *Caribbean Studies* 12, no. 2 (1972): 74–98.

- West, Hans. *Bidrag til Beskrivelse over Ste Croix med en kort Udsigt over St. Thomas, St. Jean, Tortola, Spanishtown og Crabeneiland*. Copenhagen: Friderik Wilhelm Thiele, 1793.
- Westergaard, Waldemar. *The Danish West Indies under Company Rule (1671–1754): With a Supplementary Chapter, 1755–1917*. New York: Macmillan, 1917.
- Zacek, Natalie. *Settler Society in the English Leeward Islands, 1670–1776*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Zahedieh, Nuala. "Canoes in the Early English Caribbean: The Role of an Indigenous Technology in Making Mercantilism Work". *Past & Present* (online, August 2025).

Plausible Itineraries: Slavery and Maritime Marronage in the Grenadines

PATRICK T. BARKER

Under the cover of night on the 17 July 1798, three young men named Henry, Smart and Quamy escaped from two large plantations bordering the ocean on the small island of Carriacou in the Grenadines.¹ In "a small Fishing Canoe" they set course for the island of Grenada, some twenty-three miles to their southwest.² According to a runaway advert published in the *St. George's Chronicle and Grenada Gazette*, the fugitives' canoe was discovered just north of the town Gouyave, suggesting they made landfall in Grenada's northwest. The men were then seen travelling on the public road that linked the town to St George's, the island's capital and largest settlement.³ As was typical, the runaway advert contained not only an estimate of the fugitives' whereabouts, but brief descriptions of each of the men, with the hope of aiding would-be captors. Details ranged from their age and place of origin, to other distinguishable markers, including Henry's tendency to use the alias "Townside", marks on Smart's neck, and Quamy's tall height.⁴

Henry, Smart and Quamy's escape towards another plantation colony merits attention for our understanding of maritime marronage in the Grenadines, an arc of more than a hundred small volcanic islands between Grenada to the south and St Vincent to the north.⁵ At the time of their daring voyage, lawful routes out of slavery through maritime escape were unavailable to them. Eight years had passed since the Spanish crown revoked the long-standing asylum policies that offered the possibility of sanctuary to fugitive enslaved people fleeing the territories of Spain's imperial rivals. While the policy had begun as a series of local provisions in the late seventeenth century, a royal decree extended asylum across Spain's American empire in 1750, and was reaffirmed in 1789.⁶ Under

The Journal of Caribbean History 59, 2 (2025): 73–94

DOI: 10.37234/JCH.2025.U1000004



Figure 1. Map of the Grenadines.

Source: Gabriëlle La Croix

the provisions of Spanish asylum, by swearing allegiance to the Spanish crown, providing labour and converting to Catholicism, fugitives from slavery could appeal for protection and prevent their return to slavery in the territories they had escaped.⁷ Seeking protection under such conditions, enslaved people fled from as far north as British South Carolina and as far south as the Dutch Guianas to try and claim asylum in Spanish territories, fleeing by land where possible and by sea where necessary.⁸ But in 1790, under pressure from a United States government seeking to protect the interests of its slaveholders, as well as diplomatic pressure from other European governments, the Spanish crown suspended its long-standing asylum policies.⁹

Thus, had Henry, Smart and Quamy made their way south by sea from Carriacou to Spanish territory, as maritime fugitives often had before 1790, formal protections could not have been claimed.¹⁰ Meanwhile, in territories to their north, formal protections for fugitives from slavery did not yet exist. Henry, Smart and Quamy's escape came eighteen years before the Haitian Constitution of 1816, which included provisions for granting freedom from slavery, and citizenship to African and Indigenous people and their descendants who arrived in Haiti.¹¹ Henry, Smart and Quamy also had few prospects for escape within Carriacou. A small, densely-populated island with few natural resources, this was a place

largely hostile to sustained internal marronage. Late eighteenth-century Carriacou also lacked a major urban centre, which would likely have made "market marronage" — running away internally and surviving as a market seller, labourer, or dock worker — impossible.¹² Meanwhile, the small islands to Henry, Smart and Quamy's north within the Grenadines offered fewer prospects for refuge than the island they fled, tiny and resource-scarce as they were. In light of these constraints, a 23-mile journey by sea toward Grenada, the largest colony within hours' voyage of Carriacou, but where slavery and plantation production dominated social and economic life, may well have seemed one of only a few plausible routes out of slavery in Carriacou. In the bustling port of St George's, where Henry, Smart and Quamy were thought to have fled, temporary anonymity might have been possible, though never guaranteed.

Henry, Smart and Quamy left no written traces behind. No testimonies have emerged in Britain's colonial archive that might help us reconstruct what unfolded in July 1798, whether in Carriacou prior to these men's escape, or in St George's, assuming the men made their way to the port after disembarking in Gouyave. What became of these men in the immediate aftermath of their escape is unclear. The first possible traces of Smart and Quamy appear almost two decades later in the slave registries of the Mount Pleasant and Grand Bay estates in Carriacou. According to the Mount Pleasant's slave registry, a 40-year-old African named Smart was enslaved on the estate in 1817. The Smart listed in that registry was around the same age as the fugitive Smart, who fled the estate in 1798, would have been. Perhaps this was the same Smart and he had been captured and returned to Carriacou from Grenada. Henry, on the other hand, was not listed in the same registry.¹³ It is possible that he managed to avoid recapture. But it is also possible that he passed away, won his freedom, or was sold before the 1817 registry was created. A man named Quamy, meanwhile, appears on the registry of the Grand Bay estate in 1817, listed as a 37-year-old Creole.¹⁴ In 1798, a Quamy from the Grand Bay Plantation who fled with men named Smart and Henry was described as an 18-year-old fugitive who was a Creole of Carriacou.¹⁵ Based on this age correlation, it seems plausible that the Quamy listed in 1817 may have been the same Quamy who had fled Grand Bay nearly two decades prior. Nonetheless, if we assume that Smart and Quamy were recaptured on the basis of this evidence in the registry of 1817, even our certainty of their recapture is tenuous. How, then, might we think with their escape?

Building on Elena A. Schneider's call to "think with" maritime maroons,

their testimonies, their creative efforts to remake their worlds, and the voyages they embarked on, this article considers the “plausible stories” we might tell about cases of maritime escape that emerge from the archive without fugitive testimony.¹⁶ It suggests that despite the archival silences surrounding Henry, Smart and Quamy’s escape and its aftermath, by pairing their act of escape with other instances of maritime fugitivity in the region, broader patterns of fugitive mobility can be speculatively traced between the British colonies of the region after Spanish asylum ended. As their case and others suggest, after 1790, maritime maroons appear to have reconfigured their itineraries to reflect the new realities engendered by Spanish imperial reform. Turning away from the coastlines of the Spanish-governed provinces to their south, fugitives seem to have turned towards the more heavily populated British plantation colonies of the region.

A study of maritime escape from Carriacou after 1790 builds on existing scholarship focused on maritime marronage in the colonial Caribbean in two ways. First, it contributes to decades of afore-cited scholarship that has foregrounded seaborne marronage as a principal means of escape from slavery, as well as the routes taken by fugitives escaping the plantation-dominated islands of the Eastern Caribbean, where establishing sustainable maroon communities internally was especially difficult.¹⁷ The Grenadines, where resource scarcity rendered sustained internal marronage especially fraught, have only rarely featured within broader scholarship on marronage in the Eastern Caribbean. By focusing on Carriacou, the most densely populated and heavily cultivated island in this chain of small islands, this article enriches our understanding of the sub-regional dynamics of maritime marronage at the turn of the nineteenth century by integrating a detailed perspective from the lesser-studied Grenadines.

Second, when scholars have explored patterns of maritime marronage from the Grenadines, they have largely emphasised the era prior to the 1790 suspension of Spanish asylum policies, a period when fugitives were often suspected of setting course toward Spanish provinces to try and claim asylum, as maritime fugitives also did in other parts of the greater Caribbean.¹⁸ By thinking closely with evidence of maritime fugitivity from Carriacou in the era following the Spanish asylum’s suspension in 1790, this article enriches our understanding of the fugitive routes taken by slavery’s escapees in the Grenadines. In doing so, it speculatively foregrounds factors beyond imperial policy that might have shaped fugitive itineraries in the region.

Plantation Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Carriacou

The largest island in the Grenadines chain, but at just thirteen square miles, Carriacou is small when compared with most island geographies featured in the existing literature on maritime marronage.¹⁹ But this reality, in some ways, makes the island more similar to most individual landmasses in the Caribbean, a region that consists of more than seven thousand diverse islands, reefs, banks and cays.²⁰ Within the archipelago, just four islands— Cuba, Hispaniola (Saint-Domingue/Haiti and Santo Domingo/Dominican Republic), Jamaica, and Puerto Rico — make up almost 90 per cent of the landmass. The remaining land, just over 10 per cent in total, consists of much smaller islands.²¹ Furthermore, islands constitute only a small proportion of the region, at just 8 per cent of its surface.²² The Caribbean Sea dominates and is especially pronounced when one is on land in the Lesser Antilles, defined in this special issue as an archipelago of small islands extending from the Virgin Islands in the north to Aruba near the South American mainland. The omnipresence of the ocean in the Lesser Antilles profoundly shaped cultures of survival and trade before the arrival of Europeans and afterward. Indigenous peoples who lived within this vast region were heavily reliant on small watercraft to survive, migrate and trade, a tradition that continued among the Lesser Antilles' diversifying populations after the arrival of European settlers and enslaved Africans, both of whom brought their own "watercraft cultures" with them to the region.²³

Prior to the eighteenth century, Indigenous Antilleans and Europeans appear to have occupied Carriacou only temporarily. With no rivers or streams, Indigenous Antilleans likely avoided its settlement because of the dearth of fresh water that the island offered prospective inhabitants. Instead, it appears that Indigenous groups used the island, as they did with other islands in the Grenadines, as a waystation en route to the South American mainland, to shelter from storms, for fishing and to forage for other foodstuffs, and for small-scale produce cultivation in times of crisis. The first known written description of Carriacou dates to the mid-seventeenth century, but Europeans paid little attention to the prospect of permanently settling the island before the eighteenth century. Indeed, Carriacou did not even appear on a colonial map of the region until 1717.²⁴ Following Grenada's colonisation by the French in the mid-seventeenth century, settlers appear to have seasonally visited Carriacou to hunt turtles, fish in its reefs and clear its woodland.²⁵ By the mid-eighteenth century, French settlers permanently established

themselves in Carriacou, though only sparsely. A 1750 French census indicates that the island had only 199 residents, connected to one another by sea travel rather than by internal roads, and almost half of whom were enslaved.²⁶

Enslaved people in mid-eighteenth-century French Carriacou tended to work on small farms producing cotton.²⁷ The Treaty of Paris in 1763, which formally ended the Seven Years' War, set in motion the development of the plantation model in Carriacou, and there were similar transformations on other islands in the Lesser Antilles, once neutral or claimed by the French. Britain's victory in the war permitted King George III to bring numerous islands and peoples in the region under British rule, including the Kalinago and neutral Dominica, St Vincent, and Tobago, along with French Grenada and the Grenadines. In return, the French claimed St Lucia.²⁸ In the decade following the treaty, hundreds of settlers from Britain and its colonies bought plots of land in these "Ceded" Islands, investing heavily in sugar production, and creating large cacao, coffee, cotton and mixed crop estates, sometimes by amalgamating smaller plantations.²⁹ As new, fertile land was purchased, British merchants redirected slave trade operations from older colonies like Barbados toward the Ceded Islands. Current evidence suggests nearly four hundred slave ships arrived in Ceded Island ports between 1763 and 1773 alone, compared with just thirteen ships in the previous five decades.³⁰ Between the end of the Seven Years' War and the final year of the eighteenth century, nearly 270,000 people are estimated to have been disembarked in Ceded Islands' ports through the trans-Atlantic slave trade.³¹

The intercolonial slave trade to the Ceded Islands was also significant in scale.³² Current estimates suggest that more than nine thousand captives were disembarked here, having been brought from other colonies in the region.³³ In most cases, enslaved people purchased in these years were put to work on sugar estates. Indeed, sugar, more than any other commodity, drove slavery's expansion in the Ceded Islands. But this was a process that was not only determined by the external demands of the sugar market; it was a process carefully nurtured by Britain's government. In 1764, the British created a Land Commission to sell plots of "Crown-owned" land in the Ceded Islands to prospective settlers. It was on such land that sugar came to dominate.³⁴ In the space of just nine years, more than 30,000 acres of sugar cane fields were established in Grenada, alongside other commodities. Dominica's sugar outputs increased six-fold between 1767 and 1774.³⁵ Sugar and slavery also transformed Ceded Island demographics. Before the sugar economies of Dominica and St

Vincent were expanded, Black-to-white ratios stood at 2:1 in Dominica and 3:1 in St Vincent. But by 1773, Dominica's black-to-white ratio had transformed into 5:1, and by 1791, St Vincent's into 15:1, the latter ratio already established in Tobago almost two decades prior.³⁶ In Grenada, where more than 110,000 people arrived through the slave trade by 1795, ratios of enslaved Africans to free whites had increased to around 24:1 by the 1780s.³⁷

Carriacou's development as a plantation colony was firmly connected to these wider transformations in the Lesser Antilles. Within just five years of the British takeover of the island, more than two thousand enslaved labourers had been put to work on plantations, producing more than 80,000 pounds of cotton.³⁸ Early investors and new migrants experimented with not just cotton, but also indigo and sugar.³⁹ Cotton, however, soon became the preferred crop, fuelled by demands for the commodity in Britain's industrializing textile sector.⁴⁰ Prior to the British takeover of Carriacou, cotton had often been farmed by smallholders, as was the case in much of the greater Caribbean. But after 1763, numerous large plantations developed in Carriacou alongside the smallholder economy.⁴¹ It was often British planters who led such developments.⁴² By 1776, nearly as many heads of household on the island were British as they were French. By 1790, most landholders were British, nearly equally English and Scottish.⁴³ A wealthy absentee class also emerged. In fact, the island's largest estates were owned by absentees, such as the Dumfries Plantation of some 544 acres with nearly 300 enslaved labourers, owned by London merchant, William Todd. In 1790, Todd's enslaved workforce was producing nearly 100,000 pounds of cotton.⁴⁴ The Mount Pleasant estate, from which Smart and Quamy escaped in 1798, was owned by Thomas Tarleton, of the notorious Liverpool slave-trading family. Tarleton was the island's fourth largest enslaver, with some 227 enslaved workers recorded on his 510-acre estate in 1790.⁴⁵ British capital investments in the island's cotton economy meant that by 1790, some 50 cotton estates were operative in Carriacou, while over 3,000 enslaved workers were counted by government officials on the island, predicted to produce a million pounds of cotton yearly in the century's final decade.⁴⁶

Between the 1760s and the time of Henry, Smart and Quamy's escape, Carriacou had been transformed into a brutally productive cotton colony. While the island's outputs could not compare to the volumes imported to Britain from Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Southern Europe in the same era, within the British West Indies, Carriacou's outputs represented between 9 per cent and 14 per cent of total cotton production from the

region.⁴⁷ Carriacou planters' heavy turn toward industrial-scale cotton production also made it one of the most densely populated islands in the British West Indies. By 1790, there were nearly 270 people per square mile on the island.⁴⁸ Carriacou's planters would begin to concentrate more on sugar production in the nineteenth century, but on the eve of planters' heavier turn toward sugar production after 1820 — a shift fuelled by falling prices for cotton because of the adoption of Eli Whitney's cotton gin and expanding cotton production in the US — Carriacou's population density was even higher at more than 300 enslaved people per square mile.⁴⁹

Climatic conditions on the island, especially its dry weather and low rainfall, and not only market demand, helped make cotton the preferred crop of wealthy planters in the eighteenth century.⁵⁰ But climatic conditions, as well as the island's topography, made life on the island difficult for its residents, especially its enslaved population. Like other islands in the Grenadines, Carriacou lacked sources of fresh water. Its white residents relied on the capture of rainwater and its storage in cisterns.⁵¹ Steep valleys and hills marked the island's volcanic topography, meaning rainwater often drained straight into the sea.⁵² Sinking wells were used to provide water to enslaved people, but they were noted by one British surveyor in the 1770s to contain water "of a bad quality" that "frequently disorders the Negroes, especially upon their first going to the Island".⁵³ During droughts, which were not infrequent, the island's residents even depended on imported water from Grenada. Furthermore, to create space for cotton production, farmers and planters had destroyed most of Carriacou's primary forest during the eighteenth century.⁵⁴ Already by 1776, of nearly 7,000 acres of land, just under 900 acres remained forested. By the turn of the nineteenth century, much of the island's land was planted in cotton. Even the hillsides were being cultivated.⁵⁵ As one overseer remarked, on the island's peaks, even "the least patch of soil[s] are cultivated".⁵⁶ Deforestation further compounded the effects of drought, as the island's microclimate was fundamentally altered by the increasing absence of forest cover.⁵⁷ In addition, the island's location made it susceptible to tropical storms, heavy winds and hurricanes, which Edwina Ashie-Nikoi suggests rendered domestic food cultivation unstable. As in much of the Grenadines, Carriacou's residents relied heavily upon locally caught fish for sustenance and to sell for economic gain.⁵⁸

Even as the island was ruthlessly transformed into a plantation space from the 1760s, British authorities neglected to develop much economic

infrastructure to support its residents. In the mid-1770s, the island's largest landholder, William Todd, complained that Carriacou, despite its commercial potential, lacked a Customs House. Consequently, its settlers had to ship goods to and from St George's, Grenada.⁵⁹ Planters often did so by transferring their cotton and other plantation products directly to vessels at sea. In the late eighteenth century, two-thirds of the island's estates had direct access to the coast. Small boats could thus be used to transfer cotton to larger vessels waiting offshore, destined for Grenada. Planters and farmers could also arrange to ferry cotton bales directly to Grenada on small vessels, where, in towns like St George's, they could have their crops sold to merchants or loaded onto large ships destined for Britain.⁶⁰ If the island's infrastructure was little developed in the late eighteenth century, so too was the island's only town, Hillsborough. A 1790 census counted a fixed population of just seventy-six people, including some landholders and white carpenters, merchants, clerks, surgeons, a constable, a mariner, a mason, a tailor and a fisherman.⁶¹

Plausible Itineraries of Escape in Carriacou

Late eighteenth-century Carriacou's climate and topography, plantation development, and lack of a significant town would have rendered the island an especially difficult place to sustain escape. The steep, bare hillsides, which did not rise beyond a thousand feet at the island's highest point, were not conducive to marronage.⁶² The lack of forest cover due to heavy deforestation in the late eighteenth century would also likely have made creating hidden sites of refuge difficult. The absence of reliable sources of fresh water surely would have presented another distinct challenge. Furthermore, the island's small size and comparatively dense population would have made eluding captors extremely difficult. These circumstances make it hard to imagine how fugitives on the island could have sustained flight for any lengthy amount of time, even had they discovered less well-traversed and more sheltered spaces on the island. Furthermore, Hillsborough's tiny size would have made "market marronage" implausible.⁶³

At the same time, planters' reliance on seaborne transit to export plantation products, and island residents' dependence on locally caught fish for sustenance, appear to have created opportunities for enslaved labourers to escape the island by boat. As the plantation economy expanded after the Seven Years' War, available evidence suggests that enslaved fugitives in Carriacou typically staged their escapes on small

boats taken from the island. Prior to the arrival of news that the Spanish government had suspended asylum in 1790, of the significant numbers of women, children and men who were thought to have escaped the island by boat, all were suspected to have set course for or made landfall in the Spanish territories to the south of Carriacou, including the island of Margarita and mainland Venezuela.⁶⁴ Some, like Jack and Jame, who in August 1790 were believed to have been headed south to the Spanish American mainland, did so "in a small fishing Canoe", as Henry, Smart and Quamy later would in 1798.⁶⁵ Like Jack and Jame, and like Henry, Smart and Quamy, many maritime maroons fled in collectives in the Lesser Antilles.⁶⁶ Their means of escape — for Henry, Smart and Quamy, a fishing canoe — demanded as much. As with other small vessels, canoes necessitated at a minimum two people to row and direct the vessel at sea.⁶⁷ Such vessels were also prone to capsize and required at least one skilled mariner.⁶⁸ Given that we know Henry, Smart and Quamy arrived in Grenada, it is likely that at least one of them possessed some skill as a canoeist. This, of course, would not be surprising. Enslavers in the Caribbean often forced enslaved labourers to use canoes to fish, turtle, or transport goods to market.⁶⁹ In the Lesser Antilles more broadly, it was often on small vessels like canoes and other open boats that island residents transported goods, fished, hunted turtles, and conveyed plantation produce and foodstuff from island coastlines to anchored merchant vessels or town wharves for onward export. Such vessels were thus essential for sustaining life in the Lesser Antilles, as well as binding together colonial plantation economies in regional trade networks. It was also on this "small-craft infrastructure", as Gunvor Simonsen and Rasmus Christensen argue, that thousands of enslaved people fled slavery in the Lesser Antilles between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.⁷⁰

While Henry, Smart and Quamy's escape in 1798 depended on the same kind of watercraft and skill as Jack and Jame's escape eight years earlier, the former group executed their escape at a time when it was widely understood that Spanish officials would no longer offer formal protections or asylum as they had done to fugitives who fled decades before them. More than eight years prior to their escape from Carriacou, Spain's King Carlos IV had suspended his empire's long-standing asylum policy. Venezuela's captain general, Juan Guillelmi, circulated news of this royal order to the captaincy's provincial governors in July 1790, confirming to them that fugitives from slavery escaping other empires' colonies would no longer be accepted in Venezuela's various provinces and that freedom would no longer be conferred upon them. As Cristina

Soriano shows, Spanish authorities in Venezuela complied with the order during the 1790s, returning fugitives who had made their way to Spanish territory from Curaçao.⁷¹

With Spanish officials no longer obliged to offer the formal protections they once had for enslaved fugitives, perhaps Henry, Smart and Quamy might have considered escape to one of the other Grenadines. But conditions on these small islands would hardly have offered better prospects for sustained escape than Carriacou. As with Carriacou, the islands capable of sustaining life in the Grenadines chain were mostly under plantation agriculture by the late 1770s, had small populations where anonymity would have been implausible, contained no rivers or streams, were small, and were often deforested.⁷² As in Carriacou, by that same decade, sinking wells were used as common sources of water for the enslaved. And as in Carriacou, the water available in the Grenadines, was "in general [. . .] not good, frequently Brakish [sic]" and could cause sickness until one became accustomed to it, as was noted in the 1770s. White residents in the other Grenadine islands, like in Carriacou, similarly relied on the capture of rainwater and its storage in cisterns.⁷³ Whether Henry, Smart and Quamy would have been familiar with these islands, or had the opportunity to learn of the conditions within them by 1798, is not known. But there is little documented evidence that suggests fugitives in the region viewed the smaller islands of the Grenadines as beneficial locations for sustained marronage. Sparse references to maritime fugitives spending time in the Grenadines can be gleaned from colonial newspapers after 1790. In one case found in the *St. George's Chronicle and Grenada Gazette*, a maritime fugitive appears to have passed through Carriacou en route to the larger colony of Grenada. When Ben, a boy enslaved by Samuel McClean in St Vincent, escaped in 1799, it was alleged he had been taken to Carriacou before reaching Grenada and had then been harboured by a free Black man in St George's.⁷⁴ One other case suggests that fugitives might disembark in the Grenadines, albeit unintentionally. In 1826, the *Dominica Chronicle* reported news from the *St. Vincent's Gazette* stating that 14 black people had been "cast ashore at Canouan", a tiny island in the north of the chain. According to the brief summary of the case contained in the *Chronicle*, the master of the group's boat admitted that they were runaways from Cayenne (French Guyana).⁷⁵

Rather than rowing north, we know that Henry, Smart and Quamy instead looked south toward Grenada, rowing over 20 miles to the island in July 1798. They were not the only fugitives from Carriacou suspected

of doing so that year. Indeed, just over a month after their escape, three more enslaved people also fled Carriacou in a canoe. Their enslaver's attorney believed that the fugitives had "landed in Grenada" after escaping the island. Like Henry, Smart and Quamy before them, they all spoke English and French and were young men: Sylvester, around 18 years old; Jean Francoise, around 25 years of age; and Janga, the youngest at just 12 years old. And like Henry, Smart and Quamy, these fugitives had coordinated their escape from two plantations on the island; in this case, the Hermitage and the Union.⁷⁶

Assuming Sylvester, Janga and Jean Francoise did indeed make their way to Grenada in late August 1798, then we might speculate as to why fugitives from Carriacou opted for this island as their first destination. As in Carriacou, slavery and plantation labour structured life for most people of African descent in Grenada. But in the larger Windward Islands, like Grenada, there was certainly more territory in which fugitives might hide. Indeed, a number of the Windward Islands, especially before the end of the Seven Years' War and the expansion of Britain's plantation complex, had attracted maritime fugitives from other islands in the region.⁷⁷ But as in Carriacou, plantation agriculture had expanded in Grenada after the French ceded the island to the British in 1763. Within a decade, planters and absentee investors doubled Grenada's enslaved population, principally through purchasing captives transported to the island via the trans-Atlantic slave trade.⁷⁸ Prior to 1763, half of Grenada's land was already under cultivation by French settlers. After the Seven Years' War, British settlers expanded the island's plantation complex rapidly. By 1772, more than three hundred estates were cultivated by over twenty-six thousand enslaved people with sugar as the main crop, and coffee, indigo and cacao subsidiary to it. Grenada would soon become the British Empire's second most significant export economy in the Caribbean, outsized by only Jamaica in terms of the wealth it produced by the mid-1770s.⁷⁹ The island's emergence as an important economic asset to the British Empire depended on the exploited labour of enslaved Africans and their descendants. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, close to thirty thousand enslaved people toiled in Grenada, about ten times the slave population of Carriacou.⁸⁰ Around 10 per cent of Grenada's enslaved population lived in St George's by the early nineteenth century, with between 44 per cent and 69 per cent of the town's residents listed as enslaved in the years 1812–1830, years for which data exists. In this same period, between 20 per cent and 49 per cent of the town's population were free people of colour.⁸¹

Given these demographics, Henry, Smart and Quamy — assuming they did in fact make it to the town — would not have looked out of place. Able to speak both English and French fluently, they would have been able to communicate easily with the settlers, sailors and others who passed through or populated the town. As a commercial centre with a few thousand residents of colour, enslaved and free, as well as the transient sailors, merchants and enslaved people that likely swelled the town's numbers periodically, the fugitives might have been able to assume some anonymity, at least briefly. While it is not readily apparent whether Henry, Smart and Quamy ever actually made it to St George's, B.W. Higman notes that in the early nineteenth century, maroons in Grenada were often captured in the town, if not on plantations or at provision grounds.⁸² The town was also a noted staging ground for escape beyond the island. For instance, in October 1790, three African masons named Hector, Boby and Quashy, and a Creole driver named John, were suspected to have fled St George's "in a small schooner that was seen . . . hovering off St. George's Bay" close to the town.⁸³

In other cases of fugitivity, evidence suggests that enslavers also worried that when runaways made it to Grenada, they might try to board vessels and disappear beyond the island. Perhaps Smart, Henry, and Quamy had intended to do the same. For instance, in April 1798, the master of a schooner named the *Laurel* posted a runaway advert in St George's seeking the capture of an enslaved sailor named John, who had escaped onto the island. The advert concluded with a warning that "Masters of vessels and others are cautioned against employing or carrying [him] off the island" at risk of prosecution, suggesting that John's owner believed this might be a tactic the fugitive would deploy.⁸⁴ John was not the only enslaved labourer who fled from a vessel onto the island in 1798. In June, a youngster born in Antigua named Tom, just 14 years of age, also escaped from a schooner and disappeared in Grenada.⁸⁵ In September, an enslaved man "of the Angola Nation", who responded to the name Stern, also escaped a schooner and was suspected to still be in Grenada.⁸⁶

It was not only in Grenada that enslaved fugitives escaped from passing vessels. More than two decades after these cases, in 1822, the *Trinidad Gazette* carried a runaway advertisement that claimed a 13-year-old enslaved boy named Joseph, born in Carriacou, had escaped the sloop *Collector* in Port of Spain, Trinidad. The advert demanded that Joseph be returned to a property on Chacon Street in the centre of the town, or to the Royal Gaol for a reward.⁸⁷ As Port of Spain was one of the larger

ports in the British Caribbean, Joseph would likely not have been as quickly noticed there as he might have been in other towns in the region, given its three thousand permanent enslaved residents in the 1820s.⁸⁸

Conclusion

Whether like some other fugitives, Henry, Smart and Quamy's aim had been to find a way to eventually board a vessel and depart Grenada, or to remain within the island and find refuge, is unclear. Nor do we know how long they were able to remain as fugitives. The runaway advert that carried their names, according to Simon P. Newman, appears to have been reprinted twice, suggesting that Smart and Quamy, who may have been recaptured at some point and returned to the Mount Pleasant and Grand Bay plantations, probably evaded recapture for at least two weeks.⁸⁹ By pairing cases like theirs with other fugitives in the same era, we can begin to speculatively map and "think with" the actions of enslaved people who sought to escape slavery in this lesser studied region after Spanish asylum ended. More significantly, by thinking with the potential routes that fugitives opted not to pursue, and speculatively considering how resource scarcity may have influenced fugitive decision making, we are able to consider factors beyond imperial policy that may have influenced the itineraries adopted by maritime maroons in the region. And while Henry, Smart and Quamy's case, along with others discussed in this article, involved only enslaved men and boys, fugitive itineraries from Carriacou were by no means forged by males alone in the slavery era.

The prevalence of enslaved men and boys in the cases analysed in this article is most likely a consequence of the fact that enslavers tended to task men and boys with maritime work with greater frequency than enslaved women or girls. But in reality, as scholars have already demonstrated, women and girls participated in maritime escape from Carriacou in significant numbers from the 1770s.⁹⁰ In the Lesser Antilles and greater Caribbean more broadly, women also engaged actively in maritime marronage, and were involved in cases from the late-seventeenth century through to the nineteenth century.⁹¹ Furthermore, other evidence from early nineteenth-century Carriacou reveals enslaved women continued to participate in maritime marronage from the island after the suspension of Spanish asylum.⁹² Thus, rather than presenting a comprehensive account of the routes taken by fugitives from Carriacou after 1790, the cases explored here offer speculative insights into the strategies that some individuals employed in their efforts to escape slavery after Spanish asylum ended.

NOTES

1. On the fugitives, see the *St. George's Chronicle and Grenada Gazette* Friday 3 August 1798, p.4, no. 492, in Newman, "Runaway Advertisements from Grenada, 1790–1791 and 1798–99", the Magazine of Early American Datasets, 6-6-2022 (hereafter MEAD), <https://repository.upenn.edu/handle/20.500.14332/39791>; On the location and size of the Grand Bay (275 acres) and Mount Pleasant (510 acres) estates, see Beck Ryden, 553, 562.
2. *St. George's Chronicle and Grenada Gazette* Friday 3 August 1798, p.4, no. 492, in Newman, MEAD; On the distance between Carriacou and Grenada, see Martin, 276.
3. *St. George's Chronicle and Grenada Gazette* Friday 3 August 1798, p.4, no. 492, in Newman, MEAD.
4. Ibid.
5. On the Grenadines' geography, see Kingsbury, 399.
6. Hoonhout and Mareite, 62.
7. On the obligation to swear allegiance to the Spanish crown and convert to Catholicism, the classic work remains Landers, "Spanish Sanctuary" esp. 297–300; For more recent works, see Dunnivant, 896–97, and Hoonhout and Mareite, 62.
8. Scholarship tracing fugitivity to Spanish territory in response to these policies is vast. On fugitives making their way from Cuba to Jamaica, see Scott, 63; Bretones Lane; and Schneider; On fugitives making their way from South Carolina and Georgia to Florida, see Landers; On fugitive routes from Belize to Guatemala and Honduras, see Rupert, "Seeking the Water", 202; Lentz; On fugitive routes from the Leeward Islands to Spanish Trinidad, see Rupert, "Seeking the Water", 201; On fugitive routes from the Dutch islands to Spanish territories, see Rupert, "Seeking the Water", 202; On Lesser Antillean fugitives finding their way to Spanish Venezuela, see Soriano, 94 and Rupert, "Marronage", 364; On fugitive routes from the Danish colonies of St Thomas and St Croix to Puerto Rico, see Chinae, esp. 55–57; Hall; Dunnivant; Simonsen and Christensen, 636; On fugitives fleeing Danish and British colonies in the Virgin Islands to Puerto Rico, see Scott, 62–63; On fugitives from Dutch Demerara and Essequibo fleeing to Spanish Guayana, see The British Library, Western Manuscripts, The Venezuela Papers, Vol. XXXIX, Miguel Marmion, Governor Subdelegate of Guayana to the Marqués de Sonora, Don José de Galves y Gallardo, Guayana, 15 de Enero de 1787, 1787, Add Ms. 36347, ff.1–3; on fugitives fleeing towards Spanish territory in the Gulf Coast region, see Villarreal.
9. On the US and the end of Spanish sanctuary policies in 1790, see Landers, 311–13; On the diplomatic pressures exerted by European governments, see Scott, 67–68.
10. On Carriacou fugitives aiming to escape to Spanish territories to their

- south, see Scott, 126; Polson, 206–7; and Barker, “Notions of Freedom”; Freund Carter, 115; Barker, “She Would Cut Canes No Longer” 46–48; Shantel George also discusses a case that involved fugitives who appeared to arrive in Grenada despite aiming to set course for mainland Spanish America in a fishing canoe. See George, 170; For more on this case, see *St. George's Chronicle*, and *New Grenada Gazette*, 3 September 1790, p.2, no. 124, in Newman, MEAD.
11. On the Haitian constitution of 1816, see Ferrer, esp. 43, 47, 49, and 52.
 12. On “market marronage”, see Sweeney.
 13. National Archives of the United Kingdom (hereafter NAUK), T/71/267/268, “A List of Slaves Belonging to or in the lawful Possession of Matthew Glavies, An Attorney of Thomas Tarleton & Work'd upon Mount Pleasant Estate In the Island of Carriacou”, 31 July 1817. With thanks to Angus Martin for suggesting this source.
 14. NAUK, T 71/267/228, “A List of Slaves belonging to or in the lawful Possession of George McLean Attorney for George G. Brown Mile & John Mile & Working upon Grand Bay Estate in the Island of Carriacou”, 30 April 1817. With thanks to Angus Martin for suggesting this source.
 15. *St. George's Chronicle and Grenada Gazette*, Friday 3 August 1798, p.4, no. 492, in Newman, MEAD.
 16. On Schneider's method, see Schneider, 486–87; Quote from 486; On thinking with “plausible stories” despite archival limitations, see Brown, 13 and Sidbury, 179–84.
 17. For afore-cited scholarship, see endnote 8; For important scholarship considering the eastern Caribbean, see Hall; Beckles; Handler; Scott; Simonsen and Christensen; An excellent summary of older scholarship to this effect is included in Simonsen and Christensen, 614.
 18. See, for instance, Scott, 126; Polson, 206–7; Freund Carter, 115; and Barker, “Notions of Freedom”; Barker, “She Would Cut Canes No Longer” 46–48; On scholarship that has traced similar patterns in other sites, see Scott, esp. 61–68; Chinae; Rupert, “Marronage”, and “Seeking the Water of Baptism”; Schneider; and Bretones Lane.
 19. On Carriacou's size, see Richardson, 391.
 20. Morgan, 28.
 21. *Ibid.*, 26.
 22. *Ibid.*, 24.
 23. Simonsen and Christensen, 617.
 24. Martin, 277–81.
 25. *Ibid.*, 278–79; Richardson, 393.
 26. Martin, 286–87.
 27. Ashie-Nikoi, 38–39.
 28. On the Treaty's ramifications, see Murphy, 17 and 80; on Carriacou's cession to the British by the French, see Beck Ryden, 539.

29. Murphy, 81–82; On cotton and mixed cropping, see Quintanilla, 232.
30. Murphy, 103.
31. *Voyages: The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*, www.slavevoyages.org/voyages/VosqPEID.
32. Murphy, 145.
33. *Voyages, The Intra-American Slave Trade Database*, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyages/2i4CbOsH34>.
34. Hamilton, 84. Thanks to Dr Heather Freund Carter for sharing this source with me.
35. *Ibid.*, 85.
36. Marshall, 95.
37. Hamilton, 85.
38. Ashie-Nikoi, 42.
39. William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan (hereafter WLCUM), George Macartney Papers, W. Todd to George Macartney, Dean Street, Soho, 18 February 1776.
40. Beck Ryden, 544–46 and 568; Mullen, 189.
41. Ashie-Nikoi, 42–43; Beck Ryden, 540 and 568.
42. Ashie-Nikoi, 41–42.
43. Beck Ryden, 554.
44. *Ibid.*, 556–57.
45. *Ibid.*, 569.
46. *Ibid.*, 556, 545.
47. *Ibid.*, 545; Burnard, 143; Mullen, 189.
48. Beck Ryden, 556.
49. On the turn toward sugar after 1820, see Higman, 56; On the reason for Carriacou's turn to sugar, see Beck Ryden, 570; On the number of enslaved people per square mile by 1820, see Higman, 90.
50. Beck Ryden, 544; Ashie-Nikoi, 35.
51. Ashie-Nikoi, 34–35 and Beck Ryden, 549.
52. Ashie-Nikoi, 33–34.
53. *Ibid.*, 34; quote from NAUK, CO 101/22/76, Military Report of the Windward Islands authored by Captain Morse, Engineer, enclosed in George Macartney to Lord Germain, Grenada, 22 July 1778.
54. Ashie-Nikoi, 35–36.
55. Richardson, 393–94.
56. Beck Ryden, 558.
57. Richardson, 393.
58. Ashie-Nikoi, 36.
59. WLCUM, George Macartney Papers, Todd to Macartney, 18 February 1776.
60. Beck Ryden, 552.
61. Beatty, 75; Beck Ryden, 555.

62. Ashie-Nikoi, 34.
63. On "market marronage", see Sweeney.
64. Polson, 206–7; Freund, 115; Barker, "She Would Cut Canes No Longer", 47–48.
65. Shantel George also discusses this case. See George, 170; For more on this case, see *St. George's Chronicle, and New Grenada Gazette*, 3 September 1790, p.2, no. 124, in Newman, MEAD.
66. On the prevalence of collective fugitivity in Lesser Antillean cases of maritime marronage, see Simonsen and Christensen, 631.
67. On collaboration and canoes, see Dawson, 430; Simonsen and Christensen, 631.
68. Dawson, 434.
69. *Ibid.*, 430–31.
70. Simonsen and Christensen, 612–13.
71. Soriano, 93–96.
72. This assessment is based on island descriptions contained in the only known late-eighteenth century survey of these small islands. See NAUK, CO 101/22/74–81, Military Report of the Windward Islands authored by Captain Morse, Engineer, enclosed in George Macartney to Lord Germain, Grenada, 22 July 1778.
73. Ashie-Nikoi, 34; quote from NAUK, CO 101/22/81, Military Report of the Windward Islands authored by Captain Morse, Engineer, enclosed in George Macartney to Lord Germain, Grenada, 22 July 1778.
74. *St. George's Chronicle and Grenada Gazette*, Friday 27 September 1799, p.1, no. 552, in Newman, MEAD.
75. *Dominica Chronicle*, 12 July 1826.
76. *St. George's Chronicle and Grenada Gazette*, Friday 7 September 1798, p.1, no. 497, in Newman, MEAD.
77. Hamilton, 91–92.
78. For statistics showing Grenada's enslaved population almost doubling between 1763 and 1773, see Murphy, 109.
79. Mullen, 185; Murphy 108–9.
80. Cox, 14.
81. *Ibid.*, 28.
82. Higman, 392.
83. Case briefly discussed in Scott, 127; for full details of the case, see *St. George's Chronicle and New Grenada Gazette*, 29 October 1790, p.2, no. 132, in Newman, MEAD.
84. *St. George's Chronicle and Grenada Gazette*, Friday 27 April 1798, p.1, no. 478, in Newman, MEAD.
85. *St. George's Chronicle and Grenada Gazette*, Friday 22 June 1798, p.1, no. 486, in Newman, MEAD.

86. *St. George's Chronicle and Grenada Gazette*, Friday 21 September 1798, p.1, no. 499, in Newman, MEAD.
87. *Trinidad Gazette*, 8 May 1822.
88. On the slave populations of Port of Spain in the 1820s, see Higman, 424.
89. The advert was reprinted on the 10th and 17th of August 1798. See *St. George's Chronicle and Grenada Gazette*, Friday 3 August 1798, p.4, no. 492, in Newman, MEAD.
90. Polson, 206–7; Barker, "She Would Cut Canes No Longer", 46–48.
91. See, for instance, Bretones Lane, 451; Schneider, 485; Singleton and Landers, 423–24; Rupert, "Seeking the Water of Baptism", 212; Simonsen and Christensen.
92. See, for instance, the case of Jean in *De Curacaosche courant*, 13 December 1817 and the case of Zabet in *St. George's Chronicle and Grenada Gazette*, 5 July 1815. Thanks to the "In the Same Sea" Project at the University of Copenhagen and Dr Heather Freund Carter for making these references known to me.

WORKS CITED

- Ashie-Nikoi, Edwina. "Beating the Pen on the Drum: A Socio-cultural History of Carriacou, Grenada, 1750–1920. PhD diss., New York University, 2007.
- Barker, Patrick T. "'Notions of Freedom': Slavery and Escape in the Southeastern Caribbean". Clements Library Chronicles, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan. <https://clements.umich.edu/slavery-and-escape-southeastern-caribbean/>.
- . "'She Would Cut Canes No Longer': Slavery and Everyday Struggle in Trinidad, 1769–1834". PhD diss., Yale University, 2023.
- Beatty, Joseph Alan. "'I Bear Witness': An African's Quest for Faith and Community in the Atlantic World". PhD diss., University of Florida, 2014.
- Beck Ryden, David. "'One of the Finest and Most Fruitful Spots in America': An Analysis of Eighteenth-Century Carriacou". *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 43, no. 4 (Spring 2013): 539–70.
- Beckles, Hilary. "From Land to Sea: Runaway Barbados Slaves and Servants, 1630–1700". In *Out of the House of Bondage: Runaways, Resistance and Marronage in Africa and the New World*. Edited by Gad Heuman, 79–94. London: Routledge, 1986.
- Bretones Lane, Fernanda. "Free to Bury Their Dead: Baptism and the Meanings of Freedom in the Eighteenth-Century Caribbean". *Slavery & Abolition* 42, no. 3 (2021): 449–65.
- Brown, Vincent. *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020.

- Burnard, Trevor. *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves: Plantation Societies in British America, 1650–1820*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015.
- Chinea, Jorge L. "Quest for Freedom: The Immigration of Maritime Maroons into Puerto Rico, 1656–1800". *Journal of Caribbean History* 31, nos. 1–2 (1997): 51–87.
- Cox, Edward L. *Free Coloreds in the Slave Societies of St. Kitt's and Grenada, 1763–1833*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984.
- Dawson, Kevin. "A Sea of Caribbean Islands: Maritime Maroons in the Greater Caribbean". *Slavery & Abolition* 42, no. 3 (2021): 428–48.
- Dunnavant, Justin P. "Have Confidence in the Sea: Maritime Maroons and Fugitive Geographies". *Antipode* 53, Issue 3 (May 2021): 884–905.
- Ferrer, Ada. "Haiti, Free Soil, and Antislavery in the Revolutionary Atlantic". *American Historical Review* 117, no. 1 (2012): 40–66.
- Finneran, Niall. "'The Island of the Clouds': The Archaeology of Life on the Margins in a Small-Scale Caribbean Island Landscape, Bequia (St Vincent Grenadines) ca. 1700–1900 CE". *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 22, no. 4 (December 2018): 702–27.
- Freund Carter, Heather. "A Negotiated Possession: Law, Race, and Subjecthood in the Ceded Islands, 1763–1797". PhD diss., University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 2021.
- George, Shantel. "Tracing the ethnic origins of enslaved Africans in Grenada". *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents* 17, no. 2 (2018): 160–83.
- Hall, N.A.T. "Maritime Maroons: 'Grand Marronage' from the Danish West Indies". *William and Mary Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (1985): 476–98.
- Hamilton, Douglas. "'Sailing on the same uncertain sea': The Windward Islands of the Caribbean". In *Islands and the British Empire in the Age of Sail*, edited by Douglas Hamilton and John McAleer, 77–96. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.
- Handler, Jerome S. "Escaping Slavery in a Caribbean Plantation Society: Marronage in Barbados, 1650s–1830s". *NWIG: New West India Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 71, no. 3/4 (1997): 183–225.
- Higman, B.W. *The Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807–1834*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984.
- Hoonhout, Bram, and Thomas Mareite. "Freedom at the Fringes? Slave Flight and Empire-building in the Early Modern Spanish Borderlands of Essequibo-Venezuela and Louisiana-Texas". *Slavery & Abolition* 40, no. 1 (2019): 61–86.
- Kingsbury, Robert. C. "Carriacou: An Old World in the New". *Journal of Geography* LIX, no. 9 (December 1960): 399–409.
- Landers, Jane. "Spanish Sanctuary: Fugitives in Florida 1687–1790". *Florida Historical Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (1983): 296–313.
- Lentz, Mark W. "From Slavery to Citizenship? San Benito, Sanctuary Policy, and the Law on the Ground". In *At the Heart of the Borderlands: Africans and Afro-Descendants on the Edges of Colonial Spanish America*, edited by Jay T. Harrison and Cameron D. Jones, 69–86. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2023.

- Marshall, Bernard. *Slavery, law and society in the British Windward Islands 1763–1823*. Kingston: Arawak Publications, 2007.
- Martin, John Angus. *Island Caribs and French Settlers in Grenada*. St George's: Grenada National Museum Press, 2013.
- Mills, Beth H. "Family Land in Carriacou, Grenada and its Meaning within the Transnational Community: Heritage, Identity, and Rooted Mobility". PhD diss., University of California – Davis, 2002.
- Morgan, Philip D., John Robert McNeill, Matthew Mulcahy, and Stuart B. Schwartz. *Sea and Land: An Environmental History of the Caribbean*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.
- Mullen, Stephen. *The Glasgow Sugar Aristocracy, Scotland and Caribbean Slavery, 1775–1838*. London: University of London Press, 2022.
- Murphy, Tessa. *The Creole Archipelago: Race and Borders in the Colonial Caribbean*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021.
- Newman, Simon P. "Runaway Advertisements from Grenada, 1790–1791 and 1798–99". *Magazine of Early American Datasets*. Issued 6 June. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Library, 2022.
- Polson, Donald. "The Tolerated, the Indulged, and the Contented: Ethnic Alliances and Rivalries in Grenadian Plantation Society, 1763–1800". PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2011.
- Quintanilla, Mark. "The World of Alexander Campbell: An Eighteenth-Century Grenadian Planter". *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 229–56.
- Richardson, Bonham C. "The Overdevelopment of Carriacou". *Geographical Review* 65, no. 3 (1975): 390–99.
- Rupert, Linda M. "Marronage, Manumission and Maritime Trade in the Early Modern Caribbean". *Slavery and Abolition* 30, no. 3 (2009): 361–82.
- . "Seeking the Water of Baptism: Fugitive Slaves and Imperial Jurisdiction in the Early Modern Caribbean". In *Legal Pluralism and Empires, 1500–1850*, edited by Richard J. Ross and Lauren Benton, 199–231. New York: New York University Press, 2020.
- Schneider, Elena. "A Narrative of Escape: Self Liberation by Sea and the Mental Worlds of the Enslaved". *Slavery & Abolition* 42, no. 3 (2021): 484–501.
- Scott, Julius S. *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution*. London: Verso, 2018.
- Sidbury, James. "Plausible Stories and Varnished Truths". *William and Mary Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (January 2002): 179–84.
- Simonsen, Gunvor, and Rasmus Christensen. "Together in a Small Boat: Slavery's Fugitives in the Lesser Antilles". *William and Mary Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (July 2023): 611–46.
- Singleton, Theresa A., and Jane Landers. "Maritime Marronage: Archaeological, Anthropological, and Historical Approaches". *Slavery & Abolition* 42, no. 3 (August 2021): 419–27.

- Soriano, Cristina. *Tides of Revolution: Information, Insurgencies, and the Crisis of Colonial Rule in Venezuela*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018.
- Sweeney, Shauna J. "Market Marronage: Fugitive Women and the Internal Marketing System in Jamaica, 1781–1834". *William and Mary Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (2019): 197–222.
- Villareal, Christina Marie. "Black Fugitive Strategies: Slavery and Self-Emancipation in the Spanish Gulf Coast Borderlands". In *At the Heart of the Borderlands: Africans and Afro-Descendants on the Edges of Colonial Spanish America*, edited by Jay T. Harrison and Cameron D. Jones, 20–37. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2023.

Archipelagic Law-Making: Borrowing and Implementing Caribbean Slave Law in Swedish St Barthélemy

FREDRIK THOMASSON

After lengthy negotiations with France, Sweden acquired the small and arid island of St Barthélemy in the summer of 1784 in exchange for French commercial rights in Sweden.¹ Thus, Sweden became the second Scandinavian country to play a role in the tumultuous Antilles around 1800. A few years after the Swedish takeover, slave rebellions erupted in the Caribbean in the wake of the French Revolution; the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars were also fought in the colonies.

At the moment of the Swedes' arrival in March 1785, St Barthélemy's population was less than seven hundred people, almost half of whom were enslaved. It was declared a free port in September 1785, attracting trade and merchants from all over the Caribbean. The island's population grew rapidly as it gained in commercial importance. Around 1810, it had a population of more than five thousand inhabitants. The capital, Gustavia, had approximately the same number of inhabitants as the university town of Uppsala, in metropolitan Sweden. The enslaved and free Black population was in the majority at around 60 to 70 per cent. The enslaved worked in subsistence farming, as servants and artisans, in the harbour, and as seamen, among other roles.

St Barthélemy was highly cosmopolitan, and many aspects of its society did not appear "Swedish". This was also the case in the Caribbean territories of other colonial powers. European states created colonial societies where the institution of slavery was their most distinguishing feature. The mother countries' efforts to profit from unfree labour led to deviations from the legislation and social order of the home countries. Slavery required new methods of government, legislation and a judicial system adapted to repressing the Caribbean's Black majority population.

The Journal of Caribbean History 59, 2 (2025): 95–120

DOI: 10.37234/JCH.2025.U1000005

This article outlines how the Swedes adapted the governance of the new territory to Caribbean customs, paying particular attention to the law-making and judicial practice that concerned the Black population. Instead of understanding this adaptation as a deviation from metropolitan practices, the creation of this judicial system is more appropriately understood as a process of adjustment to the surrounding archipelagic legal environment.

Upon takeover, St Barthélemy became, in all respects, a Swedish territory. Swedish jurisprudence had undergone thorough reform during the seventeenth century. The so-called Code of 1734 (*1734 års lag*) unified earlier legislation and was valid throughout the Swedish realm, including the Caribbean colony. Thus, the instructions concerning justice administration given to the first Swedish governor before his departure from Stockholm to St Barthélemy in December 1784 were brief. He was requested to collect information about the previous laws and to be careful not to upset the colony's inhabitants with unwarranted changes in legislation: "The governor has the right to propose [judicial] changes but not to decide and should rather let the matters remain as during the French rule, than to by his own design introduce novelties, with unknown results, and often to the detriment of the subjects."² In the treaty with France, Sweden promised not to worsen the conditions of the former French subjects that remained on the island, and the governor was instructed to tread lightly.³ Slavery was not mentioned in the Franco-Swedish treaty, nor in the first instructions to the Swedish governor. With the acquisition of the island, Sweden became a slave-holding nation for the first time since serfdom was abolished in the fourteenth century. The management of slavery became a complicated issue for the Swedish administrators as soon as they arrived in the Caribbean.

Archipelagic rules and customs guided legal procedures from the onset of Swedish sovereignty. The island's legal system immediately diverged from that of the metropole, and the practice of borrowing laws and judicial practices from the surrounding colonies became a recurring feature. Legal matters were frequently mentioned in early dispatches from the colony to the metropole.⁴ Existing laws from nearby colonies influenced the legal development on St Barthélemy, and the same was true of the form of government. The Swedish merchant Jacob Röhl, who arrived at St Barthélemy before Sweden took possession in March 1785, suggested that the neighbouring Dutch island of St Eustatius could serve as a model for a "popular and moderate government".⁵ His proposal was influential, and the Dutch model that was adapted at St Barthélemy gave the merchant

class a far more influential role in government, legislation and the administration of justice than they had in Sweden. The St Barthélemy governing council was composed of three or four permanent members of Swedish origin: the governor, who presided; a so-called justiciary (*justitiarie*), akin to a judge in a Swedish district court; the place major (the colony's military commander); and a representative of the Swedish West India Company. Three to four additional members were elected from the island's cosmopolitan merchant class, which generally comprised enslavers. This gave enslavers an important role in both legislation and the administration of justice, as they also became members of the court of justice. The official administrative language remained Swedish, yet Gustavia became a cosmopolitan Caribbean town where English and French were the main spoken languages, including their creole varieties.⁶

A royal decree of 1786 established the form of government and justice administration, and instructed the governor to follow "rules and reasonable customs [*sedwanor*] that were previously followed on the West Indian islands, and especially on St. Barthélemy".⁷ The decree also gave the council extensive legislative powers. While new laws needed confirmation from Stockholm, they were instantly valid when proclaimed on the island. This procedure was already in place informally, as the governor began proclaiming regulations immediately after arriving in March 1785.

In a few years, the Swedish authorities managed to install a system that echoed that of other Caribbean slave societies. Officials on St Barthélemy often struggled to determine which laws to apply. Their legal reasoning frequently consisted of drawing analogies to Swedish legislation and establishing how it could be used when no local law was applicable. However, the most important source of inspiration in the absence of metropolitan laws concerning slavery was the legal frameworks and customs regulating slavery on the neighbouring islands. The sources of inspiration can be established through a comparison of Swedish legislation from St Barthélemy with that of the adjoining British, Dutch and French islands.⁸ As a result, the legal history of Swedish St Barthélemy highlights the importance of examining regional connections, particularly in understanding the role of smaller colonial powers.⁹

By analysing the emergence of the colonial legal corpus on St Barthélemy within an archipelagic framework, rather than through its relation to the legal tradition of the metropole, a new perspective on colonial law-making is offered. A growing body of literature exists on colonial law and judicial systems, and several scholars have attempted

to define their distinct characteristics. These have been labelled under umbrella concepts, such as legal pluralism and mixed legal systems.¹⁰ Still, even this literature usually retains the nation-state as its preferred level of analysis. This is also often the case when colonial law is included; the dichotomy tends to remain between the metropole and its colonies.¹¹ This is not a criticism of this literature per se, but rather a suggestion that in the Swedish case, such a dichotomy offers little explanatory power when attempting to analyse the legal development in St Barthélemy.

The Swedish 1787 Slave Law

The first years of Swedish sovereignty were characterised by ad hoc law-making. The island's first governor, Salomon Mauritz von Rayalin (1757–1825), was appointed because of his linguistic capabilities and his experience from serving in both the British and French navies, including in the West Indies during the American War of Independence. He had to deal with issues unknown to the Swedish metropolitan legal context and initially used French colonial laws as the basis for new legislation. An example is a reiteration in August 1785 of a French royal proclamation from 1722.¹²

Legislators on early Swedish St Barthélemy attempted to understand and adapt to the frequent judicial and commercial interaction in the archipelago. Although there was fierce competition in commercial matters, there was an implicit recognition that managing slavery necessitated cooperation and legal alignment among the islands. One of the first measures to establish a slave code on St Barthélemy was the proclamation of 24 August 1785, in which the government attempted to regulate the mobility and activities of enslaved people. By doing so, Swedish legislators tapped into existing legal traditions in Caribbean slave societies. The proclamation stated that "Nègres et Nègresses", that is, enslaved people, were not allowed to make noise, music or dance after ten o'clock at night, nor were they allowed to move freely at night without the written permission of their enslavers. This proclamation also contained the first official Swedish threat of punishment solely directed towards the Black population: "all under penalty of the most severe punishment".¹³ The ordinance perpetuated the archipelagic tradition of suppressing Afro-Caribbean peoples' social life, freedom of movement and cultural expressions.¹⁴

Even when laws did not specifically mention the Black population, its presence should always be considered. A typical example is a 1786

ordinance that required owners of small boats to lock them in the harbour during the night. Enslaved people are not mentioned, but the law was intended to stop the enslaved from escaping. The signatures of Gustavia's boat owners accompany the proclamation, proving that they had been notified that non-secured boats were to be destroyed.¹⁵ As noted by Gunvor Simonsen and Rasmus Christensen, legislation concerning small boats was in place throughout the archipelago.¹⁶ As in the case of the previous law regulating the social life of the Black population, it is unclear whether this law was in response to a specific event. However, the convergence of Swedish colonial law with the legislation of the surrounding islands — whether enacted as a result of a particular occurrence or as a preventive measure — is not a coincidence. The Lesser Antillean slave law that the Swedes adopted was meant to preserve the status quo. If the Swedish system were found to be more lenient, this knowledge could eventually spread, making the Swedish colony a target for unwanted immigration.

Upon arrival at St Barthélemy, the Swedish authorities immediately realised that the island could not be turned into a plantation colony. Instead, they focused on establishing a trading hub. To accomplish this, they needed labour for the construction of buildings, road work, and the improvement of Gustavia's harbour and the batteries that defended it. The governor asked the authorities in Stockholm to organise voyages to Africa to supply the colony with enslaved people, but this was considered too complicated.¹⁷ Instead, he immediately began requisitioning enslaved people for construction work, as the authorities did not have sufficient means to acquire the enslaved or to pay enslavers for their rental. Indeed, Governor Rayalin had to visit French islands to borrow money.¹⁸ The requisition of enslaved day labourers by decree was highly unpopular with the island's enslavers.¹⁹

After less than two years of ruling St Barthélemy, it was apparent to the colonial administrators that Swedish law and additional ad hoc legislation were insufficient to govern the slave society. It was only now that a wide-ranging legal regime concerning enslaved and free Black people was put into place. To create such legislation *ex novo* would have far exceeded the capacity and experience of the Swedish administrators, who had no legal training. Instead, the governor turned to already existing law corpora from nearby French colonies. Governor Rayalin had acquired printed compilations of French colonial legislation, probably during his trips to the French islands to borrow money. In June 1786, he had sent a printed edition of the *Code de la Martinique* to Stockholm to prepare his superiors in Sweden for the upcoming legislation.²⁰ The Martinican code

was an extensive body of colonial laws. Three printed volumes (1767, 1772, 1786) contain more than four hundred and sixty ordinances that concern all sectors of society, not just the Black population.²¹

The defining moment in the legislative process concerning the Black population was the introduction of a comprehensive Swedish slave code on 30 June 1787. It would remain valid — with changes — until the Swedish abolition of slavery in 1847. In creating a slave law for St Barthélemy, Governor Rayalin chose to implement a 15 December 1783 ordinance that regulated slavery in Martinique: *Ordonnance du gouvernement, concernant la Police générale des Nègres & Gens de couleur libres* [Government ordinance concerning the police of slaves and free people of colour].²² The 1783 ordinance was a concise summary of the rules governing enslaved people accumulated over the course of the century since the proclamation in 1685 of the most well-known French slave law, the *Code noir*: Édit du Roi concernant la discipline, l'état et la qualité des nègres esclaves aux îles de l'Amérique.²³ There were two major jurisdictions in the French Antilles: Saint-Domingue (today's Haiti) and the islands Martinique and Guadeloupe, which were usually governed together. Many laws were adopted, with changes made to cater to local conditions, in both jurisdictions.²⁴

The French legal framework concerning the Black population had undergone constant change. While underlining the need to police the Black population strictly, the 1783 law was also meant to restrict the worst abuses committed by enslavers.²⁵ This law, used to regulate slavery in Martinique, had, in principle, been a valid law on St Barthélemy before the Swedish acquisition. Thus, the Swedish 1787 slave law confirmed the law governing the enslaved and free Black population during the previous French regime. The now-Swedish law was referred to as the ordinance of 30 June 1787, the "colonial law", and so on. When the English version was printed in the local newspaper, *The Report of St. Bartholomew* in 1804, it was entitled: "Ordinance of Police relative to the Treatment of Black and Coloured Persons, free or slaves, and other matters."²⁶ The essential function of the new law was not the punishments it prescribed, but rather the principles it established. Its primary function was to regulate a society that could not be governed by Swedish law. The Swedish slave law gave the new rulers of the island the blueprint to legally order the society into the three distinct groups: white people, free Black people, and enslaved people, ruled by their respective legal frameworks.

The Swedish version was not a word-for-word copy of the French 1783 original. Rayalin edited the French text of the 1783 ordinance and then

translated it into English. The law was proclaimed in both French and English, possibly the only example of a French slave law gaining legal validity in another language. Most differences between the French 1783 slave law and its Swedish version were due to different geographic and economic conditions. Attempts to grow large quantities of sugar on St Barthélemy had failed, and articles related to this activity were excluded. However, the most radical change was the introduction of an article (§ 3) that was not present in the French law. The following quotations are the original wordings from both the English and French versions. "Gender" in the English version refers to "free Mulattoes and Negroes" from the previous article:

Both men and women of the aforesaid Gender, if they strike or give a blow to any white person, shall receive Corporal punishment, according to circumstances.

Tout hommes ou femmes de couleur libre qui bat un Blanc sera puni Corporellement, suivant les circonstances.²⁷

The requirement to corporally punish free Black people for hitting a white person does not figure in the French original. The dearth of archival sources during the colony's first fifteen years makes it impossible to determine whether the article was a reaction to a particular event or court case.

Rayalin's successor, Pehr Herman Aurivillius Rosen von Rosenstein (1763–1799), outlined the rationale for adopting and adapting the Martinican ordinance of 1783 when sending the new law to Stockholm for confirmation. The governor pointed out that the enslaved population was growing and that new rules were needed not only to maintain order, but also to control the worst violence of enslavers:

It is urgent to prevent many tyrannical owners' abuse of the powers that an unfortunate necessity has awarded them over the wretches [the enslaved], who are often the victims of their [enslavers'] fierce passions, and feel the weight of their misfortune as keenly as they wish to be liberated from it. Their desire in this matter has, on many occasions in the West Indies, erupted in violence that could have the most unfortunate consequences.²⁸

Throughout the archipelago, white elites constantly feared uprisings by the enslaved people who made up the majority of island populations, and this was also the case in St Barthélemy. The situation in the 1790s was especially worrying, and Black political mobilisation was significant as a governor reported to Stockholm: "Free mulattos and negroes, even a group of white adventurers, travel around the islands and give proper lectures

on the supposed rights of people of colour."²⁹ As the rebellion spread in the French colonies, the Swedish judge underlined how rebellions on other islands could threaten St Barthélemy: "Woe! Our colour, if some clever and desperate head should unite them."³⁰

While some aspects of the new law conflicted with Swedish metropolitan legal traditions, the St Barthélemy governor argued that it was necessary to prescribe very severe punishments to accommodate existing judicial practices in Caribbean slave societies. The governor carefully phrased his report to convince the Stockholm authorities to confirm the legislation. The governor admitted that the enslaved indeed had good reasons to rebel, but added, "therefore, sternness and much caution are necessary to maintain order and security. The many and severe punishments that the ordinance imposes on criminal slaves derive from this."³¹ Capital punishment for lesser crimes went against Swedish judicial practice, and the governor was "distressed about whether I [he] could follow the regulations that punish some crimes with the loss of life". The 1786 decree establishing the colony's judicial system stated that all capital punishments were to be confirmed by the Supreme Court in Stockholm. As capital sentences were often commuted to lesser punishments in Sweden, the governor assured his metropolitan readers that death sentences "never can be executed here without your Royal Majesty's gracious approval".³² The governor thus argued that executions of enslaved people would rarely take place on the island, as the king would pardon the offender. Though Swedish metropolitan law required the death penalty for a large number of crimes, the number of executions constantly decreased during the eighteenth century in Sweden.³³ Most capital sentences from lower courts were rejected by the district courts of appeal (*Hovrätt*) or by the Supreme Court (at that time called *Justitierevisionen* and from 1789, *Högsta domstolen*).³⁴ This was the judicial mechanism that the St Barthélemy governor counted on to avoid executing enslaved people for lesser crimes.

In his rationale to get his superiors in Stockholm to confirm the legislation, Governor Rosenstein mentioned the law's protective articles that were intended to shield enslaved people from the worst mistreatment by their enslavers. This choice might only have been a rhetorical measure to avoid alarming his superiors in Stockholm, who were not yet fully acquainted with the violence of Atlantic slavery. Early surviving criminal cases show that the court had difficulty sentencing free Black individuals to corporal punishment, as the law required. The free Black barber Seraphine Lindor defended himself from the attack of a white man in August 1788 and was only sentenced to a fine. This was not appreciated

by a group of white men, who attempted to lynch him the night after the trial. By chance, a Swedish soldier came upon the mob; he fetched other soldiers, and they managed to stop the lynching.³⁵

The 1787 law installed a Caribbean, racialised legal framework in St Barthélemy. This also meant that the repertoire of punishments available to legal authorities on St Barthélemy differed from that used by Sweden's metropolitan courts. One of the many customs the Swedish officials immediately adopted was the various modes of punishment present in Caribbean slave law. The use of the whip, in particular, places St Barthélemy's punitive practices squarely within the history of Caribbean slave law. White people were punished according to the *Book on Execution of Judgments (Straffbalk)* in the Swedish Code of 1734. The punishments of the Black population adhered to local Caribbean customs. The most used sentence in Sweden was a fine, but as enslaved people were not allowed to own anything, they could, in theory, not pay fines. Penal servitude was not an option; this was, so to speak, already their situation. The closest thing to written regulations concerning the number of lashes a convicted enslaved person was to receive were conversion lists in the court protocols.³⁶ These transformed Swedish punishments with rods, into lashes with a whip in the Caribbean.

Some of the other punishments imposed in the new slave law were also foreign to Swedish judicial practice. An example is branding. In 1799, the enslaved man Manuel was sentenced to sixty lashes and transportation for theft. Before being sold away, he was branded.³⁷ Branding was long out of use in metropolitan Sweden. It is prescribed in the 1787 slave law (§ 18, 30, 38). Enslaved people were branded on the forehead or the cheek, but we do not know with what symbol. In the French colonies, V was used for *voleur* (thief) and M for *marron*.

The only punishment believed to have a deterring effect on the island's enslaved population was corporal. The only recognition of Swedish metropolitan practice was the rare use of the death penalty. While executions took place on the Swedish island, no case has been found of an enslaved person being executed. The enslaved who were sentenced to death had their punishment converted to corporal punishment. However, the execution of enslaved people was common in many other Caribbean and American territories.³⁸

The use of corporal punishment also extended to what the court sometimes referred to as "extra-judicial" whipping. As its name indicates, it was not present in the Swedish slave laws. This punishment typically consisted of twenty-nine lashes and was administered when the court

believed the culprit merited fewer than thirty lashes. The limit of twenty-nine lashes originated from the Martinican ordinance of 1783. Enslavers who exceeded this limit could be prosecuted according to the 1787 law (§ 8). There are rare cases when enslavers were taken to court for failing to adhere to the limit, but the law's only punishment was confiscation of the enslaved victims and the prohibition to re-acquire them. In these few cases, enslavers received the money from the sale of the enslaved person they had mistreated. To restrict enslavers' right to use violence could lead to protests. When a 1784 Saint-Domingue law limited private punishment of enslaved people to fifty lashes, planters protested. This was even reported in Swedish newspapers.³⁹

The Swedish slave law thus prohibited enslavers from using more than twenty-nine lashes in private punishments, but it was not always clear which crimes owners should punish and which should be referred to the court; thus, "lesser" offences sometimes ended up in court. Twenty-nine lashes were prescribed for a few minor offences in the 1787 law (§ 32, 33). However, when the court explicitly referred to this "extra-judicial" punishment, it referred to a court-decided punishment that substituted the private punishment by enslavers. Instead, the private punishments executed by enslavers were sometimes referred to by the Swedish term *husaga*, which denoted corporal punishment by employers, regulated in Sweden by the Code of 1734 and the *Servants' Statute* (*Tjänstehjonsstadgan*) that was first proclaimed in 1664.⁴⁰

While the introduction of the Swedish 1787 slave law did create a framework for governing the Black population, new laws concerning the Black population continued to be proclaimed. The proliferation of laws soon led to a legal system similar to that of other Caribbean colonies. A comparison can be made with the Danish islands as Denmark had been in the West Indies for over a century when the Swedes arrived.⁴¹ The Danish Caribbean legal system had become increasingly unwieldy: "Though in principle the [metropolitan] Danish Law was valid, local regulations were given precedence when they conflicted with the Danish Law. [. . .] The legal system had thus by 1830 taken the character of an incomprehensible jungle of colonial proclamations, governmental regulations, published and unpublished royal ordinances."⁴² Such confusion was not only the case on Danish, Dutch or Swedish islands; the situation in the French colonies was likewise bewildering.⁴³ When the Martinican judge Jacques Petit de Viéville tried to bring some order to the chaos by collecting and printing the laws, he remarked, "that most laws are ignored even by those whose profession it is to use them".⁴⁴ A similar lack of knowledge

was underlined when Spanish authorities proclaimed a summary of the laws governing the treatment of the enslaved in 1789.⁴⁵

Reading the Swedish St Barthélemy records, it is evident that the court members were sometimes uncertain about which law to apply. Danish and Swedish Caribbean research has pointed out the weaknesses of their colonial Caribbean courts and magistrates. Turning towards the archipelago allows Caribbean legal developments to be seen as more than lesser versions of increasingly complex metropolitan legal regimes.⁴⁶ Such deficiencies, including the judicial administrators' lack of knowledge, might instead be seen as a function of the system rather than a deficiency in itself. As courts seldom accepted defendants' excuses of lack of knowledge about the law, the courts' own professed ignorance should likewise be regarded with scepticism. The main explanation may instead be that the court's insecurity or vacillation contributed to its independence in making the decision it preferred. The French legal historian Dominique Mignot puts it laconically when discussing how French rules concerning manumission were flaunted when it came to white planters freeing their own mixed-race children: "This explains why in the Antilles, actual conditions have always been more influential than the law."⁴⁷ The court's ignorance — pretended or real — can be considered a function of the judicial administration's powers.

Adopting West Indian Customs

One of the most striking features of Swedish law-making in St Barthélemy is how fast authorities adapted the legal environment to Caribbean mores. The natural scientist Bengt A. Euphrasén visited the island in 1778, three years after the Swedes had arrived in 1785. In 1795, he published a book that contained a detailed description of the legal system: "The law, according to which all cases [concerning white people] were determined and judged, was the Swedish; there are some cases that are judged according to West Indian law, or after agreements with the surrounding islands, to promote neighbourly harmony."⁴⁸ The Black population was treated differently: "Almost every owner has their own law, according to which they punish their Negroes [i.e., the enslaved]; he has the right to treat his slaves as he pleases and as his conscience dictates." The West Indian law that Euphrasén referred to was the island's slave law and several more or less explicit customs that regulated the treatment of the Afro-Caribbean population. Euphrasén concluded: "White people are thus those who wield the greatest power and rule over black people".⁴⁹ This

power depended on legal traditions imported from other slave colonies.

Developing the judicial system on St Barthélemy was an ongoing process. Almost twenty years after the Swedish takeover, officials continued to look to the legal customs of nearby colonies for inspiration to consolidate the legal system. In the summer of 1802, the St Barthélemy governor sent customs official Anders Furuuträd with a questionnaire to the main Danish town on the island of St Thomas, Charlotte Amalie. Furuuträd was instructed to obtain answers to sixty-seven questions covering all aspects of colonial governance. St Barthélemy's judge, Anders Bergstedt, had most likely compiled the questionnaire. A large number of the questions addressed legal issues, and many of these pertained to the Black population, such as:

9. According to which law are slaves and free coloured persons tried?
10. Can slaves testify against whites, and in what circumstances? Are slaves baptised?
11. Can a free coloured in any way forfeit his freedom so that he is sold into slavery?
12. Can a free coloured be subjected to flogging or whipping in circumstances other than those in which a white person is subjected to such punishment?
13. What is stipulated for the maintenance of slaves?
14. Is there any guarantee of maintenance upon the emancipation of a slave, or is there a provision in place to prevent the emancipated slave from becoming destitute?
15. Do the laws allow the owner, at his discretion, to shackle and parade his slave in the streets, or throw him into a private prison, or lock him up or chain him in his house, or hang him, or have him whipped without any restriction, or kill him without consequences?⁵⁰

The questions sent to St Thomas demonstrate that Swedish authorities, while quick to adapt to the legal regime of Caribbean slavery, still, almost twenty years after acquiring the colony, struggled to govern a slave society.

In the case of question number 11, the Swedish court had indeed already sold free Black people into slavery, both as punishment for crimes, as well as to repay the debts they had incurred.⁵¹ To punish free Black people with enslavement was prescribed in the 1787 slave law (§ 5) as the punishment for hiding enslaved fugitives and receiving or selling stolen goods. However, the most common court cases that resulted in the selling of people into slavery regarded individuals who could not prove their freedom status. The first law sanctioning this procedure was proclaimed in 1790, concerning "non-reclaimed negros and boats". Following the waves of Black people escaping uprisings and repression in neighbouring colonies in the 1790s, this law was reiterated and made

more "efficient" in several later versions. Individuals unable to prove their free status were put in jail, and if no enslaver had "reclaimed" them within three months, they were sold at public auction. An 1804 version of the law divided the sale proceeds between the authorities and the prosecutor. In an 1814 version, the system was made even more explicit: "the detained person will be sold for the benefit of the Crown and the Accuser, half each."⁵²

The questionnaire's other queries likewise underscore that Swedish authorities on St Barthélemy were keen to follow developments in the surrounding archipelago. Question number 12 about the corporal punishment of free people of colour likely referred to Article 3 in the Swedish 1787 slave law; the question may have been posed because it had already become socially complex to punish free Black people corporally in 1802. In the 1810s, this issue became especially contentious when the growing free Black population struggled to achieve political rights.⁵³ Question number 15 addressed the frequent violence of enslavers. There had been repeated instances of enslavers torturing enslaved people — there were cases where women were almost beaten to death by their enslavers — and the judge wondered how the Danes dealt with such violence.⁵⁴

The customs inspector was unable to obtain answers to all his questions; his report states that even "better people" at St Thomas knew nothing about legislation or how the Danish colony was governed. He concluded that "slaves are treated very harshly in the Danish islands."⁵⁵ The strict Danish slave law enacted in 1733 required capital punishment for enslaved people stealing minor amounts or "raising their hand against a white man".⁵⁶ The questionnaire reveals that, in 1802, Swedish officials administering justice on St Barthélemy were still uncertain about the region's judicial practices. However, the fact that several of the legal issues mentioned in the questionnaire had already been resolved on St Barthélemy confirms that the Swedish administrators had established many of the archipelago's judicial practices concerning slavery. The selling of free Black people into slavery is a telling example of this.

Many vital areas of law were unregulated in the Swedish slave code and were handled through a mixture of traditions borrowed from neighbouring colonies. Several of those areas were of paramount importance for the enslaved population. One of those was banishment, which immediately became common on St Barthélemy, although it was rare in the Swedish metropole. It was first used two months after the Swedes arrived in 1785, when the governor expelled Charles, an enslaved man, who was accused of being a "poisoner".⁵⁷ Transportation was one of the most common

methods used to rid the colony of unwanted enslaved people, particularly those convicted of what were considered serious crimes, who were first whipped and then sold off the island. Yet, the St Thomas questionnaire indicated that it was not clear who should compensate enslavers when the court sentenced enslaved individuals to transportation: "Is there a fund to compensate [owners] for banished slaves, and if so, how is it funded?"⁵⁸

It has been proposed that banishment had the effect of spreading ideas about dissent and information about the respective islands' judicial systems within Antillean Black communities.⁵⁹ Judging from the evidence, it is indeed probable that information concerning how Black healers were treated at St Barthélemy circulated on the surrounding islands. One of the few legal areas where the Swedish officials did not conform to wider Caribbean practices was in their treatment of Black healers and Afro-Caribbean religious practices. They did not absorb the widespread fear of poisoning and "black magic" that led to very harsh sentences in many other colonies. The Black healers who were prosecuted were not punished corporally as the 1787 slave law prescribed (§ 6, 7), but were let go or sent back to their enslavers on other islands. They were admonished to stop practising medicine in St Barthélemy; if not, they would indeed be punished. Nonetheless, even repeat offenders were let go.⁶⁰

The use of transportation occasionally raised concern, especially when white people were sent away, and it was finally decided to petition the authorities in Stockholm to confirm the use of this punishment. Indeed, it was only in 1812 that transportation was explicitly permitted in local law.⁶¹ An early case following the Stockholm approval of banishment was that of the free Black man Bobi Zenon. He was accused of theft and disorderly conduct in 1813. According to the island court, he "behaved in a manner that clearly indicates a disposition and temperament dangerous to public order for a negro in the colony".⁶² The court noted that Zenon had recently been expelled from St Martin, and after serving his prison sentence, he was deported to a third island.⁶³

Interaction with the authorities of other islands was typically informal. Enslaved people who were sought for crimes on different islands were readily extradited. One such case was reported in *The Report of St. Bartholomew* in 1804: "A Negro Man named Punch was taken up here on the 12 September last, partly as a runaway, partly as charged with the murder of a black man in Anguilla. Our Governor sent him over to that Place with the first opportunity, and we are told, that Punch was hanged the day after his arrival."⁶⁴ This custom of extradition was maintained for several decades. The newspaper *The West Indian*, also printed in

Gustavia, reported in 1827 how "yesterday the two fugitives from the island of Grenade, who, it was mentoned [sic] some time ago, had been apprehended and imprisoned here, were delivered up to the Executive Authority of that colony".⁶⁵ These cases left no traces in official archives. Extradition of enslaved people was, it appears, based on a principle of unregulated collaboration between colonial governments.

Another crucial issue for the island's enslaved people concerned manumission, their only legal path to freedom. As with banishment, there was no written Swedish law regulating it. The French slave laws provided mechanisms to manumit enslaved people, but these were not included in the borrowed statutes. At St Barthélemy, a practice developed through a mixture of imported customs and local decisions. The most common manumissions among the early cases were when white men freed Black women or their children. Two of these involved the colony's first governors freeing their enslaved people upon departure to Sweden. Governor Rayalin, a week before leaving the colony for good in 1787, granted freedom to the 27-year-old enslaved woman Marie Rose, born on Martinique.⁶⁶ Rayalin may have purchased her for the purpose of providing sexual services. The next governor, Rosenstein, bought Jenny Bruzette and her infant daughter in October 1787. The girl's name, Anna Lovisa Ulrika (Lovisa Ulrika was Gustav III's mother), was very Swedish-sounding, and she was most probably Rosenstein's daughter. He manumitted Jenny and her daughter a few weeks later.⁶⁷ Before returning to Sweden in 1790, he gave Jenny money and a piece of land in Gustavia. The way in which the letters of manumission were drawn up shows how the court borrowed laws and procedures from neighbouring islands. In Marie Rose's case, the document was in French and borrowed phrases from French manumission documents. Rosenstein had bought Jenny and Anna Lovisa Ulrika from a Kittian man, and they were thus freed using the wording standard in British manumission documents.

As in the case of transportation, manumission developed as a legal custom before it became part of the written corpus of legislation and decrees available to St Barthélemy's authorities. Governor Rosenstein requested that the government in Stockholm confirm the council's authority to issue letters of manumission (*fribrev*) in May 1789 and to tax them. He justified his proposal by referring to customs of "all foreign islands".⁶⁸ Rosenstein's plea was granted, and a manumission tax was introduced in 1790. Incidentally, the Stockholm decision instituting this tax reiterated the king's exhortation to trade enslaved people through the Swedish colony. The tax for manumitting an enslaved person born at St

Barthélemy was set at 24 Spanish dollars. The tax was lowered in 1800 to 16 Spanish dollars.⁶⁹ The decrease was motivated by the argument that enslavers chose to free their enslaved people in other jurisdictions to avoid the Swedish fees. As with other tariffs, it should be high enough to generate revenue, but low enough not to prompt enslavers to shift their business to other islands, in this case, the trade in freedom.

Another way enslaved people attempted to achieve freedom was to escape the island, despite numerous local laws regulating their movement.⁷⁰ Judging from their frequent reiterations, these laws were not very successful in stopping enslaved people from escaping and moving between the islands. When slavery was re-established in the French colonies by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802, it had drastic effects.⁷¹ Many free Black people escaped Guadeloupe to avoid being re-enslaved, and many of them arrived at St Barthélemy. In July 1802, the St Barthélemy government issued an ordinance prohibiting the immigration of Black people. The new law was justified in the preamble: "With respect to the large number of black and coloured persons that have arrived here after the recent troubles at Guadeloupe, the Council finds it [the new law] necessary for the safety and order".⁷² The law itself did not mention that the rationale was to stop "black and coloured persons" from escaping re-enslavement. The fear of the increased mobility of the Black population was a recurring theme in the Caribbean legislation of the period.⁷³

Another issue troubling Swedish authorities on St Barthélemy was the question of whether enslaved people were allowed to give testimony in court. This is also obvious from question number 12 in the St Thomas questionnaire: "Can slaves testify against whites, and in what circumstances? Are slaves baptised?"⁷⁴ To be able to testify in a Swedish court, the witness needed to be able to show some knowledge of Christianity and to be baptised. Slave testimony was discussed throughout the Caribbean, and in contemporary historiography, such testimonies are an essential source.⁷⁵ Slave testimonies were necessary to prosecute crimes within the enslaved communities, but when white people were involved, it immediately became more complicated. According to the original 1685 French *Code noir*, enslaved people were not allowed to testify in cases concerning white people. No such rule was included in the St Barthélemy law in the early 1800s. In contrast, the Swedish metropolitan code of 1734 prohibited servants from testifying against their employers, except in cases of grave crimes when no other witnesses were present.⁷⁶

A case from the year 1800 is illustrative of how the legislative process involved both inter-island customs and trans-Atlantic correspondence.

The Italian sailor Matteo Antonetti had killed the Swedish carpenter Eric Hellström in a street brawl. The only person witnessing the fight was the enslaved man Victor, who ran a "grog-shop" in Gustavia. The court needed his testimony to be able to condemn Antonetti. White immigrants to St Barthélemy hailed from various jurisdictions and undoubtedly brought diverse understandings of jurisprudence to the island. Three of the elected members of the court, merchants from England, Scotland and Naples, claimed that according to the French *Code noir*, an enslaved could never testify against a white person, and that they were never allowed as witnesses on the surrounding islands. They preferred to acquit Antonetti rather than to enable an enslaved person to give testimony against white people. The court voted on the matter, and as another French member voted with the three Swedish officials, Victor's testimony was allowed, and Antonetti was sentenced to death. French colonial authorities had been forced to modify the original 1685 law and permit slave testimony in some instances.⁷⁷ The court admitted Victor's testimony by referring to this 1738 French *Code de la Martinique* ordinance that permitted the enslaved to testify when there were no white witnesses, except for testifying against their enslaver. Again, legal issues in St Barthélemy were resolved by turning towards archipelagic precedents.

Diverging Colonial and Metropolitan Jurisprudence

While archipelagic legal customs heavily influenced the law in St Barthélemy, the island diverged from conventional Caribbean punitive practices regarding the death penalty. Capital sentences had to be confirmed by the Supreme Court, and Antonetti's death sentence was sent to Stockholm for review. The Supreme Court noted the vote concerning slave testimony and sternly instructed the St Barthélemy court henceforth to follow the French law of 1738 without further discussion.⁷⁸ The death sentence was confirmed, but when it eventually reached the island, Antonetti had already died in prison. The Stockholm Supreme Court thus confirmed not only the local Swedish slave code, but also upheld the preceding French colonial legislation in relation to the Black population in the Swedish colony when no Swedish law could be used. That the Swedish compulsory review of death sentences by the Stockholm Supreme Court was exceptional was confirmed during the British occupation of St Barthélemy in 1801–1802. It was the first Swedish law to be abolished by Commander Thomas Trigge, who wanted to be able to execute criminals without lengthy transatlantic correspondence. According to Trigge,

abolishing the Stockholm control mechanism was necessary to "render the attainment of public justice more certain and effectual and to afford that vigour and energy to the laws, which may the better tend to prevent them being violated with impunity".⁷⁹

The archipelagic law-making in St Barthélemy received little recognition in Sweden, where it was often viewed as a result of the island's legal officers lacking expertise. The Supreme Court found that the St Barthélemy government had become an uncontrolled law-making body. Reviewing another case in 1801, the Supreme Court criticised the St Barthélemy court's autocratic tendencies, noting that the Swedish Caribbean judge "dared to entertain and express the utterly erroneous opinion and conviction that he and the council are subordinate legislators".⁸⁰ Considering the relatively few cases that went to appeal in Stockholm, it is noteworthy how many sentences were criticised by the Supreme Court. The St Barthélemy court was probably the most often reprimanded lower court in Sweden in this period.⁸¹ Still, while criticising the St Barthélemy court, the Stockholm authorities also confirmed the validity of slave laws from the surrounding archipelago. Even though the Supreme Court often found the St Barthélemy court lacking, its objections were focused on procedural issues, rather than the distinct legal issues of slavery.

Despite its criticism, the Supreme Court maintained its support for the racialised societal order of St Barthélemy. In 1812, the St Barthélemy governor requested a decision from Stockholm on whether he could extend voting rights for council membership to the island's free Black inhabitants. The criteria for voting rights were freedom and property ownership, which many free Black tradespeople and merchants satisfied. The issue was discussed in Stockholm: "To deny free coloured in possession of houses or land voting rights might seem unjust, however, West Indian customs might presently require this rule, and a deviation from it might, even if it would not cause the atrocities that occurred on St. Domingo [Haiti], lead to all property falling into the hands of free coloured."⁸² The referral to West Indian customs was grounded on the fear of a Black revolution and the economic advancement of the class of free Black people. The Haitian Revolution had been abundantly reported on in Sweden during the previous decade, and the Stockholm authorities judged that denying free Black civil rights was necessary to avoid similar developments on the Swedish island.⁸³ Revealingly, when the decision was communicated to the governor in St Barthélemy, this reasoning was omitted. The denial of voting rights was motivated by technicalities and by examples from

the Dutch island of St Eustatius.⁸⁴ The authorities in Stockholm, as these incidents demonstrate, found themselves participating in the creation of a distinctly Caribbean and transnational legal regime.

St Barthélemy was a small colony, and Sweden may well have been the weakest colonial power in the Caribbean. This weakness was not only military and economic, but also administrative in nature. Most faults Stockholm authorities found with the administration in St Barthélemy, such as the critique from the Supreme Court, mirrored the lack of attention the same authorities showed by not equipping the colony with sufficient resources and educated personnel.

That colonial judicial systems were deficient in comparison to those of the metropolises is often taken for granted.⁸⁵ In the Swedish case, such an assertion would not be unfounded, as has been demonstrated. Yet, and with the risk of repetition, the primary legal distinction between the metropolises and their Antillean territories was slavery. The objective of colonial governance was to create societies wholly different from those of the metropolises, and here also the Swedes were successful. Swedish colonial judicial practice exhibited some differences when compared with the surrounding territories; one was the limited use of capital punishment. But this was an exception. The rapid adoption of many of the region's customs demonstrates how a newcomer nation reproduced a system whose main objective was to dominate the enslaved and free Black population. From a Caribbean perspective, there was little that was exceptional about how Sweden adapted to slavery. Nonetheless, the ad-hoc nature of the legislative process — and the possibility of connecting it to events in the circum-Caribbean — makes it an interesting example of how slavery was managed during a few turbulent decades at a turning point of the transatlantic slave trade and plantation system.

NOTES

1. Waller.
2. All translations are made by the author. Translated from Swedish, Stockholm, Swedish National Archives (hereafter SNA), S:t Barthélemysamlingen (hereafter SBS), vol. 1A, Kongl. May:ts nådiga instruction för [. . .] Friherre Salomon Rayalin [. . .] Commendant på öen S:t Barthélemy. . . , 22 September 1784.
3. *Convention*.
4. SNA, SBS, vol. 1B, 1 January 1786, 29 July 1786, 9 February 1787, 6 July 1787.

5. Translated from Swedish, Stockholm, Riksarkivarieämbetet, Antikvarisk-topografiska arkivet, Vitterhetsakademiens handskriftssamling, F 16:20, Hjalmar Jacob Eliasson Röhl, Wördsamt Memorial, 14 January 1786.
6. Maher.
7. Translated from Swedish, *Kongl. Maj:ts Nådiga Reglemente*.
8. Several colonial powers' legislation is compiled and published. In the Dutch case, Smidt; in the French *Recueil d'édits*; Durand-Molard. For bibliography on British colonial law, see e.g. Rugemer.
9. See e.g. Oostindie and Roitman; Mulich.
10. Benton; Benton and Ross.
11. In the British-American case, see e.g. Bilder.
12. SNA, SBS, vol. 1A, Order book 1784–1787, 23 August 1785. French original: 3 August 1722, Déclaration du roi concernant les terres concédées aux Isles du Vent de l'Amérique, in *Code*, 258–60.
13. Translated from French, SNA, SBS, vol. 1A, Order book 1784–1787, 24 August 1785.
14. SNA, SBS, vol. 1A, Order book 1784–1787, 13 May 1785, concerning an enslaved healer; SNA, SBS, vol. 1A, Order book 1784–1787, 28 December 1786, against enslaved making fires; France, Aix-en-Provence, Archives nationales d'outre-mer (hereafter ANOM), Fonds Suédois de Saint-Barthélemy (hereafter FSB), vol. 191, 30 January 1819, against "mixed" dances in the countryside.
15. SNA, SBS, vol. 1A, Order book 1784–1787, 4 April 1786. Document with signatures, ANOM, FSB, vol. 325, 4 April 1786.
16. Simonsen and Christensen.
17. SNA, SBS, vol. 23, Instructions from Stockholm 7 September 1785 answering the governor's letter of 20 May 1785.
18. ANOM, COL C8A, vols. 85–86, 4 March 1785, 18 June 1786, 11 April 1786.
19. ANOM, FSB, vol. 325, 4 July 1785, and several reiterations the following months.
20. SNA, SBS, vol. 1B, 1 June 1786.
21. Petit de Viévine, *Code de la Martinique*; Petit de Viévine, *Supplément*; Petit de Viévine, *Second supplément*.
22. Petit de Viévine, *Second supplément*, 324–34; Durand-Molard, vol. 3, no 627, 568–81.
23. Bibliography on the 1685 edict in e.g. Niort and Richard, *L'Édit*; Charlin.
24. Desalles.
25. Niort.
26. *The Report of St. Bartholomew*, no. 102, 11 April 1807.
27. Both the French and English quotations are transcribed from a manuscript in ANOM, FSB, vol. 134.
28. Translated from Swedish, SNA, SBS, vol. 1B, 6 July 1787.
29. Translated from Swedish, SNA, SBS, vol. 2B, 23 January 1792.

30. Translated from Swedish, SNA, Handel och sjöfart, vol. 169, 10 April 1796.
31. Translated from Swedish, SNA, SBS, vol. 1B, 6 July 1787.
32. Ibid.
33. Anners, 143–66.
34. Anners; Sundin.
35. Thomasson, *Svarta*, 11–16.
36. E.g. ANOM, FSB, vol. 165, 13 July 1812.
37. ANOM, FSB, vol. 143, 18 June 1799.
38. Lofquist; Simonsen, *Slave Stories*; Paton, *No Bond*; Paton, "Punishment"; Vidal. Judicial mass executions of the enslaved were common after slave rebellions, see e.g.: Blackman and McLaughlin; Craton; Viotti da Costa; Westergaard.
39. *Götheborgs Allehanda*, 5 August 1785. The law limiting the punishment was: *Ordonnance du Roi concernant les Procureurs et Économes-gérans des Habitations situées aux Isles sous le Vent*, in Moreau de Saint-Méry, vol. 6, 655–67, titre II, art. 9.
40. The Code of 1734, Book on Commerce [Handelsbalk], ch. 14 § 5; On *Tjänstehjónsstadgan* see Harnesk.
41. The most updated overview of Danish colonial judicial practice is Simonson, *Slave Stories*.
42. Translated from Danish, Olsen, 302.
43. For the Dutch case: Jordaan, 69. See also van der Velden. The most recent overview of French colonial jurisprudence is Houlemare. See also Wood.
44. Translated from French, Petit de Viéville, *Code*, i.
45. *Real Cédula*. On reform of Spanish slave law, see: Lucena Salmoral, esp. ch. 5.
46. On the challenges arising from trying to adapt metropolitan law to a Caribbean context, see: Simonsen, *Sovereignty*; Christensen, *Against the Law*.
47. Translated from French, Mignot, 65.
48. Translated from Swedish, this and the following quotation, Euphrasén, 51.
49. Translated from Swedish, Euphrasén, 25.
50. Translated from Swedish, ANOM, FSB, vol. 147, 30 June 1802.
51. E.g.: An unnamed manumitted girl re-enslaved for having hidden the fugitive girl Pauline, from St Barthélemy council protocols (7 June 1790) in private ownership, available digitised here: <https://swecarcol.uu.se/view/30241>; Black man George Devent re-enslaved to pay his debts, ANOM, FSB, vol. 130, 2 December 1797.
52. 6 July 1804, published in *The Report of St. Bartholomew*, no. 16, 19 July 1804; 17 August 1814, published in *The Report of St. Bartholomew*, no. 160, 27 August 1814.
53. Pålsson.

54. Thomasson, *Svarta*, 28–46.
55. Translated from Swedish, ANOM, FSB, vol. 148, 11 March 1803.
56. Ibid.
57. Translated from French, SNA, SBS, vol. 1A, Order book 1784–1787, 13 May 1785.
58. Translated from Swedish, ANOM, FSB, vol. 147, 30 June 1802. Question number 45.
59. Bassi; Craton; Gómez; Thomasson, "Révoltes et résistances".
60. Thomasson, "Black Healers".
61. ANOM, FSB, vol. 256, 11 March 1812.
62. Translated from Swedish, ANOM, FSB, vol. 169, 5 February 1813.
63. ANOM, FSB, vol. 169, 5 February 1813.
64. *The Report of St. Bartholomew*, no. 5, 30 April 1804.
65. *The West Indian*, no. 3, 14 July 1827.
66. ANOM, FSB, vol. 299, 16 April 1787.
67. ANOM, FSB, vol. 250, 27 October 1787.
68. Translated from Swedish, SNA, SBS, vol. 1B, 15 May 1789.
69. ANOM, FSB, vol. 144, 14 April 1800.
70. E.g.: ANOM, FSB, vol. 142, 12 August 1797; SNA, SBS, vol. 16, 6 July 1804; 17 August 1814, printed in *The Report of St. Bartholomew*, no. 171, 26 November 1814; SNA, SBS, vol. 9A, 20 September 1825.
71. Niort and Richard, "Bonaparte".
72. Translated from Swedish, ANOM, FSB, vol. 147, 30 July 1802. The law itself printed in French in *The Report of St. Bartholomew*, no. 29, 17 November 1804.
73. Jansen; Freund.
74. Translated from Swedish, ANOM, FSB, vol. 147, 30 June 1802.
75. Aljoe; Zacek; White and Burnard; Régent, Gonfrier and Maillard; Rogers.
76. The Code of 1734, Book on Judicial Procedure [Rätttegångsbalk], ch. 17 § 7.
77. 15 July 1738, *Ordonnance du Roi, Sur le témoignage des Nègres contre les Blancs*, in Petit de Viéville, *Code*, 298.
78. SNA, Justitierevisionen, Besvärs & ansökningsmål, Utslagshandlingar, Case no. 77 ½, 16 September 1801.
79. ANOM, FSB, vol. 146, 7 July 1801.
80. Translated from Swedish, Wedberg, *Konungens*, 146.
81. Wedberg, *Tärningkast*, 95.
82. Translated from Swedish, SNA, Handels och Finance Expeditionen, Statsrådsprotocoller, 11 March 1812.
83. Thomasson, "Sweden and Haiti".
84. ANOM, FSB, vol. 256, 11 March 1812.
85. Herzog, 189.

WORKS CITED

- Aljoe, Nicole N. "'Going to Law': Legal Discourse and Testimony in Early West Indian Slave Narratives". *Early American Literature* 46, no. 2 (2011): 351–81.
- Anners, Erik. *Humanitet och rationalism: Studier i upplysningstidens strafflagsreformer - särskilt med hänsyn till Gustav III:s reformlagstiftning*. Stockholm: Nordiska bokhandeln, 1965.
- Bassi, Ernesto. *An Aqueous Territory. Sailor Geographies and New Granada's Transimperial Greater Caribbean*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Benton, Lauren and Richard Ross, eds. *Legal Pluralism and Empires, 1500–1850*. New York: New York University Press, 2013.
- Benton, Lauren. *A Search for Sovereignty. Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Bilder, Mary Sarah. *The Transatlantic Constitution: Colonial Legal Culture and the Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Blackman, Paul H., and Vance McLaughlin. "Mass legal executions in America up to 1865". *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés / Crime, History & Societies* 8, no. 2 (2004): 33–61.
- Charlin, Frédéric. "Le Code noir de 1685 entre compilation et codification du droit colonial esclavagiste français". *Cahiers des Annales de la Mémoire* 19 (2021): 118–37.
- Christensen, Rasmus. "'Against the Law of God, of Nature and the Secular World': Conceptions of Sovereignty in Early Colonial St. Thomas, 1672–1680". *Scandinavian Journal of History* 46, no. 4 (2021): 476–92.
- Convention provisoire pour servir d'explication de la Convention préliminaire de Commerce & de Navigation du 25 Avril 1741, entre le Roi et le Roi de Suède. Conclue à Versailles le 1er Juillet 1784. Ratifiées par le Roi le 26 du même mois : Et par le Roi de Suède à Stockholm [sic] le 10 Août suivant*. Printed with very slight variations both in Paris and Stockholm, 1784.
- Craton, Michael. *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982.
- Dessalles, Pierre-François-Régis. *Les Annales du Conseil souverain de la Martinique*, edited and commented by Bernard Vonglis. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995.
- Durand-Molard, M., ed. *Code de la Martinique. Nouvelle édition*, 5 vols. Saint-Pierre, 1807–1814.
- Euphrasén, Bengt A. *Beskrifning öfver svenska vestindiska ön St. Barthelemi, samt öarne St. Eustache och St. Christopher*. Stockholm, 1795. German translation Göttingen, 1798.
- Freund, Heather. "'A Place of Refuge to Republicans and Royalists': The French Revolution in British Dominica". *Journal of British Studies* 63, no. 3 (2024): 643–63.
- Gómez, Pablo F. *The Experiential Caribbean. Creating Knowledge and Healing in the*

- Early Modern Atlantic. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017.
- Harnesk, Börje. *Legofolk: Drängar, pigor och bönder i 1700- och 1800-talens Sverige*. Umeå: Umeå universitet, 1990.
- Herzog, Tamar. "Judges in Colonial Spanish America". In *Le juge et l'outre-mer: Phinée le devin ou les leçons du passé*, edited by Bernard Durand and Martine Fabre, 169–89. Lille: Centre d'histoire judiciaire, 2005.
- Houllemare, Marie. *Justices d'Empire: la répression dans les colonies françaises au XVIIIe siècle*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2024.
- Jansen, Jan C. "Aliens in a Revolutionary World: Refugees, Migration Control and Subjecthood in the British Atlantic, 1790s–1820". *Past & Present* 255, no. 1 (2022): 189–231.
- Jordaan, Han. "Free Blacks and Coloureds and the Administration of Justice in Eighteenth-century Curaçao". *New West Indian Guide* 84, nos. 1–2 (2010): 63–86.
- Kongl. Maj:ts Nådiga Reglemente, Angående Styrelsen å Ön St. Barthelemy i West-Indien. Stockholm, 1786.
- Lofquist, William S. "Identifying the Condemned: Reconstructing and Analyzing the History of Executions in The Bahamas". *International Journal of Bahamian Studies* 16 (2010): 19–34.
- Lucena Salmoral, Manuel. *Los Códigos Negros de la América Española*. Alcalá: Universidad de Alcalá, 1996. French translation, Paris, 2005.
- Maher, Julianne. *The Survival of People and Languages: Schooners, Goats and Cassava in St. Barthélemy, French West Indies*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013.
- Mignot, Dominique A. "Droit romain aux Antilles: la pratique des affranchissements". *Bulletin de la Société d'histoire de la Guadeloupe*, nos. 121–22 (1999): 33–73.
- Moreau de Saint-Méry, Médéric-Louis-Élie, ed. *Loix et constitutions des colonies françaises de l'Amérique sous le vent*, 6 vols. Paris, 1784–1790.
- Mulich, Jeppe. *In a Sea of Empires: Networks and Crossings in the Revolutionary Caribbean*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- Niort, Jean-François. "De l'ordonnance royale de mars 1685 à l'ordonnance locale sur la police générale des Nègres de décembre 1783: remarques sur le 'Code Noir' et son évolution juridique aux Îles françaises du Vent sous l'Ancien Régime". *Bulletin de la Société d'histoire de la Guadeloupe*, no. 173 (2016): 37–52.
- Niort, Jean-François and Jérémy Richard. "Bonaparte et le processus du rétablissement de l'esclavage à la Guadeloupe (1802–1803): essai de reconstitution à partir de découvertes archivistiques récentes". *Cahiers aixois d'histoire des droits de l'outre-mer français*, no. 4 (2012): 251–91.
- . "L'Édit royal de mars 1685 touchant la police des îles de l'Amérique française dit 'Code Noir': comparaison des éditions anciennes à partir de la version 'Guadeloupe'". *Bulletin de la Société d'histoire de la Guadeloupe*, no. 156 (2010): 73–89.
- Olsen, Poul Erik. "Danske Lov på de vestindiske øer". In *Danske og Norske Lov i 300 år*, edited by Ditlev Tamm, 289–321. Copenhagen: Jurist-og Økonomforbundets forlag, 1983.

- Oostindie, Gert, and Jessica V. Roitman, eds. *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1680–1800: Linking Empires, Bridging Borders*. Leiden: Brill, 2014.
- Pålsson, Ale. "Smugglers Before the Swedish Throne: Political Activity of Free People of Color in Early Nineteenth-Century St Barthélemy". *Atlantic Studies* 14, no. 13 (2017): 318–35.
- Paton, Diana. *No Bond but the Law: Punishment, Race, and Gender in Jamaican State Formation, 1780–1870*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.
- . "Punishment, Crime, and the Bodies of Slaves in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica". *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 4 (2001): 923–54.
- Petit de Viéville, Jacques, ed. *Code de la Martinique*. Saint-Pierre, 1767.
- . *Second supplément au Code de la Martinique*. Saint-Pierre, 1786.
- . *Supplément au Code de la Martinique*. Saint-Pierre, 1772.
- Real Cédula de Su Majestad sobre la educación, trato y ocupaciones de los esclavos en todos sus dominios de Indias e islas Filipinas, bajo las reglas que se expresan*. Madrid, 1789.
- Recueil d'édits, déclarations et arrêts de sa Majesté, concernant l'administration de la justice & la police des colonies françaises de l'Amérique, & les engagés*. Paris, 1765.
- Régent, Frédéric, Gilda Gonfier and Bruno Maillard. *Libres et sans fers: paroles d'esclaves français : Guadeloupe, Îles Bourbon (Réunion), Martinique*. Paris: Fayard, 2015.
- Rogers, Dominique. *Voix d'esclaves: Antilles, Guyane et Louisiane françaises, XVIIIe–XIXe siècles*. Paris: Karthala, 2015.
- Rugemer, Edward B. "The Development of Mastery and Race in the Comprehensive Slave Codes of the Greater Caribbean during the Seventeenth Century". *William and Mary Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (2013): 429–58.
- Simonsen, Gunvor. *Slave Stories: Law, Representation, and Gender in the Danish West Indies*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2017.
- . "Sovereignty, Mastery, and Law in the Danish West Indies, 1672–1733". *Itinerario* 43, no. 2 (2019): 283–304.
- Simonsen, Gunvor, and Rasmus Christensen. "Together in a Small Boat: Slavery's Fugitives in the Lesser Antilles". *William and Mary Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (2023): 611–46.
- Smidt, J. T. et al., eds. *West Indisch plakaatboek, vols. 1–2, Publikaties en andere wetten alsmede de oudste resoluties betrekking hebbende op Curaçao, Aruba, Bonaire, 1638–1816; West Indisch plakaatboek, vol. 3, Publikaties en andere wetten betrekking hebbende op St. Maarten, St. Eustatius, Saba, 1648/1681–1816*. All volumes Amsterdam: Emmering, 1978–1979. The final volume, "Plakaatboek Guyana 1670–1816", was never printed but is accessible at: <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/retroboeken/guyana>
- Sundin, Jan. *För Gud, staten och folket: Brott och rättskipning i Sverige 1600–1840*. Stockholm: Institutet för rättshistorisk forskning, 1992.
- Thomasson, Fredrik. "Black Healers, Surgeons and 'Witches': Medicine, Mobility and Knowledge Exchange in Swedish St Barthélemy 1785–1815". *Social History of Medicine* 35, no. 1 (2022): 49–71.

- . "Révoltes et résistances dans la Caraïbe scandinave". *Revue du Philanthrope* 9 (2020): 125–43.
- . *Svarta S:t Barthélemy: Människoöden i en svensk koloni 1785–1847*. Stockholm: Natur & kultur, 2022.
- . "Sweden and Haiti, 1791–1825: Revolutionary Reporting, Trade, and the Fall of Henry Christophe". *Journal of Haitian Studies* 24, no. 2 (2018): 4–35.
- van der Velden, B.D. *Ik lach met Grotius, en alle die prullen van boeken. Een rechtsgeschiedenis van Curaçao*. Willemstad: Carib, 2011.
- Vidal, Cécile. "Violence, Slavery and Race in Early English and French America". In *The Cambridge World History of Violence, Volume III 1500–1800 CE*, edited by Robert Antony, Stuart Carroll and Caroline Dodds Pennock, 36–54. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- Viotti da Costa, Emília. *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Waller, Sture M. "Det svenska förvärvet av S:t Barthélemy. Huvuddragen av de svensk-franska förhandlingarna och parternas syften". *Historisk tidskrift* 73 (1953): 231–55.
- Wedberg, Birger. *Konungens högsta domstol*, vol. 1. Stockholm: Norstedt, 1922.
- . *Tärningkast om liv och död: Rättshistoriska skisser*. Stockholm: Norstedt, 1935.
- Westergaard, Waldemar. "Account of the Negro Rebellion on St. Croix, Danish West Indies, 1759". *Journal of Negro History* 11, no. 1 (1926): 50–61.
- White, Sophie and Trevor Burnard, eds. *Hearing Enslaved Voices: African and Indian Slave Testimony in British and French America, 1700–1848*. New York: Routledge, 2020.
- Wood, Laurie. *Archipelago of Justice: Law in France's Early Modern Empire*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020.
- Zacek, Natalie. "Voices and Silences: The Problems of Slave Testimony English West Indian Law Court". *Slavery and Abolition* 24, no. 3 (2003): 24–39.

An Eastern Caribbean Maritime Network:

The Bigard Family of St Barths, 1802–1829

FELICIA J. FRICKE*

The free ports of the colonial era Caribbean were cosmopolitan, multilingual environments that were important not only in times of war, but also for the day-to-day survival of Caribbean people. The port of Gustavia, on the Swedish island of St Barthélemy (also known as St Barths or St Barts), was one such place in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Its wide-ranging trade network was essential for supporting the populations of the small Eastern Caribbean islands, whose steep slopes and dry soils were often unsuitable for large-scale agriculture. Gustavia thereby helped to create the Eastern Caribbean as a region shaped by European colonialism. Upon taking over St Barths from the French in 1784, the Swedish government was keen to attract colonists who could contribute skills and labour to the growing town.¹

One such contributor would be Balthazar Bigard senior. An eccentric, political, opportunistic, religious, and successful man born on the south coast of France, he would make Gustavia the site of his descendants' great successes and failures, as part of a maritime family. Indeed, the Bigards in the early nineteenth century allow us a window into how family and kin networks undergirded the early nineteenth-century trade system of the Eastern Caribbean. Their activities and experiences, placed within the wider context of trade from free ports in this region, demonstrate how island residents in a diverse archipelago grappled with the fluidity or ambiguity of nationality and race, and with the chances for prosperity

* The research for this article was supported by the European Research Council, under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No. ERC-2019-COG 863671).

or ruin offered by the colonial milieu. An evaluation of the human face of trade and exchange in this period and region expands our knowledge of the maritime family as one of the institutions that facilitated inter-island connections, and of the motivations that drove trading decision-making. As a result, it adds a significant element to the understanding of inter-island trade in the Caribbean.

The early nineteenth century has been neglected in historical studies of trade in the Caribbean for several reasons, including a focus on the social complexity, economic boom and political upheaval of the islands in the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century, these processes began to collapse; the sugar boom was over, and the slave trade and slavery were gradually being abolished. However, free ports continued to perform an important function in the trade network, which while reduced in terms of its intercontinental scope, was still vital for the survival and well-being of island communities. Additionally, most prior studies of trade in the Caribbean have focused on the larger imperial powers and islands. Over the past decade, works by Fredrik Thomasson, Ale Pålsson, Victor Wilson, Han Jordaan, Pernille Røge, and Grant Kleiser have made a substantial contribution to the development of this field on the small Danish, Dutch and Swedish islands.² However, publications mapping this new area have often remained (necessarily) at the large scale and have often focused on economics and politics, without delving substantially into the individual lives of the sailors, shipwrights, sailmakers, merchants, brokers and other workers without whom the goals of these free ports could not have been achieved. It was the activities of these "sinew" populations that bound the Eastern Caribbean together across empires, islands and nationalities.³

The sailors on board the barques, brigs, galliots and schooners that sailed the inter-island routes in the Eastern Caribbean were often part of a crew that included several men from the same family or kin network. For example, in February 1827, the barque *Mary* left the port of Willemstad, Curaçao, with a crew of nine. Four of these men belonged to the same kin network; the master, the supercargo and two of the ordinary seamen were all members of the Hart family, and they enslaved the *Mary's* two ship's boys.⁴ Such personal social bonds of blood, friendship, marriage and enslavement, within and between islands, were key to the endurance of the wider trade system.⁵ In the Eastern Caribbean, these networks were perhaps even more important than elsewhere. It was at once a region that was essential in the development of colonialism, racial capitalism and empire; and a region that experienced unique challenges and opportunities in terms of resource scarcity, multilingualism and inter-imperial relations.

Travelling between spaces that belonged to different colonial empires and that had different trading needs, the Harts, Bigards and others like them connected this complex region over an expanse of water that they intimately knew. The worldview of the Eastern Caribbean sailor can perhaps be understood a little better by looking at Philip Hayward's concept of the "aquapelago", which foregrounds archipelagos' connection with the water that surrounds them. Communities in aquapelagos inhabit both land and water; they are impossible to separate from one another. This is particularly important where the aquapelagic islands are small, as in the Eastern Caribbean; limited resources necessitate actions in "the transitional zone between land and sea". Thus, they are "*performed entities [and] imagined entities*" that exist in the actions of humans on, in, and around landscapes and seascapes.⁶ Other scholars, such as Sharika Crawford and Ernesto Bassi, have examined Caribbean actors as inhabiting a "waterscape" or an "aqueous territory" with a focus upon the sea.⁷ Meanwhile, Jonathan Pugh's "landship" brings maritime culture onto the land, connecting both in the persistence of Barbados' intangible heritage.⁸ Hayward's aquapelago charts a middle way between these approaches, navigating a balance between land and sea. For the Eastern Caribbean, the connectedness of the islands with each other and with the water surrounding them was something that characterised the region. As Nathan Perl-Rosenthal and Margaret Hunt remind us, connections between land and sea shaped maritime communities and networks in the Caribbean and beyond.⁹ These connections occurred as families like the Bigards repeatedly crossed from island to island in their many small vessels.

This article explores Eastern Caribbean maritime families by focusing on the Bigard family of St Barths as an example of this important phenomenon. Using newspapers, government correspondence, harbour master records, travel narrative, notarial documents and muster rolls to study this family in their wider context, the essay moves beyond the abstractions of trade statistics and network analyses to provide what Marcus Rediker calls "a human history".¹⁰ To begin, we now turn to the free port of Gustavia, St. Barths, and explore the circumstances in which the Bigard family found themselves at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Trade from Gustavia in the Early Nineteenth Century

An overview of early nineteenth-century trade from the free port of Gustavia can be obtained from shipping data gathered by hand from the newspaper the *Report of St. Bartholomew* in 1804, and from the 1821 harbour master records in the *Fonds suédois de Saint-Barthélemy* archive. After the stifling of trade during British occupation between 1801 and 1802, there was a slow economic recovery.¹¹ This occurred despite the 1804 hurricane that destroyed twenty-five American and thirty-two Swedish vessels anchored at St Barths, representing a significant personal disaster for the maritime families based in Gustavia, probably including the Bigards.¹² That year, the *Report of St. Bartholomew* listed 704 origins for vessels entering Gustavia (see figure 1), although unfortunately, the outgoing vessels for 1804 were not listed in a systematic fashion, yielding only seven listed vessel destinations, none of which were in the Caribbean. Most incoming vessels were from "the Islands" (68 per cent), a generic term that could encompass both the Lesser Antilles and the Greater Antilles. The next largest groupings were vessels from North America (11 per cent) and the Lesser Antilles specifically (8 per cent). The most frequently named individual port was that of New York, followed by St Thomas (Danish) and Demerara (Dutch). The next most common Lesser Antillean ports of origin were Antigua (British) and Guadeloupe (French). Because of these data, it is likely that the term "the Islands" mostly included origins and destinations in the Lesser Antilles. The vessels arriving at Gustavia in 1804 carried goods such as flour, beef, pork, wine, lard and lumber from New York; cattle, wine and lignum vitae from St Thomas; sugar, rum, coffee, gin, molasses, tea and lard from Demerara; bread, candles, lard, soap, oil, sugar and molasses from Antigua; and cotton, coffee, jelly and sweetmeats from Guadeloupe.¹³ Gustavia's trade network was diverse both in terms of its destinations and in terms of the goods it transported.

The following years of the early nineteenth century saw several political developments that had an impact on trade networks and maritime actors across the Caribbean. Just two years after the hurricane that destroyed many of the vessels at St Barths, Napoleon's Berlin Decree of 1806 obstructed trade with Europe and forced merchants to find new markets in the Caribbean. In 1807, revolts in Spanish colonies began the struggle for Latin American independence that would temporarily boost free port commerce in the Caribbean.¹⁴ Between 1807 and 1809,

an embargo kept American vessels from trading in Spanish territories, forcing them to trade elsewhere.¹⁵ These circumstances benefited the trade at Swedish St Barths. For several years at the beginning of the nineteenth century, St Barths was the only free port in the Caribbean not under the control of the British.¹⁶ The 1810s, in particular 1812, came to be the peak of Gustavia's prosperity.¹⁷ This also coincided with the period in which Swedish presence in St Barths was greatest, between 1812 and 1815.¹⁸

During 1815, however, an economic decline caused by the end of the Napoleonic Wars began in Gustavia.¹⁹ In 1817, a committee representing those with commercial interests in the town wrote to the St Barths governor and the island council expressing concern about their ability to compete with the ports at St Thomas and St Eustatius.²⁰ They asked, "Shall our Harbour be frequented, or shall it be a blank sheet of water?" and requested lower import duties to encourage incoming vessels.²¹ Indeed, scholars have often noted that the Caribbean experienced an economic slump during the nineteenth century, but this environment was one in which actors at Eastern Caribbean free ports were sometimes able to take advantage of regional instabilities.²² The 1810s and 1820s saw a return to widespread privateering, and, although increasingly illegal, the slave trade continued.²³ Local maritime workers like the Bigard men were a part of these legal and illegal activities, flying the powerful British flag, or the useful neutral one of Sweden.²⁴

In 1821, therefore, St Barths' maritime community was experiencing these new circumstances. Shipping manifests from this year record 291 incoming vessels and 1,084 outgoing vessels (see figure 1). The most common regional vessel origins and destinations were the Lesser Antilles (origins 74 per cent; destinations 86 per cent) and North America (origins 16 per cent; destinations 5 per cent), while the most popular individual ports were at St Martin/Maarten (French/Dutch), St Kitts (British) and Anguilla (British), all within the Lesser Antilles. That year, vessels entering the port of Gustavia carried items such as sugar, rice, cotton and firewood from St Martin/Maarten; rum, sugar, molasses and fruit from St Kitts; and sugar, yams and sheep from Anguilla. Afterwards, vessels left Gustavia bound for St Martin with flour, potatoes, candles, cornmeal, herring, lime, nails and tobacco; St Kitts with flour, resin, corn, soap, peas and pork; and Anguilla with flour, corn, boards and ship's bread.²⁵ These items again represent a mixture of colonial produce and subsistence items, illustrating the complex and interdependent nature of trade networks in the Eastern Caribbean.

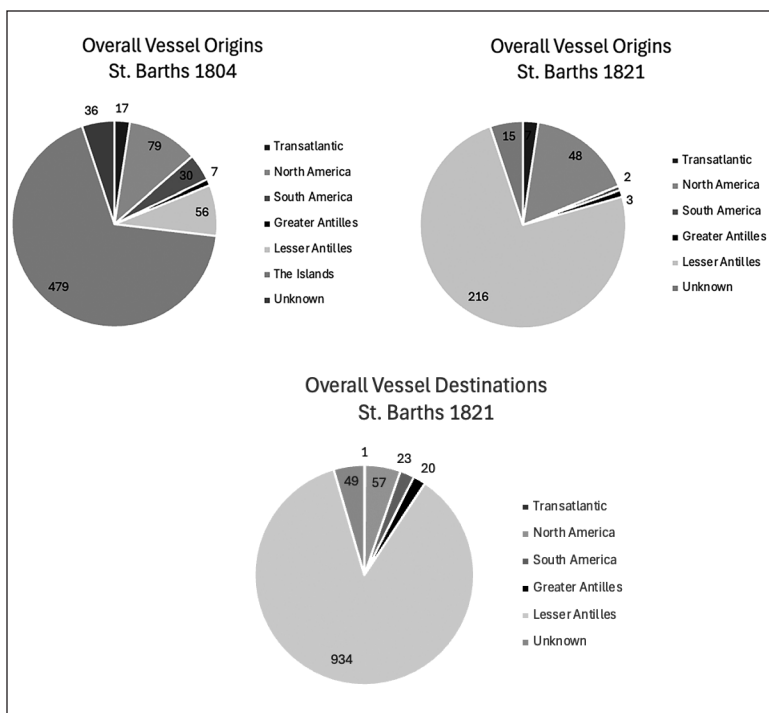


Figure 1. Vessel origins and destinations for Gustavia, St Barths, in 1804 and 1821. *Source:* Fonds Suédois de Saint-Barthélemy vol. 5 and 6

In both 1804 and 1821, Gustavia therefore had strong trading connections, mainly with the Lesser Antilles and North America. During these years, trade with the Lesser Antilles remained constant. Ports on neighbouring islands became more important than ports farther away, reflecting the increasingly micro-regional nature of Caribbean trade with the coming of peacetime, the abolition of the slave trade and falling sugar prices.

This can be compared with that of trade from other free ports in the region in the same period. At the Danish port of Charlotte Amalie (St Thomas) in 1804, data from the harbour master's records indicate that roughly half (48 per cent) of the vessels entering the port were from the Lesser Antilles. This is despite the fact that the most common single origin point for these vessels was Puerto Rico (Spanish), from which St Thomas often received goods that could not be produced locally.²⁶ Seventeen years later, in 1821, the trade to and from St Thomas was still very much directed towards Puerto Rico and the Lesser Antilles.²⁷ When addressing the intervening years, an interruption can be seen in 1812,

when Charlotte Amalie's trade connections with the Greater Antilles declined in favour of South America.²⁸ During this year, the most popular origin and destination was St Barths, a reflection of the 1812 Swedish trading boom, while traffic to Puerto Rico from St Thomas decreased. This may have been due to several factors, including an earthquake in Caracas and the possibility of the ongoing Latin American wars of independence encouraging free port trade with the mainland.²⁹ By 1816, however, trade returned to its previous pattern.³⁰

At the other end of the island chain, on the Dutch island of Curaçao, vessel origins and destinations in 1816 were largely from South America (origins 53 per cent; destinations 55 per cent) and the Lesser Antilles (origins 29 per cent; destinations 26 per cent). Shipping lists in the newspaper *De Curaçaosche Courant* often used the generic term *Spaansche kust* (Spanish coast) as an origin or destination, making precise analysis difficult (as in the case of St Barths with "the Islands"). Of the named origins and destinations, the most popular ports were all on the South American coast. The most popular Eastern Caribbean ports were Aruba (Dutch) and St Thomas (Danish). A few years later, in 1821, vessels entering and leaving the Curaçaoan port of Willemstad once again largely engaged with ports in South America (origins 48 per cent; destinations 45 per cent) and the Lesser Antilles (origins 25 per cent; destinations 28 per cent). Within the Lesser Antilles there was little change in dominant trade patterns for over half a decade; the most popular ports were once again Aruba and St Thomas.

Linda Rupert and Wim Klooster have noted the importance of trade between Curaçao and the Spanish coast, which often took place illegally in the many inlets, coves and waterways that fringe Venezuela and Colombia.³¹ Trade links with Aruba probably reflected not only its nearby location but also the fact that it was governed from Curaçao. Meanwhile, the close connection with St Thomas may have been due to the islands' shared status as free ports. For Curaçaoan merchants, the Danish colony was a place to access a different market; one that had closer geographical and trade links to nearby French, Swedish and British colonies. Of note is that the second early nineteenth-century British occupation of Curaçao took place between 1807 and 1815.³² Thus, the years assessed here represent the period immediately following the occupation and five years later. The stability of the trade patterns from Willemstad across this period indicates that whatever interruptions or changes the occupation may have caused were quickly overcome when the island was returned to the Dutch.

A comparison of St Barths' trade networks with those of St Thomas and Curaçao therefore indicates that during the early nineteenth century there was an enduring local, inter-imperial trade network between islands in the Eastern Caribbean. This trade network was one that responded to changes in circumstance, but had a preference for local trade that could be expected to return. The Bigards, as part of this wider network, had a diverse catalogue of destinations along the Spanish coast, across the French, British, Danish and Dutch islands, and to Puerto Rico. Swedish colonial records and the newspaper the *Report of St. Bartholomew* indicate that the Bigards owned or sailed aboard at least twenty-six different vessels out of St Barths between 1802 and 1829, with many more that they administered as merchants (see table 1).³³ Considering that there were only five Bigard seamen at St Barths in this period, the number of vessels at their disposal indicates their persistent and extensive engagement with the maritime world; they always had access to the sea. On and through these vessels, the Bigard family profited from the inter-island trade in sugar, iron, annatto extract, cloves, candles, cinnamon, ivory, lime, cotton and cocoa, sailing to Cayenne, Guadeloupe, St Thomas, Tobago, Dominica, St Kitts, Cumaná (Venezuela), Grenada, St Lucia, and Puerto Rico between 1804 and 1824.³⁴ Additionally, as ship owners, vessel masters and merchant traders, the Bigard brothers Philippe and Balthazar junior not only traded for themselves, but also provided a service transporting goods for third parties. On 2 June 1808, Philippe agreed to transport rum and handkerchiefs for Mademoiselle Rosiette Seran, under the care of an enslaved girl, and according to "la risqué de la Mer & de Guerre", upon whose delivery he expected to receive payment of 32 Gourdes.³⁵ On nearby St Eustatius, a Bigard family member entered the trade network by purchasing goods such as rice, wine, (sea) grapes and raisins at the auctions of prize ships in December 1826 and January 1827.³⁶

Goods entering St Barths from elsewhere on Bigard vessels were often colonial produce such as cotton and cocoa, while goods leaving the island under their care were often imported items such as money and crackers.³⁷ This underlines the role of the free port as a node for regional trade, and on a more granular level the role of these maritime families in distributing supplies among the less well-connected islands. The Bigard family was profiting not only from the transfer of cash crops, but also substantially from the kinds of items upon which Caribbean people relied for their daily survival and comfort. In doing so, the Bigards had to respond to the changing political, economic and environmental situation of the post-war Caribbean so that they could trade in the safest and most profitable way.

Table 1. Vessels owned, worked on or administered by members of the Bigard family network between 1802 and 1829.³⁸ The grey vessels were owned by the family.

No.	Date	Name of Vessel	Vessel Type	Name and Position of Relative	Destinations	Cargo
1	1802	Hazard	Boat	Louis (owner)	N/A	N/A
2	1803	Bird	Schooner	Philippe (master)	N/A	N/A
3	1804	Apollo	Sloop	N/A (master)	The Islands, Cayenne, St Thomas	Lime, iron, roucou, cloves, candles, cinnamon, rum, ivory, sugar
4	1805–1806	Hermione	Schooner (Swedish)	Louis (master) and Philippe (master)	Guadeloupe, Cayenne, Grenada	Lime, sugar, roucou, cotton, cocoa, gum, bales of paper, manioc flour, handkerchiefs
5	1805	Adventure	Schooner	N/A (master)	N/A	N/A
6	1806	Constance	Schooner	Louis (owner and master)	N/A	N/A
7	1810	Sophia	Schooner	Balthazar Jr (master)	The Islands	N/A
8	1811–1812	Susanna	Sloop (British)	Philippe (master)	St Thomas, Cumana, Puerto Rico	Cocoa
9	1812	Anthony	Schooner (English)	Balthazar Jr (master)	St Thomas, St Kitts	N/A
10	1814	Maria	Schooner	Balthazar Jr (owner) and Philippe (owner)	N/A	N/A

Table 1 continues on next page

No.	Date	Name of Vessel	Vessel Type	Name and Position of Relative	Destinations	Cargo
11	1814	Helsingborg	Brig	Honoré (master)	N/A	N/A
12	1814–1815	Tippo Saib	Sloop	Balthazar Jr (owner), Philippe (owner), John (master), Bastian (sailor), Ulek (cook)	N/A	N/A
13	1815	Helene	Schooner	John (second mate)	N/A	N/A
14	1815	John	Sloop	John (owner and master)	N/A	N/A
15	1817	Flying Fish	Little Boat	Philippe (owner)	N/A	N/A
16	1818	Fly	Boat	Philippe (co-owner with Thomas Gibbs)	N/A	N/A
17	1819	Josephine (formerly The Willing Man)	Galliot	Philippe (owner)	N/A	N/A
18	1819	Samuel Lamb	Sloop	Philippe (merchant)	N/A	Corn
19	1819	Enterprise	Schooner	Balthazar Jr (merchant)	Saint Lucia	Herring, mackerel, red oak staves, shingles
20	1820	Neptune	Sloop	Philippe (merchant)	Tobago	Salt
21	1820	St. Louis	Sloop	Philippe (merchant)	Guadeloupe	Ballast
22	1820	Regulator	Hermaphrodite Brig	Philippe (owner)	N/A	N/A

Table 1 continues on next page

No.	Date	Name of Vessel	Vessel Type	Name and Position of Relative	Destinations	Cargo
23	1820	Sophie	Schooner	Philippe (merchant)	St Thomas, Guadeloupe	Cod, mackerel, salmon, rice, lard, pork, tobacco
24	1820	Catherine	Brig	Philippe (owner)	N/A	N/A
25	1820	Rebecca	Schooner	Philippe (merchant)	Dominica	Flour
26	1820	Le Neptune	Boat	Balthazar Jr (merchant)	N/A	N/A
27	1820	La Sophia	Galliot	Balthazar Jr (merchant)	Guadeloupe	Beef, money
28	1820	Busy	Boat	Balthazar Jr (owner) and Philippe (owner)	N/A	N/A
29	1820	Westmanland	Brig	Philippe (owner)	N/A	N/A
30	1820	La Bonne Mère	Galliot	Balthazar Jr (owner) and Philippe (owner)	N/A	N/A
31	1821	World	Boat	Balthazar Jr (owner) and Philippe (owner)	N/A	N/A
32	1824	Governor Maxwell	Sloop	Balthazar Jr (owner) and Philippe (owner)	St Kitts	Corn, pears, shingles, crackers
33	1824	Eliza	Galliot	Balthazar Jr (owner) and Philippe (owner)	N/A	N/A
34	1824	Guillaume Tell	Boat	Balthazar Jr (owner)	N/A	N/A

Table 1 continues on next page

No.	Date	Name of Vessel	Vessel Type	Name and Position of Relative	Destinations	Cargo
35	1824	Eliza Ann	Schooner	Elisabeth or Eulalie? (merchant)	St Kitts	Lumber and corn
36	1827	Lady Codrington	Galliot	Elisabeth or Eulalie? (merchant)	N/A	N/A
37	1829	Amenaide (formerly Le Deux Frères)	Brig	Balthazar Jr (owner)	N/A	N/A

Source: ANOM FSB, AM 265; FSB Vol. 1, 24, 214, 379; FSB Vol. 4, 87, 101, 311, 329, 503, 584; FSB Vol. 11, 215; FSB Vol. 16, 440; FSB Vol. 14, 600; FSB Vol. 266, 34, 492; FSB Vol. 267, 194, 243, 338, 398, 401, 404, 417-18, 426; FSB Vol. 268, 90, 264, 288, 397; Rigarkivet 678 Den vestindiske regering, Guvernmentets St. Croix Afdeling, Gruppordenede sager 10. Næringsvæsen; Ind- & udgæde skibe i Charlotte Amalie 1804-1807; 3.81.647; *Report of St. Bartholomew* Issues 4, 16, 17, 26, 32, 48, 50, 54, 57, 63, 64, 66, 77, 89, 97, 119; *Saint Thomas Gazette* Issues IV(I) 1812-01-02, IV(LI) 1812-06-25, IV(LVI) 1812-07-13, V(LVII) 1812-07-16, IV(XLV) 1812-06-04; TNA CO 101/45, 66; Tingbrand, *Who Was Who in St. Bartholomew During the Swedish Epoch?*, 98

Their inter-island, inter-imperial identities and allegiances were both an advantage and a drawback in this regard.

French, Swedish, Caribbean: The Bigards as a Maritime Family

Gustavia became a free port under Swedish rule in 1786, in order to take advantage of the trade with nearby Martinique and Guadeloupe.³⁹ At the beginning of the nineteenth century, it had therefore been a free port for over a decade and had a well-established place in the trade networks of the Eastern Caribbean, with many French–Swedish connections. Like its Dutch and Danish predecessors, it was a cosmopolitan environment that facilitated exchange between islands of different colonial powers.⁴⁰ Sweden's neutral stance in the inter-imperial wars of the Caribbean was also advantageous.⁴¹ Trade in Gustavia in the 1780s was often small-scale and localised, with a focus on coastal exchange. However, this changed when war with Republican France broke out in 1793, providing more trading opportunities to St Barths' merchants. Regional instability led to a large number of inter-island migrants, including many French subjects who fled the revolutionary fighting in Martinique and Guadeloupe to shelter on St Barths.⁴² These migrants included several members of the Bigard family.

By the early nineteenth century, the Bigards therefore had an established reputation on the Swedish island, albeit one that would later be described as "fort mauvaise" (very bad).⁴³ The Marseille-born white patriarch of the Bigards, Balthazar senior and his wife Jeanne Louise Pépin, a free woman of colour from Guadeloupe (once described as a "commère" or gossip by an affectionate family friend), resided from 1798 with their extended household at a prime location in the port of Gustavia.⁴⁴ They had already been together for at least forty years by the time they got married in 1816.⁴⁵ This delay could have been for several reasons. For example, it is likely that the French Revolution had an important effect on interracial relationships in Guadeloupe, an island with which the Bigard couple was intimately connected. In one similar case from the French island, a freedwoman named Véronique and a white man named Jean-Baptiste Pineau, who had been together for more than three decades and had eleven children together, decided to finally marry in 1797. They were one of six interracial couples who got married in Basse-Terre between January 1795 and September 1797, while in the preceding twenty-five years there had been none.⁴⁶ The

climate was perhaps now right for Balthazar senior and Jeanne Louise to do the same. Alternatively, they may have had to wait for Balthazar's first wife, a French woman named Anne Charlotte Giraudin, to die, leaving him free to marry again.⁴⁷ Another potential reason might have been to ensure Jeanne Louise's rights over their joint property, while Balthazar senior lived as a hermit on nearby Île Fourchue.

A prosperous merchant and former French consul, Balthazar senior in fact owned the islet named Île Fourchue (also known as Five Islands), located to the north-west of St Barths. Here, he lived out his later years almost completely alone, occasionally visited by one of his many sons, and in 1821 by a single manatee (probably misidentified by contemporaries as a hippopotamus).⁴⁸ It is also highly likely that he was on Île Fourchue to facilitate piracy and smuggling, a practice that the Swedish authorities had neither the inclination nor the capability to effectively curtail beyond the shores of St Barths.⁴⁹ However, according to one observer, Balthazar senior's need for isolation was caused by the psychological toll of his participation in the French Revolution.⁵⁰ In the second half of the eighteenth century, Balthazar senior may have been one of the few French caboteurs, smugglers, and privateers working out of Guadeloupe. Such seamen had a network of relations with neutral and allied islands, such as St Eustatius, upon which the Guadeloupean revolutionaries very much depended.⁵¹ Indeed, in the Caribbean, the revolution hinged on its maritime capabilities and connections.⁵² In return, there was an incentive for local merchants and seamen to support the revolutionaries, who wanted to open up Pointe-à-Pitre and Basse-Terre to free trade.⁵³ Because of their attitude to trade, some contemporaries saw little difference between the revolutionary sailors and pirates.⁵⁴ This pattern of trade, illicit activity, and revolution would be repeated in the next generation of Bigards.

Balthazar senior and Jeanne Louise's family exemplifies the multi-lingual, inter-island and inter-national nature of the Eastern Caribbean maritime family. The next generation of Bigards, all Caribbean people of colour, included five sons (Philippe, Balthazar junior, Louis, Jean Sylvie and Honoré) and four daughters (Louise Ursule, Cécile, Elisabeth and Eulalie).⁵⁵ Philippe, a successful merchant, vessel master and ship owner, was born in or around the year 1777, on either Guadeloupe or St Eustatius.⁵⁶ Balthazar junior, his brother and business partner, was born in or around the year 1775 on Guadeloupe, and was the master of vessels such as the schooners *Sophia* in January 1810 and *Anthony* in June 1812.⁵⁷ In 1819, one of the many Bigard sons (probably either

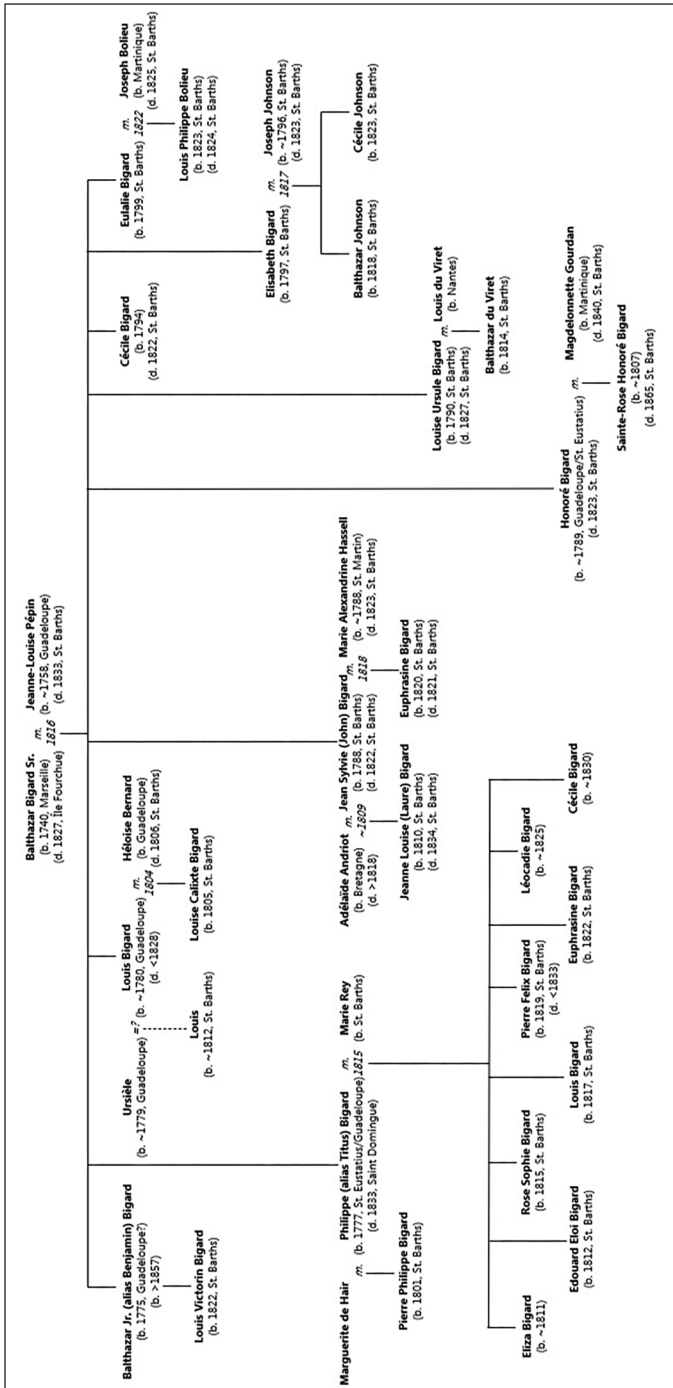


Figure 2. Bigard family tree showing three generations, after Jérôme Montoya and with additional information from documentary sources.⁵⁸
Source: ANOM FSB, AM 265; FSB Vol. 1, 24; FSB Vol. 266, 34; FSB Vol. 287, 78-80; FSB Vol. 289, 37, 123-125; FSB Vol. 292, 81; Mongey, vii, 90; Montoya, "Descendance de BIGARD Baltasar"

Philippe or Balthazar junior) was appointed as the temporary harbour master at Gustavia, and apparently used this position to engage in some illegal activities.

On 5 February that year, the governor of St Barths noted that the temporary harbour master, "a free colored man named Bigard had made many times to me false reports that pirates or corsairs who have dropped anchor [. . .] were [actually] regular vessels."⁵⁹ Three years later, in 1822, these two "bold and dashing" brothers, both in their forties at the time, would be heavily involved in an inter-island expedition that aimed to make Puerto Rico into an independent state, the Republic of Boricua (the island's Indigenous name).⁶⁰ The Bigard family's investment in trade from St Barths thus extended to the facilitation of piracy in the Gustavia harbour and on Île Fourchue, and revolutionary practices across the Spanish, Swedish, and French islands of the Eastern Caribbean.

Next in the family, there was Guadeloupe-born Louis, a vessel owner and master, born around 1780.⁶¹ Louis married a free woman of colour named Héloïse Bernard, also from Guadeloupe. She was the daughter of a free woman of colour named Anne Louise and a free (possibly white) man named Etienne Duchesne.⁶² This made her background very similar to Louis' and strengthened the Bigard family ties to Guadeloupe. The next of the Bigard brothers was St Barths-born John (or Jean Sylvie), a ship owner, vessel master and occasional second mate who could earn more than three times what an ordinary sailor was paid.⁶³ John departed slightly from the rest of the family by also being a goldsmith.⁶⁴ The last brother, Honoré, was born on the Dutch island of St Eustatius or in Guadeloupe in around 1789.⁶⁵ He was probably named after Balthazar senior's father.⁶⁶ The younger Honoré was a vessel master, for example commanding the crew of the brig *Helsingborg* in August 1814.⁶⁷ These five brothers were followed by their sisters, probably all born in St Barths.⁶⁸ The third sister, Elisabeth, married a St Barths merchant named Joseph Johnson in 1817 when she was around twenty years old; a strategic marriage perhaps, that cemented the Bigard family's mercantile and maritime position on the island. They would go on to have two children, named Cécile (after the younger sister who had died the previous year) and Balthazar (after her brother and father), showing what may have been a greater integration into the Bigard family than into the Johnson one.⁶⁹ Indeed, it was a common practice, in the following generations of Bigards, for children to be named after their forebears (Jeanne Louise, Balthazar, Philippe, Louis, Honoré and Cécile were all repeated), regardless of whether or

not they possessed the Bigard surname.⁷⁰ The Bigard family therefore appears to have been a strongly integrated network.

Additionally, although they dominate the documentary evidence, it was not only the men of the Bigard family who were involved in the shipping business from Gustavia. On two occasions, a person named "E. Bigard" signed shipping agreements; in 1824 on behalf of Balthazar junior, and in 1827 on behalf of both Balthazar junior and Philippe.⁷¹ There was no male E. Bigard of an appropriate age alive at the time. The only adults with this initial were the sisters Elisabeth and Eulalie (see figure 2). It is likely that this was therefore a married woman, part of a well-established maritime family, filling an important and trusted role on behalf of her brothers. As Ale Pålsson has noted, free women of colour were increasingly demographically impactful in Gustavia across the early nineteenth century and they were therefore prominent in the life of the town.⁷² The Bigard example is not the only one of women playing active roles in trade from Gustavia. Mary Gumbs, for example, was part of a smaller maritime family sailing to Anguilla and St Martin transporting sugar, coffee and rum.⁷³ One of her roles in this family network was as the enslaver of a man named Victor, who joined the schooner *Catharina* as a cook in October 1815.⁷⁴ Women appeared as enslavers quite frequently in the 1814–1815 St Barths muster rolls. Other women who enslaved sailors during this period were Marie Louise (a free woman of colour); Rose Sequin; Catharine Hill; and women from the Duperoy, Woods, Brown and Smith families.⁷⁵

Women were also listed as owners of prize ships in Guadeloupe between 1799 and 1810, namely the widow Saint-Martin and the widow Allain.⁷⁶ Similarly, in Curaçao, Cathalina Danies was one of three women listed as vessel owners in the 1826–1828 muster rolls.⁷⁷ She joined her male relatives Johannes and Pieter in this important position. However, the men had the additional responsibility of occasionally acting as the master of a vessel that the family also owned. In some ways this must have been to Cathalina's disadvantage; unable to accompany the vessels on their journeys, she may have missed out on trading decisions that Johannes and Pieter could make in the moment.⁷⁸ Alternatively, her landlocked position may have been seen as an advantage. Land-based members of maritime networks were essential when something went wrong at sea, with women often taking the lead in the aftermath of maritime disasters.⁷⁹ It seems that the Bigard family also engaged in this practice. Thus, the second generation of Caribbean Bigards speaks not only to the extreme maritime focus of the family's professions, and to their mobility between

islands, from St Eustatius and Guadeloupe in the 1770s and 1780s to St Barths in the 1790s and into the nineteenth century, but also to an interdependence between sea and land, the essence of the aquapelago.

The Bigards' inter-island and inter-national nature, however, could also sometimes turn out to be something of a hindrance. On 16 August 1806, local newspaper the *Report of St. Bartholomew* was sympathetic in its description of Louis' misfortune at the hands of an Antiguan court, which had rejected his claim on the seized schooner *Constance* because he "being a native of Guadeloupe, was not from his conduct intitled [sic] to the rights of neutrality, although a Burgher or pretended Burgher of the Swedish Island St. Bartholomew".⁸⁰ Other ships' masters had suffered similar fates in Antigua, for example Aaron du Bordieu of *Le Courier* in 1794.⁸¹ The newspaper paragraph shows that, while the Bigard family was originally French, by 1806 the residents of St Barths considered them to be fellow Swedes and fellow citizens. Indeed, Louis had requested naturalisation in 1802, on the basis of his parents having been residents since 1793.⁸² However, the British were not so open-minded. In 1806, they were at war with Napoleon and were therefore unwilling to give any leeway to those they considered remotely French. This was exacerbated by St Barths' long history of French rule and French emigration encouraged by its status as a free port. During the late eighteenth century, the island came to be considered something of a French proxy colony.⁸³ Louis could not therefore hide behind Swedish neutrality; in fact, the British were increasingly suspicious of foreign free ports and neutral islands in general.⁸⁴ Free ports could favour one combatant over another, supply goods illegally and provide neutral flags for vessels to operate under. Indeed, it was often difficult to determine the true nationality of a vessel because of the diverse crew composition, which might be at odds with the vessel's construction, cargo and paperwork.⁸⁵ Those encountering the Bigards' vessels, for example, would have observed a crew that spoke French, English, various Creoles and possibly also African languages, but sailed under a Swedish flag. For this reason, captured vessels like the *Constance* were often condemned according to the language or languages spoken on board and according to the content of any letters they carried.⁸⁶ In 1805, the *Report of St. Bartholomew* even warned island residents against speaking French in order to avoid getting into trouble with the British.⁸⁷ The multilingual Bigards would have had to take care at sea, speaking to each other and their crew in English rather than in their native tongue.⁸⁸

Enslaved and Free in the Bigard Network

Together with the Bigards on board their small vessels, whether it was the *Constance* or one of the many others that they sailed on, were a variety of different people, a crew drawn from the diverse maritime population of Gustavia.⁸⁹ At the beginning of the nineteenth century, St Barths had just experienced an enormous growth in its population, from seven hundred people in 1785 to six thousand people in 1800.⁹⁰ Gustavia now consisted of a cosmopolitan population with many interracial family networks.⁹¹ In 1802, numerous Afro-Caribbean people had left Guadeloupe to avoid being deported by Napoleon, and one of their most popular destinations was St Barths. It is likely that the eldest Bigard brothers, Philippe and Balthazar junior, were among them.⁹² In so migrating, they followed their father, mother, and brother Honoré, who had left Guadeloupe for St Barths almost ten years earlier.⁹³

In 1804, a 1787 ordinance for the social control of enslaved people and free people of colour was re-published, a possible indication of the little effect it had had on the growing urban population.⁹⁴ Indeed, the free population of colour in Gustavia was increasingly demographically impactful across the 1810s, 1820s and 1830s as the white and enslaved populations declined.⁹⁵ In 1806, the number of white inhabitants of Gustavia (835) was roughly equal to the number of free people of colour (802), but much fewer than the number of enslaved people (1,424).⁹⁶ By 1812, the population of Gustavia had increased, with the number of white inhabitants (1,025) still roughly equal to the number of free people of colour (1,038), and still fewer than the number of enslaved people (1,818).⁹⁷ However, in 1821, the population of free people of colour in Gustavia reached a high, with 1,129 free people of colour compared with 878 white people and 1,401 enslaved people.⁹⁸ This was a peak from which, with time, the overall population of Gustavia declined. In 1835, the white (551) and enslaved (572) populations were roughly equal in number, and free people of colour (718) outnumbered them both.⁹⁹ The free Bigards must have benefited from such demographic changes. There were societal changes as well; in 1813, St Barths named James Wattley as its first licensed Black medical practitioner, an indication that conditions were improving for free people of colour.¹⁰⁰

Hundreds of people, however, were still enslaved on St Barths, including people in the Bigard households. At their home in Gustavia, Balthazar sernior and Jeanne Louise enslaved three people; an elderly woman named Brigitte, a child named Victor, and a man named Bastien,

who had escaped by the time of the Bigard marriage in 1816.¹⁰¹ Louis and Héloïse also enslaved several people; a woman named Ursiele, her small son Louis (perhaps named after Louis Bigard; we can speculate about the nature of their relationship), a teenager named Clarisse, and a little girl named Séraphine.¹⁰² The younger Bigard household comprised a largely female domestic environment where the enslaved outnumbered the free, and where relationships of blood may have been inextricably entangled with relationships of domination.

Enslaved members of the Bigard household were also present at sea. Muster rolls from Gustavia between 6 June 1814 and 28 December 1815 can provide an insight into the seafaring community of St Barths' free port on the cusp of its economic downturn, including both enslaved and free sailors, and of course Bigards. Victor Wilson has noted that enslaved people and free people of colour made up 18 per cent of the crew listed on the muster rolls from Gustavia, a figure that is probably an underestimation.¹⁰³ Usually, the enslaved people aboard a vessel were enslaved by the vessel owner, but there were also cases where the enslaved crew had been hired out to someone else.¹⁰⁴ Similar patterns in crew members are seen in muster rolls from Curaçao between 2 October 1826 and 31 December 1828.¹⁰⁵ Like the Hart family mentioned earlier, the Bigard network sometimes sailed together. For example, in February 1815, John (or Jean Sylvie) Bigard was master of the sloop *Tippo Saib*. His brothers Philippe and Balthazar junior were the owners of that vessel and the enslavers of two of her other crew members.¹⁰⁶

On these vessels, skill was often more important than anything else. Hierarchies of age, wealth, and social status could therefore be upended, with enslaved men supervising less experienced white men.¹⁰⁷ Additional attractions for enslaved people and free people of colour were the chance to earn money through trade and wages, to achieve literacy and numeracy, and to learn foreign languages.¹⁰⁸ However, there were also significant drawbacks. African and Afro-Caribbean people fared very badly when captured by pirates,¹⁰⁹ and enslaved people were prevented from becoming master mariners.¹¹⁰ We should also consider the impacts of setting sail with one's enslaver. Life on board meant an increase rather than a decrease in surveillance, if not also in physical and psychological abuse. Around 1800, a Dominican man named Bernard was well known in St Barths for selling small pouches containing bark and roots, which offered protection against being captured at sea; a worthy reassurance, perhaps, for enslaved sailors wishing to risk an escape.¹¹¹

Trading partners Philippe and Balthazar junior enslaved several people,

at least one of whom decided to take an opportunity for freedom. A man named Aby ran away from them on 22 October 1817, and the brothers advertised for his return in the *Report of St. Bartholomew*.¹¹² Additionally, a sailor named Bastian and a cook named Ulek, both born on St Barths and enslaved by the Bigard brothers, joined the crew of the *Tippo Saib* in February 1815.¹¹³ This Bastian may be the same man listed as escaped from the Bigard parents in 1816. If so, we can perhaps speculate that he used his employment as a sailor to find some degree of freedom elsewhere. Newspaper advertisements provide evidence that many enslaved men, like Bastian and Ulek, had the opportunity to abscond at sea. From St Barths in particular, there are several examples of those who took such opportunities, including Joseph, an Ibo man who ran away from the master of the schooner *Little Sam* in 1802, and Duke, who ran away from the master of the sloop *Maria* in 1804.¹¹⁴ Other fugitive adverts in Eastern Caribbean newspapers also point to established connections of fugitivity between St Barths and the French islands of Guadeloupe, Martinique and Marie Galante.¹¹⁵ Perhaps Bastien was also intending to run to a French island, where he would have had the relevant language skills and would perhaps be able to find family. Indeed, he may have been able to maintain such links through the large number of people (20 per cent of the enslaved population) who were labouring on St Barths for enslavers on other islands, including on Guadeloupe.¹¹⁶ Between 1800 and 1815, one third of the enslaved people in St Barths were born in Africa, while 25 per cent were from elsewhere in the Caribbean, with only 10 per cent born on the island; Bastian belonged to this last and smallest group.¹¹⁷ The inter-island, inter-imperial nature of the Bigard family may have been reflected in the people they enslaved, whose names often suggest French origins, perhaps in Guadeloupe where the Bigards maintained close ties through trade and marriage.

When the risks of sailing were too high and the rewards too little, even free sailors ran away across the Caribbean. An advert in the newspaper *De Curaçaosche Courant* reported the theft, in 1818, of the schooner *Matchless* with her entire cargo by the first mate.¹¹⁸ Likewise, Danish newspapers reported the desertion of a sailor from the schooner *Invincible* in 1802 and of the first mate from the brig *Sheperdess* in 1831.¹¹⁹ In St Barths, the structures that were imposed upon free seamen of colour usually included the necessity of providing endorsements from white citizens when they applied for naturalisation.¹²⁰ However, neither Louis Bigard nor Honoré Bigard included such endorsements in their applications for naturalisation. It is likely that they did not need them because of their family connections;

their brothers owned a successful merchant company and their father had been an important political figure. Ale Pålsson suggests that those who did not mention their race in such contexts in early nineteenth-century St Barths were probably white.¹²¹ The examples, however, of Louis and Honoré mean that we must nuance this assumption. On the occasion of his marriage to Héloïse, Louis was described as a “Métis Libre, Bourgeois & Marin de cette Isle” (a free man of colour, a burgher and sailor of St Barths).¹²² These brothers serve as good examples of the ability of some Caribbean actors to negotiate their race based upon the particular occasion.¹²³ Although we do not know what they looked like, the Bigard brothers were considered to be (and considered themselves, as is evident from Philippe and Balthazar junior’s political efforts) to be men of colour.¹²⁴ This was not necessarily relevant in all contexts. People from more privileged backgrounds, like the Bigards, were able to express themselves politically in a way that those from less economically advantaged backgrounds could not, and they could perhaps also rely on the reputation of their family to sometimes become socially white.¹²⁵ This separated them substantially from the population of enslaved people whom they were complicit in oppressing.

Indeed, like many wealthier free people of colour in this period, Philippe and Balthazar junior may not necessarily have identified with the struggles of enslaved people and less wealthy free people of colour, choosing instead to strive towards equality with the white elites.¹²⁶ For example, in 1812, the brothers signed a petition that requested the vote specifically for free men of colour who owned property in St Barths.¹²⁷ Similarly, while their revolutionary heritage probably contributed to their desire to involve themselves in the Boricua expedition, it did not mean that Philippe and Balthazar junior were fighting for the freedom of all. A Republic of Boricua could adopt free trade that would certainly benefit merchant traders such as themselves, but economic goals also meant that the revolutionaries did not intend to abolish slavery.¹²⁸ This was in alignment with the Bigard brothers’ commercial focus, since their merchant trading exploits included buying and selling other people.¹²⁹ In 1824, they profited from the journey of the *Jaloux* that transported 107 captives across the Atlantic.¹³⁰

After the region’s colonial powers discovered the plans for the liberation of Boricua, the Bigards’ ability to blur racial boundaries (perhaps as well as their use of aliases; Philippe as Titus and Balthazar junior as Benjamin) may have assisted the merchant brothers in recovering from their involvement.¹³¹ The governor of Curaçao and several international

newspapers described the Boricua revolutionaries as "pirates".¹³² This was not a new association for a Bigard, but it boded poorly. In Curaçao, two white conspirators were initially sentenced to thirty years' hard labour, but ultimately escaped punishment.¹³³ Meanwhile in Puerto Rico, another conspirator of colour named Pierre Dubois had been executed.¹³⁴ Conspirators of colour were rarely able to leverage legal uncertainties to avoid punishment in the way that white conspirators did; yet surprisingly, the Bigard brothers avoided any severe consequences.¹³⁵ They were free to continue their inter-island activities in a trade context that was increasingly micro-regional and Eastern Caribbean.¹³⁶

Maritime Family in a Sea of Islands

During the early nineteenth century, ports like Gustavia and maritime families like the Bigards played a large part in the continuation of the interconnections that allowed Eastern Caribbean islanders to survive. Much of the demand for foreign goods in the region was met locally, through this inter-island small boat trade in ceramics, livestock and perishable items.¹³⁷ Free ports in particular thrived on the need to smuggle goods between islands belonging to competing European powers, and they became important hubs for piracy, privateering, laundering and the increasingly illegal slave trade during the nineteenth century.¹³⁸ Colonial powers were often troubled by the ways in which such smugglers (and sailors in general) could move between imperial spaces, even while these same powers also depended upon the interconnections that these seafarers made.¹³⁹

As for the free port at St Barths, its position benefited from the Atlantic trade winds bringing vessels not only from across the Atlantic, but also from the many British, Dutch and French islands housing markets to the southeast.¹⁴⁰ Other free ports had different strengths, but still adhered to a micro-regional focus. For Curaçao, its strength as a free port had always resided in its location next to the Spanish coast. In the early nineteenth century, the mainland represented a market of consumers newly independent from Spain and free to make their own trading decisions. It also provided a long stretch of coastline with numerous small bays and inlets where illegal trading could take place unobserved.¹⁴¹ For St Thomas, its outstanding natural harbour at Charlotte Amalie and its proximity to the large, productive Puerto Rico, had always been important factors.¹⁴² They continued to be important in the early nineteenth century.

The multi-imperial environment of the Eastern Caribbean made

it vital for free ports to attract foreign settlers, like the Bigards, who could tap into wider economic networks and facilitate trade in multiple languages. Wealthy merchants were particularly sought-after settlers and free ports provided low taxation, low customs fees, and, at times, freedom of religion in order to attract them.¹⁴³ Balthazar senior hit all the targets as an accomplished politician, a wealthy merchant, a polyglot and a sailor. When he moved to St Barths in 1793, he was already the father of several men who would come to be prominent in the island's trade landscape. This second generation of Bigards would continue the trend, maintaining connections to Guadeloupe through marriage, but also forging new alliances with economic actors in St Barths. It was also not irrelevant for the Bigard family that free ports were spaces where free people of colour had opportunities to trade, find employment, and fight for their rights.¹⁴⁴

Inter-island trading vessels, in particular, provided job opportunities for people of colour and white people of lower to middling class.¹⁴⁵ Working together with those whom they enslaved or employed, the Bigard seamen show how kinship and island ties were important on small vessels. Across the Eastern Caribbean, inter-island and inter-imperial trade and movement were supported by sailors as part of wider social networks, most importantly (although not exclusively) that of the maritime family or kin network.¹⁴⁶ Maritime family members were involved at every level of the vessel crew, from ship's boy to master, both enslaved and free. Indeed, Tânia Manuel Casimiro and Marco Oliveira Borges have theorised the sailing vessel as a type of movable household.¹⁴⁷ As the history of the Bigards shows, this approach only becomes more relevant when applied to smaller vessels. The short lengths of their inter-island voyages meant that the crew seldom ran out of fresh food, and interpersonal conflicts may have been less likely to occur and easier to resolve than on larger vessels.¹⁴⁸ Sharing resources and religious rituals, and facing risks together also encouraged the development of effective in-groups.¹⁴⁹ The crews of these vessels were therefore paradoxically hierarchical and socially subversive; well-connected and at times isolated; and united and divided by race, rank and experience.¹⁵⁰ The Bigards, as we have seen, sailed with other members of their household, both free and enslaved; a cramped environment from which Bastian in particular may have wished to escape.

Meanwhile, the terrestrial part of the Bigard network included both men and women performing important brokerage or artisanal functions without which trade connections would have collapsed. Indeed, the Bigards invested much effort into the free port of Gustavia, where

they owned property, became naturalised citizens of Sweden, plotted revolutions and sought to function as part of the elite. However, the independence of the Latin American countries, which Philippe and Balthazar junior are likely to have supported for both pragmatic and idealistic reasons, brought the free port system in the Lesser Antilles to an end in the 1820s as smuggling became less necessary.¹⁵¹ It may also have contributed to the decline and collapse of the Bigard merchant trading partnership. Having made some of their money from the slave trade, the Bigard brothers were economically challenged by the anti-slave trade treaty between Sweden and Britain in 1824, and they experienced financial difficulties so severe that they dissolved their firm the following year.¹⁵² However, in an aquapelago there is always the possibility to find a context in which one's skills might be more readily utilised. Here, we have seen the Bigards do this across several decades. They and others like them continued to do this in the following decades, as maritime families navigating the ongoing socioeconomic and political changes of the mid-nineteenth-century Eastern Caribbean.

NOTES

1. Wilson, "Contraband Trade".
2. Jordaan and Wilson; Kleiser; Kleiser and Røge; Pålsson, "Our Side of the Water"; Thomasson, "Den Karibiska Skorpionen".
3. Cromwell.
4. Nationaal Archief, Den Haag (hereafter NL-HaNA), Curaçao, Archieven na 1828, nummer toegang 1.05.12.02, inventarisnummer 671. Bestandsnaam NL-aNA_1.05.12.02_671_0046.
5. Benton and MacGregor; Kleiser and Røge; Scott.
6. Hayward.
7. Bassi; Crawford, 2–5.
8. Pugh.
9. Perl-Rosenthal; Hunt.
10. Rediker, 12–13.
11. Wilson, "Commerce in Disguise", 200.
12. Rodigneaux, 163.
13. All these data are from the *Report of St. Bartholomew*, Readex.
14. Armytage, 113–14.
15. Ibid., 114.
16. Armytage, 115; Pålsson, "Our Side of the Water", 90.
17. Lavoie, Fick, and Mayer; Sjöström; Pålsson, "Our Side of the Water", 171.
18. Pålsson, "Our Side of the Water", 91.

19. Pålsson, "Smugglers"; Wilson, "Contraband Trade".
20. S:t Barthélemysamlingen (hereafter SBS) vol. 6B, 7–23.
21. SBS vol. 6B, 10.
22. Benton; Rupert, 246.
23. Mulich, "Microregionalism"; Thomas, 711–26.
24. Mulich, *In a Sea of Empires*, 48, 52; The National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNA) Colonial Office (hereafter CO) 101/45, 66; *Saint Thomas Gazette*, 1812-07-13, Mediestream.
25. All these data are FSB vol. 5 and FSB vol. 6.
26. All these data are from DNA 678 Den vestindiske regering, 3.81.647, Gruppordnede sager 10, Næringsvæsen: Ind- & Udgående skibe i Charlotte Amalie 1804–1807.
27. 1821 data for St Thomas are from Danish National Archives, 701, Government-General St. Thomas Harbour Master, Pilot Journal of Incoming Vessels 1821.
28. 1812 data for St Thomas are from newspaper the *Saint Thomas Gazette*, Mediestream.
29. Armytage, 113–14; Coomans-Eustatia.
30. *Sanct Thomæ Tidende*, Mediestream.
31. Rupert; Klooster, 74, 141–47.
32. "1800: Curaçao under Britain's Rule", Nationaal Archief Curaçao, 2024, <https://www.curacaohistory.com/1800-curacao-under-britain>.
33. These were the *Hermione*, *Hazard*, *Maria*, *Flying Fish*, *Fly*, *Josephine*, *Samuel Lamb*, *Enterprise*, *Neptune*, *St. Louis*, *Regulator*, *Sophie*, *Catherine*, *Rebecca*, *Busy*, *Westmanland*, *La Bonne Mère*, *World*, *Governor Maxwell*, *Eliza*, *Guil-laume Tell*, *Lady Codrington*, and *Amenaide* (SweCarCol.test.uu.se) and the *Apollo*, *Adventure*, and *Constance* (Report of St. Bartholomew, Readex).
34. *Report of St. Bartholomew*, 1804-07-19, 1804-10-19, 1805-04-20, 1805-06-08, 1805-07-04, 1805-08-31, 1805-09-07, 1805-09-28, 1806-01-25, 1806-06-21, 1810-04-26, Readex; Danish National Archives (hereafter DNA) 678 Den vestindiske regering, Guvernementets St. Croix Afdeling, Gruppordnede sager 10, Næringsvæsen; Ind- & udgåede skibe i Charlotte Amalie 1804–1807, 3.81.647; FSB vol. 4, 87, 329; FSB vol. 11, 215; *Saint Thomas Gazette*, 1812-07-16, Mediestream; FSB vol. 1, 379; TNA CO 101/45, 66.
35. FSB vol. 157, 14.
36. NL-HaNA, St. Eustatius, St. Maarten en Saba tot 1828, 1.05.13.01, inv.nr. 239.
37. *Report of St. Bartholomew*, 1805-08-31, Readex; FSB vol. 4, 584; FSB vol. 11, 215.
38. Archives nationales d'outre-mer (hereafter ANOM) FSB, AM 265; FSB vol. 1, 24, 214, 379; FSB Vol. 4, 87, 101, 311, 329, 503, 584; FSB vol. 11, 215; FSB vol. 16, 440; FSB vol. 14, 600; FSB vol. 266, 34, 492; FSB vol. 267, 194, 243, 338, 398, 401, 404, 417–18, 426; FSB vol. 268, 90, 264, 288,

- 397; Rigarkivet 678 Den vestindiske regering, Guvernementets St. Croix Afdeling, Gruppordenede sager 10. Næringsvæsen; Ind- & udgåede skibe i Charlotte Amalie 1804–1807; 3.81.647; *Report of St. Bartholomew Issues* 4, 16, 17, 26, 32, 48, 50, 54, 57, 63, 64, 66, 77, 89, 97, 119; *Saint Thomas Gazette Issues* IV(I) 1812-01-02, IV(LI) 1812-06-25, IV(LVI) 1812-07-13, V(LVII) 1812-07-16, IV(XLV) 1812-06-04; TNA CO 101/45, 66; Tingbrand, *Who Was Who*, 98.
39. Jordaan and Wilson; Thomasson, "Black Healers"; Wilson, "Contraband Trade under Swedish Colours".
40. Wilson, "Contraband Trade".
41. Pålsson, "Political Culture".
42. Jordaan and Wilson; Pålsson, "Our Side of the Water", 91.
43. TNA, War Office (hereafter WO) 1/24, 196.
44. Tingbrand, *Who Was Who*, 97; Pålsson, "Insolent"; Fonds Suédois de Saint-Barthélemy (hereafter FSB) vol. 287, 76–80; FSB vol. 289, 123–25; Alvin-record_85208; TNA CO 318/103, 150; TNA CO 152/77, 52.
45. Montoya, "Déscentance de BIGARD Baltasar"; Mongey, 90.
46. Régent, 300.
47. Montoya, "Déscentance de BIGARD Baltasar".
48. Brown, 14; Pérotin-Dumon, *Témoignages Sur La Guadeloupe En 1794*; Mongey, 88; Montoya, "La fameuse histoire de l'hippopotame de Fourchue", accessed 5 July 2024. <https://saintbarthislander.com/2023/06/13/la-fameuse-histoire-de-lhippopotame-de-fourchue/>; Tingbrand, *Who Was Who*, 97; FSB vol. 125, 124; TNA CO 152/76, 112.
49. Montoya, "Les insurgés d'Artigas", accessed 5 July 2024, <https://saintbarthislander.com/2023/06/22/les-insurgés-dartigas-des-corsaires-et-des-pirates-a-saint-barthelemy-en-1821/>; Tingbrand, *Saint Barthélemy*, 52–54.
50. Brown, 15–16; Pérotin-Dumon, "Témoignages sur La Guadeloupe En 1794".
51. Pérotin-Dumon, "Cabotage".
52. Alamkan, 12.
53. Pérotin-Dumon, "Cabotage".
54. Alamkan, 30.
55. Montoya, "Déscentance de BIGARD Baltasar".
56. ANOM FSB, AM 265; Mongey, vii, 90.
57. *Report of St. Bartholomew*, 1810-04-26, Readex; *Saint Thomas Gazette*, IV(XLV), 1812-06-04, Medistream.
58. ANOM FSB, AM 265; FSB vol. 1, 24; FSB vol. 266, 34; FSB vol. 287, 78-80; FSB vol. 289, 37, 123–25; FSB vol. 292, 81; Mongey, vii, 90; Montoya, "Déscentance de BIGARD Baltasar".
59. "Un homme de couleur libre nommé Bigard, m'ayant fait plusieurs fois de faux rapports que des corsairs ou pîrâtes qui ont ou jetté l'ancre [. . .] étaient des bâtimens réguliers" FSB vol. 125, 124 (available at SweCarCol.test.uu.se).
60. Mongey, 83, 88, 90, 92.

61. FSB vol. 266, 34; FSB vol. 287, 76; FSB vol. 1, 24; *Report of St. Bartholomew*, 1807-01-31, Readex; FSB vol. 289, 123–25; Montoya, "Désccendance de BIGARD Baltasar".
62. FSB vol. 287, 76–80.
63. ANOM FSB, AM 265; FSB vol. 163, 547; ANOM FSB, AM 265; Montoya, "Désccendance de BIGARD Baltasar".
64. Montoya, "Désccendance de BIGARD Baltasar".
65. ANOM FSB, AM 265; Montoya, "Désccendance de BIGARD Baltasar".
66. FSB vol. 289, 123–25.
67. ANOM FSB, AM 265.
68. Montoya, "Désccendance de BIGARD Baltasar".
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid.
71. FSB vol. 16, 440; FSB vol. 14, 600.
72. Pålsson, "Insolent".
73. *Report of St. Bartholomew*, 1804-07-31, 1804-8-28, 1804-09-12, 1804-09-26, 1804-10-29, 1804-11-08, 1805-01-12, 1805-02-16, 1805-11-21, Readex.
74. ANOM FSB, AM 265.
75. Ibid.
76. Alamkan, 260, 263–64.
77. The other two were named Antonetje Balentien (golet *Drie Zusters*) and Helena Rafaela (golet *Helena*) (see NL-HaNA, Curaçao, Bonaire en Aruba na 1828, 1.05.12.02, inv.nr. 671).
78. The Danies' vessels included the golets *Oberste von Scholten*, *Theresa* and *Favorite* (see NL-HaNA, Curaçao, Bonaire en Aruba na 1828, 1.05.12.02, inv.nr. 671).
79. Hunt.
80. *Report of St. Bartholomew*, 1806-08-16, Readex.
81. Wilson, "Commerce in Disguise", 197–98.
82. FSB vol. 298, 252.
83. Wilson, "Commerce in Disguise", 196–97, 208.
84. Ibid., 197.
85. Perl-Rosenthal, 75–88.
86. Perl-Rosenthal.
87. Pålsson, "Our Side of the Water", 189.
88. FSB vol. 277, 438; Mongey, 90.
89. Wilson, "Commerce in Disguise", 95.
90. Pålsson, "Diversity and Division".
91. Sjöström; Pålsson, "Diversity and Division".
92. Mongey, 89, 96.
93. FSB vol. 277, 438.
94. Lavoie, Fick and Mayer.
95. Pålsson, "Our Side of the Water", 91.

96. Lavoie, Fick and Mayer.
97. Mayer and Fick.
98. Maher, 42.
99. Mayer and Fick.
100. Thomasson, "Black Healers".
101. FSB vol. 289, 123–25.
102. FSB vol. 287, 76–79.
103. Wilson, "Commerce in Disguise", 94.
104. Ibid., 95.
105. NL-HaNA, Curaçao, Bonaire en Aruba na 1828, 1.05.12.02, inv.nr. 671. Bestandsnaam NL-HaNA_1.05.12.02_671_0046.
106. ANOM FSB, AM 265.
107. Jarvis; Morgan.
108. Maxwell; Morgan.
109. Bialuschewski, Hardesty, 120.
110. Jarvis.
111. Thomasson, "Black Healers".
112. *Report of St. Bartholomew*, 1817-10-27, Readex.
113. ANOM FSB, AM 265.
114. *Report of St. Bartholomew*, 1804-04-23, 1804-09-19, Readex.
115. *Report of St. Bartholomew*, 1805-06-16, 1806-12-29, 1807-02-14, 1811-05-18, 1816-09-27, 1817-04-14, Readex.
116. Montoya, "The foreign slaves in Gustavia during the Swedish period", accessed 5 July 2024, <https://saintbarthislander.com/2021/08/31/the-foreign-slaves-in-gustavia-during-the-swedish-period/>.
117. Körber, "Sweden and St. Barthélemy".
118. *De Curaçaosche Courant*, 1818-04-11, Delpher.
119. *Danish American Gazette*, 1802-05-01; *Dansk Vestindisk Regierings Avis*, 1831-02-21, Mediestream.
120. Pålsson, "Our Side of the Water", 91.
121. Pålsson, "Our Side of the Water", 88–90; FSB vol. 277, 438; FSB vol. 298, 252.
122. FSB vol. 287, 76.
123. Pålsson, "Our Side of the Water", 88–90.
124. Ibid., 156, 158; Mongey, 90–91.
125. Sio; Pålsson, "Our Side of the Water", 172. Also see Hodes, 230–34, for a discussion of how perceptions of race could alter in different contexts; Livesay, "Emerging from the Shadows"; and Livesay, *Children of Uncertain Fortune*, 21–22.
126. Newton, 58–59.
127. Pålsson, "Our Side of the Water", 156, 158; Mongey, 90–91.
128. Mongey, 91, 95.
129. Ibid., 95.
130. Mongey, 100; ANOM FSB, série C, vol. 258.

131. Tingbrand, *Who Was Who*, 98; Mongey, vii, 177.
132. Mongey, 99, 103.
133. Ibid., 100–1.
134. Ibid., 99.
135. Ibid., 99, 107.
136. Fricke and Hjorth, "Incoming Vessels in De Curaçaosche Courant", 2022, <https://inthesamesea.ku.dk/blog/vessel-itineraries-in-de-curacaosche-courant-1833-1834-and-1845-1846/>; Fricke et al, "Vessel Itineraries in De Curaçaosche Courant", 2022-06-15 <https://inthesamesea.ku.dk/blog/vessel-itineraries-in-de-curacaosche-courant-1816-1818-and-1825-1826/>; Peters.
137. Hauser and Kelly; Simonsen and Christensen.
138. Espersen.
139. Cromwell.
140. Kleiser and Røge.
141. Ibid.
142. Ibid.
143. Wilson, "Contraband Trade".
144. Pålsson, "Smugglers".
145. Jarvis; Simonsen and Christensen.
146. Laursen Brock et al.
147. Manuel Casimiro and Oliveira Borges.
148. Jarvis.
149. Jarvis; Morgan.
150. Morgan.
151. Armytage, 135; Kleiser.
152. Mongey, 99–100.

WORKS CITED

- Alamkan, Myrian. *Vous irez porter le fer et la flame: Les corsaires français de la Révolution française et du Premier Empire en Caraïbe (1793–1810)*. Matoury: Ibis Rouge Éditions, 2015.
- Armytage, Francis. *The Free Port System in the British West Indies: A Study in Commercial Policy, 1766–1822*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1953.
- Bassi, Ernesto. *An Aqueous Territory: Sailor Geographies and New Granada's Transimperial Greater Caribbean World*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.
- Benton, Lauren. "Abolition and Imperial Law, 1790–1820". *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, no. 3 (2011): 355–74.
- Benton, Lauren, and Timo MacGregor. "A Sea of Households: Ordering Violence and Mobility in the Inter-Imperial Caribbean". *Past & Present* 265 (2024): 21–44.
- Bialuschewski, Arne. "Pirates, Black Sailors and Seafaring Slaves in the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1716–1726". *Journal of Caribbean History* 45, no. 2 (2011): 143–58.

- Brown, C. *Narrative of the Expedition to South America, Which Sailed from England at the Close of 1817, for the Service of the Spanish Patriots: Including the Military and Naval Transactions, and Ultimate Fate of That Expedition: Also the Arrival of Colonels Blosset and English, Which British Troops for That Service, Their Reception and Subsequent Proceedings, with Other Interesting Occurrences*. London: E Howlett, 1819.
- Coomans-Eustatia, Maritza. "Notes on Early Printing in the Dutch Caribbean Islands". in *History of Literature in the Caribbean, Volume 2: English- and Dutch-Speaking Regions*, edited by A. J. Arnold. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2001.
- Crawford, Sharika D. *The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean: Waterscapes of Labor, Conservation, and Boundary Making*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020.
- Cromwell, Jesse. "More than Slaves and Sugar: Recent Historiography of the Trans-Imperial Caribbean and Its Sinew Populations". *History Compass* 12, no. 10 (2014): 770–83.
- Espersen, Ryan. "Fifty Shades of Trade: Privateering, Piracy, and Illegal Slave Trading in St. Thomas, Early Nineteenth Century". *New West Indian Guide* 93 (2019): 41–68.
- Fricke, Felicia, and Hannah Hjorth. "Incoming Vessels in De Curaçaosche Courant: A Quantitative Microhistory, 1833–1834 and 1845–1846". IN THE SAME SEA, 2022. <https://inthesamesea.ku.dk/blog/vessel-itineraries-in-de-curacaosche-courant-1833-1834-and-1845-1846/>.
- Fricke, Felicia, Christian Kofoed Hansen, Hannah Hjorth, and Gunvor Simonsen. "Vessel Itineraries in De Curaçaosche Courant: A Quantitative Microhistory, 1816–1818 and 1825–1826". IN THE SAME SEA, 15 June 2022. <https://inthesamesea.ku.dk/blog/vessel-itineraries-in-de-curacaosche-courant-1816-1818-and-1825-1826/>.
- Hardesty, Jared. *Mutiny on the Rising Sun: A Tragic Tale of Slavery, Smuggling, and Chocolate*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2021.
- Hauser, Mark W., and Kenneth G. Kelly. "Colonies without Frontiers: Inter-Island Trade in the Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Caribbean". In *Islands at the Crossroads: Migration, Seafaring, and Interaction in the Caribbean*, edited by Mark W. Hauser, 41–56. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011.
- Hayward, Philip. "Aquapelagos and Aquapelagic Assemblages: Towards an Integrated Study of Island Societies and Marine Environments". *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures* 6, no. 1 (2012): 1–11.
- Hodes, Martha. *The Sea Captain's Wife: A True Story of Love, Race, and War in the Nineteenth Century*. New York NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007.
- Hunt, Margaret R. "An English East India Company Ship's Crew in a Connected Seventeenth-Century World". *Itinerario* 46, no. 3 (2022): 1–12.
- Jarvis, Michael. "The Binds of the Anxious Mariner: Patriarchy, Paternalism, and the Maritime Culture of Eighteenth-Century Bermuda". *Journal of Early Modern History* 14 (2010): 75–117.

- Jordaan, Han, and Victor Wilson. "The Eighteenth-Century Danish, Dutch and Swedish Free Ports in the Northeastern Caribbean: Continuity and Change". In *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1680–1800; Linking Empires, Bridging Borders*, edited by Gert Oostindie and Jessica V. Roitman, 273–308. Leiden: Brill/KITLV, 2014.
- Kleiser, R. Grant. "An Empire of Free Ports: British Commercial Imperialism in the 1766 Free Port Act". *Journal of British Studies* 60, no. 2 (April 2021): 334–61.
- Kleiser, R. Grant, and Pernille Røge. "Emulating Empires: Caribbean Free Ports, Economic Dualism, and European Imperial Rivalry, c. 1670s–1760". *Global Intellectual History* 0, no. 0 (2023): 1–27.
- Klooster, Wim. *Illicit Riches: Dutch Trade in the Caribbean, 1648–1795*. Leiden: KITLV, 1998.
- Körber, Lill-Ann. "Sweden and St. Barthélemy: Exceptionalisms, Whiteness, and the Disappearance of Slavery from Colonial History". *Scandinavian Studies* 91, no. 1–2 (2019): 74–97.
- Laursen Brock, Aske, Misha Ewen, Lucas Haasis, Margaret R. Hunt, and Annika Raapke. "Forum Introduction: Gender, Intimate Networks, and Global Commerce in the Early Modern Period". *Itinerario* 46, no. 3 (2022): 316–24.
- Lavoie, Yolande, Carolyn Fick, and Francine-M. Mayer. "A Particular Study of Slavery in the Caribbean Island of Saint Barthelemy: 1648–1846". *Caribbean Studies* 28, no. 2 (1995): 369–403.
- Livesay, Daniel. *Children of Uncertain Fortune: Mixed-Race Jamaicans in Britain and the Atlantic Family, 1733–1833*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018.
- . "Emerging from the Shadows: New Developments in the History of Interracial Sex and Inter marriage in Colonial North America and the Caribbean". *History Compass* 13, no. 3 (2015): 122–33.
- Maher, Julianne. *The Survival of People and Languages: Schooners, Goats and Cassava in St. Barthélemy, French West Indies*. Leiden: Brill, 2013.
- Manuel Casimiro, Tânia, and Marco Oliveira Borges. "Life on Board Portuguese Ships in the 16th–18th Centuries: Theorizing Households through History and Archaeology". *Heritage* 6 (2023): 2020–37.
- Maxwell, Clarence. "Enslaved Merchants, Enslaved Merchant-Mariners, and the Bermuda Conspiracy of 1761". *Early American Studies* (Spring 2009): 140–78.
- Mayer, Francine M., and Carolyn E. Fick. "Before and after Emancipation: Slaves and Free Coloreds of Saint-Barthélemy (French West Indies) in the 19th Century". *Scandinavian Journal of History* 18 (1993): 251–73.
- Mongey, Vanessa. *Rogue Revolutionaries: The Fight for Legitimacy in the Greater Caribbean*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2020.
- Montoya, Jerome. "The foreign slaves in Gustavia during the Swedish period", The Saint-Barth Islander, 2021. Accessed 5 July 2024. <https://saintbarthislander.com/2021/08/31/the-foreign-slaves-in-gustavia-during-the-swedish-period/>.

- . "La fameuse histoire de l'hippopotame de Fourchue". The Saint-Barth Islander, 2023. Accessed 5 July 2024. <https://saintbarthislander.com/2023/06/13/la-fameuse-histoire-de-lhippopotame-de-fourchue/>.
- . "Les insurgés d'Artigas, des corsairs et des pirates à Saint-Barthelemy en 1821". The Saint-Barth Islander, 2023. Accessed 5 July 2024. <https://saintbarthislander.com/2023/06/22/les-insurges-dartigas-des-corsaires-et-des-pirates-a-saint-barthelemy-en-1821/>.
- . "Désendance de BIGARD Baltasar". unpublished genealogy, 2024.
- Morgan, Philip D. "Introduction: Maritime Slavery". *Slavery and Abolition* 31, no. 3 (2010): 311–26.
- Mulich, Jeppe. *In a Sea of Empires: Networks and Crossings in the Revolutionary Caribbean*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- . "Microregionalism and Intercolonial Relations: The Case of the Danish West Indies, 1730–1830". *Journal of Global History* 8, no. 1 (2013): 72–94. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022813000053>.
- Nationaal Archief Curaçao. "1800: Curaçao under Britain's Rule", 2024. <https://www.curacaohistory.com/1800-curaçao-under-britain>.
- Newton, Melanie J. *The Children of Africa in the Colonies: Free People of Color in Barbados in the Age of Emancipation*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008.
- Pålsson, Ale. "Diversity and Division: Digital Mapping of Censuses in the Swedish Caribbean, 1835–1872". *Atlantic Studies* 20, no. 1 (2021): 109–33.
- . "'Insolent, quarrelsome, noisey and troublesome': Women's Street Fights and Noise in St. Barthélemy in 1835". *Scandinavian Journal of History* 49, no. 3 (2024): 333–51.
- . "Our Side of the Water: Political Culture in the Swedish Colony of St Barthélemy 1800–1825". PhD diss., Department of History, Stockholm University, 2016. <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:su:diva-133528>.
- . "Political Culture in St. Barthélemy 1800–1820". *International Journal of Maritime History* 27, no. 4 (2015): 803–5.
- . "Smugglers before the Swedish Throne: Political Activity of Free People of Color in Early Nineteenth-Century St. Barthélemy". *Atlantic Studies* 14, no. 3 (2017): 318–35.
- Perl-Rosenthal, Nathan. "Reading Cargoes: Letters and the Problem of Nationality in the Age of Privateering". In *A World at Sea: Maritime Practices and Global History*, edited by Lauren Benton and Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, 75–88. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020.
- Pérotin-Dumon, Anne. "Cabotage, Contraband, and Corsairs: The Port Cities of Guadeloupe and Their Inhabitants, 1650–1800". In *Atlantic Port Cities: Economy, Culture, and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650–1850*, edited by Franklin Knight and Peggy Liss, 58–86. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991.

- . "Témoignages Sur La Guadeloupe En 1794". *Bulletin de La Société d'histoire de La Guadeloupe* 47 (1981): 5–33.
- Peters, Dexnell. "Studying the Colonial Caribbean: Combining Geographical and Imperial Approaches". In *Colonial-Era Caribbean Theatre: Issues in Research, Writing and Methodology*, edited by Julia Prest, 19–35. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2023.
- Pugh, Jonathan. "The Relational Turn in Island Geographies: Bringing Together Island, Sea and Ship Relations and the Case of the Landship". *Social and Cultural Geography* 17, no. 8 (2016): 1040–59.
- Rediker, Marcus. *The Slave Ship: A Human History*. London: John Murray, 2008.
- Régent, Frédéric. *Esclavage, Métissage, Liberté: La Révolution Française En Guadeloupe 1789–1802*. Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2004.
- Rodrigueaux, Michel. *La Guerre de Course en Guadeloupe XVIIe-XIXe Siècles, ou Alger Sous Les Tropiques*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006.
- Rupert, Linda M. *Creolization and Contraband: Curaçao in the Early Modern Atlantic World*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012.
- Scott, Julius S. *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution*. Brooklyn: Verso, 2018.
- Simonsen, Gunvor, and Rasmus Christensen. "Together in a Small Boat: Slavery's Fugitives in the Lesser Antilles". *William and Mary Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (July 2023): 611–46.
- Sio, Arnold A. "Marginality and Free Coloured Identity in Caribbean Slave Society". *Slavery & Abolition* 8, no. 2 (1987): 171–76.
- Sjöström, Rolf. "Conquer and Educate: Swedish Colonialism in the Caribbean Island of Saint-Barthélemy 1784–1878". *Paedagogica Historica* 37, no. 1 (2001): 69–85.
- Thomas, Hugh. *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440–1870*. New York NY: Simon & Schuster, 1997.
- Thomasson, Fredrik. "Black Healers, Surgeons and 'Witches': Medicine, Mobility and Knowledge Exchange in Swedish St Barthélemy 1785–1815". *Social History of Medicine* 35, no. 1 (2021): 49–71.
- . "Den Karibiska Skorpionen. Om Digitaliseringen Av Det Svenska Saint Barthélemyarkivet i Aix-En-Provence". *Historisk Tidskrift (Sweden)* 138, no. 1 (2018): 78–90.
- Tingbrand, Per. *Who Was Who in St. Bartholomew During the Swedish Epoch?* Stockholm: Swedish St. Bartholomew Society, 2001.
- . *Saint-Barthélemy à l'Époque Suédoise*. La Mairie de Saint-Barthélemy and the Centre Culturel, 1995.
- Wilson, Victor. "Commerce in Disguise: War and Trade in the Caribbean Free Port of Gustavia, 1793–1815". PhD diss., Åbo Akademi University, 2015.
- . "Contraband Trade under Swedish Colours: St. Barthélemy's Moment in the Sun, 1793–1815". *Itinerario* 43, no. 2 (2019): 327–47. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115319000299>.

The “Mount Moritz Bajans”:

Origins and Establishment of Grenada’s “White” Tribe

JOHN ANGUS MARTIN

The village of Mount Moritz and its residents, tucked away on a hillside just in from the coast at Molinière Point, St George, have always been viewed as an anomaly in Grenadian society by many Grenadians. Very little is known of them because of their perceived whiteness, foreignness and self-isolation.¹ As a result, a great deal of mythology surrounds who they were/are, where they came from, and how and when their community developed, even within the Mt Moritz community itself. Their perceived whiteness made them privileged, but their poverty seemed incongruous in a society where race, skin colour and class defined you, with whiteness at the top, blackness or Africanness at the bottom, and shades in between. In the post-emancipation era, when the majority of Grenadians were struggling to (re)create a new society from the rubble of slavery, the emergence of the predominantly “white” community at Mt Moritz appeared misplaced. However, it has historical precedent in a region dominated by peoples who voluntarily and involuntarily populated these islands for millennia. This article examines the Barbadian (Bajan) origins of the Mt Moritz community in the last decades of the nineteenth century and its establishment in Grenada in the first half of the twentieth century.

Grenada’s Connections in the Eastern Caribbean

It was once popular among Rastafari brethren to understand the term *Caribbean* as “Carry Beyond”, emphasizing the fact that their captive ancestors were brought here from Africa, in effect “carried us beyond our borders”.² It is an apt description of most of the ancestors of the majority

The Journal of Caribbean History 59, 2 (2025): 155–176

DOI: 10.37234/JCH.2025.U1000007

of the region's current residents. And as Arthur Lewis insists, with regard to Caribbean migration, the "Caribbean peoples have always been, and still are, a massively uprooted people."³ Thus, the history of the Caribbean and its peoples is the story of forced and voluntary migration into, out of, and within the region, but especially so since the invasion of Europeans after the sixteenth century.⁴ Grenada, despite its small size, illustrates this phenomenon well, dating to its precolonial (Indigenous) beginnings and its location at the southern entrance to the Caribbean archipelago.⁵

Grenada has been part of several groupings of islands that have connected it politically, economically and socially to its neighbours. Grenada, itself an archipelagic state, has been (politically) part of the French Îles du Vent (1674–1762), the (British) Ceded Islands (1763–1779), the British Windward Islands (1833–1958) and the Federation of the West Indies (1958–1962).⁶ The Caribbean Sea has been the conduit allowing islanders easy access to and from other islands in the chain, and to and from the Spanish Main. But it is Grenada's connections with its immediate island neighbours in the Eastern Caribbean, particularly through trade via small, locally built schooners (and other boats), that have created deep connections and have led to extensive inter-island migration over the centuries.⁷ As Grenadians from Grenada and Carriacou moved with the sea currents southwards in the late 1800s and 1900s, particularly to Trinidad and Tobago, the peoples of St Vincent and Barbados also migrated into Grenada in significant numbers, cementing these sub-regional connections.⁸ But, according to Hareward, "the net inward flow of migrants to Grenada ended towards the end of the nineteenth century, and for all inter-censal periods from 1891–1960, there has been significant net emigration."⁹

Of the regional migrants who settled in Grenada in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Barbadians were the most numerous and culturally impactful. As a result of changes to their emigration laws in the 1870s, Barbadians began leaving their native island in large numbers in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Their arrival in Grenada was covered by local newspapers, which detailed the estates on which the disparate and mainly African-descended migrant groups settled. On 5 August 1871, the *Grenada Chronicle* newspaper reported that,

The sloop *Dasher* arrived this morning from Barbados via Carriacou, deeply laden with fish, flour, etc., and bringing, besides, no less than 43 immigrants — 19 men, 9 females, 15 children. So crowded was she with this lot of people, that one called Eastman, fell overboard last night, close to the Sisters' Rock, and was drowned [. . .] These immigrants intend to settle on Mount Parnassus

estate, the property of Andrew J. Nugent, Esq., on the Clark's Court, owned by Mr. Lord, and on Mr. Pitcher's estate, Laura.¹⁰

In July 1872, the *Grenada Chronicle* again reported on Barbadian immigrants:

There has been quite a crowd of immigrants from Barbados during the last few days. The enterprising proprietor of the Laura and Mt. Gay estates, Mr. F. Ince of that colony, has sent down no less than seventy able bodied labourers for those proprietries, who arrived safe and sound in the *Lark* on Monday [. . .] Of late years, the number of Barbadian laborers who have come here would surprise many. A regular colony has been formed by them about the Mount Parnassus lands, and others are scattered over the country—everywhere happy and prosperous.¹¹

The community of St Paul's, St George, deriving from the Mount Parnassus estate where many Barbadians had settled in the 1870s, became known as "Barbados Village" by the 1890s. A flattering appraisal for the *Report of the West India Royal Commission* (1897) states that:

The Barbados labourer has been ranked side by side with any labourer in the world from the standpoints of intelligent labour, efficiency, and endurance under the most adverse circumstances of life. These he carries with him wherever he emigrates, as [the] Barbados village in the neighbouring island of Grenada can testify.¹²

By 1907, the village was described as "a colony of Barbadian negroes who have emigrated to Grenada and become rich and prosperous members of society".¹³ Today, the village retains many known Barbadian-descendant families after a century and a half. These Barbadian immigrants brought with them celebrations like tea-meetings of speechifying that would spread across Grenada by the early 1900s and evolved into literary leagues; the still commemorated Guy Fawkes Day (in a predominantly Catholic country); and food dishes like conkie, and cou-cou and fish.¹⁴

Among the migrant groups who arrived in Grenada during this period, one stood out because of its perceived difference: the noticeable whiteness of its members. This group settled on the outskirts of Grenada's capital, St George's, and worked on plantations primarily in Grand Mal, Beausejour, and Mt Moritz under similar conditions to those experienced by their countrymen who went to the Mt Parnassus estate. After a period of tenancy, many of the families established the village of Mt Moritz, located about 2 km (1.25 miles) inland from Molinière and about 5 km (3 miles) from the capital, where they were known as the "Mount Moritz Bajans". Unlike their compatriots in St Paul's, the Mt Moritz Bajans were always viewed as different.¹⁵

The ideas of race and colour quickly had grown to be significant identifiers of peoples, and thus signals of status, across the slave plantation complex in the Caribbean by the end of the seventeenth century. The dominance of Europeans and the enslavement of Africans resulted in a social hierarchy that placed Europeanness and whiteness at the top and Africanness and blackness at the bottom, with varying shades of racial mixtures in between them. The high value placed on whiteness in the slave societies of the region meant that membership of and proximity to this category became highly desirable to many. This led to the blurring of the category through attempts to gain entry to whiteness, both before and after the abolition of slavery. Thus, the idea of whiteness was (and is) contested, and should be seen as malleable in the context of the poor whites who settled and later intermarried with Grenadians of African descent in Mt Moritz, Grenada.¹⁶

Grenada's White Population

Unlike in the older British colonies such as Barbados, white indentured servitude in Grenada was never important as a component of the plantation labour regime. Between 1649 and 1762, the French colonised and developed the island's plantation economy, leading to a "turn to sugar" in the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁷ During that period, the total number of white indentured servants brought to the island stood at fewer than two thousand.¹⁸ They were always in short supply and so did not develop into a dependable source of labour for the plantations, even in the initial stages of colonisation. When the sugar revolution began in the Caribbean in the mid to late 1600s, it was evident that white indentured labour was inadequate to meet demands on sugar plantations, and captive Africans soon replaced indentured Europeans across the system. Yet, a class of middling and poor whites was always viewed as necessary for the maintenance of European control over an overwhelming majority enslaved population.¹⁹

This late turn towards sugar production in Grenada meant that white indentured labourers were not used here. By the time the British captured Grenada from the French in 1762, the plantation system was well developed, focusing on coffee and cotton, and already depended exclusively on enslaved African labour, although sugar had yet to become the main crop.²⁰ The overwhelming turn to sugar under the British led to a doubling of the enslaved population from around 15,000 to 35,000 within a decade and a half of taking control, and the British also legislated

that plantation owners should employ Europeans who could serve in the militia and present a veneer of colonial security.²¹ The traditional indentured servitude that had been practised in Barbados and other British colonies, and that had become obsolete, was never implemented in Grenada under the British. However, a slightly altered form of white indentured servitude or apprenticeship did exist on some of the British, particularly Scottish, Grenadian plantations, albeit on a very small scale.²²

Following the ceding of the islands to the British in 1763 and again in 1784, British subjects, both rich and poor, migrated to Grenada in search of new opportunities. Though many were wealthy planters, a fairly large group were middling farmers and poor whites hoping to make their fortunes in a new colony. In 1763, the white population stood at 1,235, a large portion comprising French Roman Catholics who would leave the island in large numbers over the next decade as a result of cultural and political clashes between themselves and the incoming British Protestants. By 1810, due mainly to the disruptions caused by Fédon's Rebellion in 1795–1796, the white population had dropped to 633 but rose to 761 by the time of the abolition of slavery in the 1830s.²³

Thus, Grenada's inter-imperial history and its late development as a sugar colony meant that white indentured servitude had not played a significant role in its labour history. While it had attracted poorer whites, most were small to middling farmers rather than rural wage labourers. In 1871, on the eve of the immigration of poor whites to Grenada from Barbados, the total white population in Grenada stood at less than one thousand. It was never a large population by any standards, and it was constantly decreasing. The process of emancipation, which began in 1834, only accelerated the decline, as the remaining Europeans left Grenada for better opportunities elsewhere in the region (such as in Trinidad and British Guiana), or returned to Europe. The small remaining group of Europeans/white people comprised plantation owners and their families, plantation overseers and managers, professionals like doctors and merchants, British civil servants, and others who worked for the white elite.²⁴

The Government of Grenada had made attempts to increase the white population on a number of occasions. It had always been a goal of the colonial government and the plantocracy to increase the white population, but they were unsuccessful throughout the period of slavery, under both the French and British. In 1839 and again in 1846–1847, groups of immigrants from British Malta and Portuguese Madeira were brought in as indentured labourers for the sugar estates.²⁵ It was hoped that the

Maltese "would have a civilizing effect on the ex-slaves" and increase the small white population.²⁶ The scheme was unsuccessful. Though a small number remained in Grenada, the majority emigrated to Trinidad and other colonies in the region. Thus, Grenada's population of poor whites remained low.

"Poor Whites" in Barbados

In contrast to Grenada, Barbados had a long history of successful exploitation of European indentured labourers. White indentured labourers arrived on the island from the British Isles in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, soon after the British occupation of Barbados in 1627.²⁷ They were part of regular streams of emigrants who left or were removed from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, some in the hope of improving their economic situation and social status, others tricked into making the journey.²⁸ In Barbados, they were indentured for periods of three or more years, working on sugar plantations in various capacities, predominantly as agricultural labourers, skilled artisans, domestic servants and militia. Their treatment and indenture were often harsh, sometimes cruel, but many survived their indenture to become part of the growing free population, one of several groups of people within hierarchical Barbadian slave society.²⁹

After 1648, political prisoners, prisoners of war, criminals and other "undesirables" augmented the regular flow of voluntary indentured labourers, beginning with Oliver Cromwell's transportation of prisoners of war to Barbados.³⁰ These prisoners of war included English, Scots and Irish, who by 1655 may have numbered some 12,000 employed as indentured labourers on the island.³¹ Transporting members of these various groups to Barbados became so widespread that the verb "*to Barbados*" someone became part of the English language. With this impactful migration, the island was described as "the Dunghill wharone England doth cast forth its rubidg [rubbish]: Rodgs [rogues] and hors [whores] and such like people."³² As late as the 1680s, prisoners of war were still being deported to Barbados. The deportation of these prisoners, particularly a few hundred of the followers of the Duke of Monmouth in 1686, would later create the "Monmouth myth" that the Bajan "Redlegs" (or poor whites) were "the direct and only descendants of those Monmouth rebels".³³

By the 1660s, Barbados' white population stood at about 20,000, with so-called "poor whites" making up over 60 per cent.³⁴ Though

many had begun to emigrate to other British colonies in the region and North America, particularly to South Carolina, a considerable European population remained. This large population did not have much access to land because sugar plantations had already enveloped the island, thus forcing many poor whites to re-indenture, to find employment as servants, to farm, or to work as skilled tradesmen. The continuing increase in the enslaved population during this period, however, had a significant impact on European labourers in their search for gainful employment.³⁵ They found themselves competing with the enslaved not only for agricultural jobs, but also skilled employment on the plantations and in the towns. In the end, the economics of plantation slavery resulted in enslaved people assuming many of the jobs and skills that the European indenture labourers could have held or aspired to.³⁶ As a result of their marginalisation — a growing number of white people were only eking out their subsistence in the slave economy — and by the beginning of the eighteenth century, they constituted "indisputably a class of poor whites".³⁷ The slave society had not completely discarded the formerly indentured labourers because of the perceived need for a considerable number of white people to control the growing enslaved population, especially in the event of a revolt, which was a fear of the plantocracy. Beginning in the late 1600s, that fear led to the establishment of "military tenants": every 60 acres of agricultural land had to provide one militia member. These tenancies were filled by "a lower order of whites" who were given a house and plots of two acres of land rent-free in exchange for their membership in the militia.³⁸ Thus, thousands were able to work and sustain their families for decades within the slave society.

The maintenance of enslaved and free populations meant that the island of Barbados historically had a high population density. By 1844, there were 749 persons per square mile, far above the other British colonies in the region. Unlike the other colonies that experienced streams of out-migration after the abolition of slavery in the 1830s, including Grenada, the Barbados government pursued policies that discouraged the emigration of its citizens, as it believed that their cheap labour was needed on the plantations.³⁹ By the 1850s, however, it was evident that Barbados would experience social problems associated with overpopulation, such as high unemployment, poverty, disease and starvation, if action was not taken to curb population growth. Yet, it was not its "overpopulation" that led to the island's first proposal for organised emigration, but instead the unfortunate conditions of the segment of the population known as the "poor whites".⁴⁰

Poor Whites in Barbados in the Post-Emancipation Era

The emancipation of the enslaved population in 1834, and the end of the apprenticeship system in 1838, dealt a deathblow to the economic base of the poor whites who had survived on the largesse of the slave society for centuries.⁴¹ The most immediate consequence of emancipation was the disbandment of the military tenancy in 1839, and its replacement by a national police force. Thus, over two thousand white families, who could not afford to pay rent for formerly rent-free lands they had occupied for militia services rendered, were evicted from the plantations and from their only means of livelihood.⁴² Many subsequently settled in the eastern Scotland District, primarily in the St Lucy, St John, St Joseph, St Andrew, St Peter and St Phillip parishes, where rents for land were the lowest on the island.⁴³ A second blow to the poor whites as a result of emancipation was the loss of income for women who, as seamstresses, were contracted by the estates to make clothes for the enslaved labourers.⁴⁴

After centuries of teetering on the brink of poverty, the abolition of slavery therefore pushed Barbados' poor whites over the edge. Yet, as Watson suggests, "[t]hese people did have alternatives to abject poverty."⁴⁵ The disintegration of slave society created employment opportunities for the poor whites, but despite their white skin in a society where whiteness was thought to be superior, it appears they were at a disadvantage. First, they were unable to compete successfully with formerly enslaved people for agricultural and many skilled jobs. When they did manage to obtain these jobs, they were found to be "physically unfit for the labour of digging cane holes and that they do not possess enough energy to be useful as labourers in other departments of agriculture".⁴⁶ A Rockefeller Foundation study in 1916 revealed that 65 per cent of the poor white population was infected with hookworms, as opposed to 36 per cent among the larger population. This resulted in "signs of marked anemia of the skin, lips, tongue and conjunctivae. Shortness of breath, palpitation of the heart, giddiness, pain in the pit of the stomach, pot-belly and dwarfism were common symptoms."⁴⁷ It appears that hookworm and other diseases were partly responsible for their inability to successfully compete physically with the wider population.

Second, though their white skin was seen as advantageous, Watson suggests that it was a liability, adding, "being white and poor in an island where this was not the norm imposed psychological constraints and in the end the poor whites were the losers, because the attitudes they adopted

were unsuited to the realities of the situation, being distorted by their lack of an identity and a hallucinatory concept of self."⁴⁸ Watson believes that "their delusions about themselves inhibited their progress."⁴⁹ Or, in other words, the poor whites were caught up in a centuries-old racialisation that tied whiteness to wealth and superiority, yet they lacked the means to conform to such ideas.

The deplorable physical and economic conditions of the poor white population in the early 1800s elicited comments from diverse observers. While some ridiculed their poverty, others, who were more sympathetic, believed that something had to be done to reverse their dire situation. The comments of visitors to the island, struck by the incongruence of whiteness and poverty within a plantation society, were often negative and showed disdain. They characterised the poor whites as lazy, proud and degenerate, with one commentator going so far as to describe them as "the most indolent, ignorant and impudent race of beggars that were ever tolerated in any community".⁵⁰ Emigration would prove to be one possible solution to their plight.

Emigration to Neighbouring Islands, 1859

The dire social conditions of Barbados' poor whites by the 1850s were brought to the attention of Governor Hincks. Little in the way of social services, except church-administered poor relief and education, had been established to alleviate their poverty. A former governor had proposed that poor white youths be apprenticed to sailors, and that they should explore emigration to Canada and New Zealand.⁵¹ Though Governor Hincks believed that emigration was the solution to their predicament, he described the proposal for emigration to Canada and New Zealand as impractical "on account of the expense and even if that difficulty could be removed, likely to fail owing to the unsuitability of the climate and of the agricultural pursuits and habits of the people".⁵² Instead, Hincks turned his attention towards the other islands of the Eastern Caribbean, following a long tradition of turning towards neighbouring territories in times of need.⁵³

Seeing the solution to the problem of Barbados' poor whites as lying within the archipelago, Governor Hincks thus began promoting a scheme for their resettlement to a place where the "climate would be similar to that of Barbados".⁵⁴ His plan was to send between five hundred and one thousand poor whites to neighbouring British colonies, where each would be granted small plots of land, between five and ten acres, which could

provide "advantages as a place of refuge for these poor people".⁵⁵ Jamaica and St Vincent were seen as possibilities because of the availability of large areas of Crown lands under government control, but Jamaica's distance from Barbados made the cost of transportation prohibitive. St Vincent seemed more appropriate for Hincks's plan, and he sent a proposal to the Secretary of State for the colonies in London.⁵⁶ Both the Secretary of State and the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners viewed the plan positively, provided that St Vincent and any other colony where Barbados might propose the resettlement of its poor white population gave their approval, and that provided that Barbados' financial obligations were made clear.

Grenada was also seen as a possible target for Governor Hincks's plan. Letters were sent to St Vincent, Jamaica and Grenada in late 1859, arguing that resettlement of poor whites throughout the region on Crown lands, where they could earn a living from agriculture, would be an effective way to remove them from the poverty they were experiencing in Barbados. However, both St Vincent and Jamaica rejected the idea on the basis that poor whites were unsuited for agricultural labour and would therefore prove disadvantageous. Acting Governor Walker of Barbados would also report that Grenada's Lieutenant-Governor Kortwright was not supportive of the scheme due to the unavailability of land. Kortwright, however, had in fact responded favourably to Barbados's proposal, adding that "every addition to the permanent population of the Island is a step towards increasing its prosperity."⁵⁷ In a letter dated 8 August 1859, to the Barbados House of Assembly, Kortwright enthusiastically welcomed the resettlement scheme and promised his full support. If the settlers could be transported to Grenada at no expense to that island, the poor whites, following approval by the Executive Committee, would be given access to the 2,000 acres of unappropriated, mountainous Crown lands in the Grand Étang area of St Andrew. The letter goes on to state that the Crown lands in question were

situated about seventeen hundred feet above the level of the sea and is better suited to European constitutions or to those of European descent than the lower land in the neighborhood of the towns. It is nearly equidistant from St. George's and from the township of Grenville, offering a choice of markets for the sale of provisions. The soil is reported to be of excellent quality and the timber on the land is such as I believe would repay the expense of clearing. An industrious community, located not more than seven miles from the principal town, in the healthy, fertile part of the Island might furnish the market with a supply of fruit and vegetables at prices highly remunerative to them.⁵⁸

Kortwright, it appears, believed that Barbados's poor whites could contribute to Grenada through small-scale provision farming, but like earlier officials, he may have also viewed this emigrant group as a positive contribution to Grenadian society because of their race.

There was much debate on Governor Hincks's proposal in the regional press. Commentators were often harsh in their characterisation of the poor whites as "useless people" and "walk and nyam Buckras", who appeared to be of little value to Barbados, whose colonial authorities were trying to dispose of them.⁵⁹ An editorial in the *Jamaica Standard* expressed the views of many who were opposed to the scheme, adding that, "if they were really valuable, Barbados would not give them to us. Why does not Barbados offer us a few thousand of her black people? No, they are valuable. She would send us a class of persons who are evidently an incumbrance. [. . .] We want labour not squatters."⁶⁰

With only Grenada's favourable response, the Barbados House of Assembly took up the matter, but the administrator, in Governor Hincks's absence, "appeared from his covering note to the relevant documents to have stifled the Grenada suggestion by saying that 'before this scheme could be effected, however, the lands would have to be cleared at an expense, and, if the whites themselves were engaged in the work, at a cost of life, which puts it almost out of the question'".⁶¹ Again, poor whites were measured against their (alleged) inability to perform hard physical labour.

Thus, in the face of strong opposition from many of the islands, Governor Hincks's plan eventually proved fruitless. Though St Vincent and Grenada were still somewhat open to the idea of receiving white migrants from Barbados, there was little official communication on the matter. With Hincks's departure from Barbados in 1862, the proposal soon lost favour, with his replacement Governor Rawson incorrectly reporting that, as a class, the poor whites were disappearing and that there was therefore little need for concern.⁶²

With little by way of government support, poor whites from Barbados began migrating to other islands in the Eastern Caribbean from the 1860s under their own steam. Their most popular destinations were St Vincent and Grenada, with smaller groups filtering into Bequia and Carriacou in the Grenadines. These territories were the closest to Barbados and thus easily accessible via regular boat traffic between the islands of the Eastern Caribbean.⁶³ Unlike for the larger migration of Barbadians throughout the region, private and religious institutions aided these initial small groups that settled in the Windward Islands. Migration to St Vincent seemed to

have begun before the others, when "the owner of some forest land near Kingstown" made a request to the Anglican rector of St Joseph's parish "to send down a family or two of Poor Whites".⁶⁴ Following favourable reports, other families followed, and by 1877 the community overlooking Kingstown comprised some three hundred to four hundred people who "work diligently and make a comfortable living [in agriculture], enjoying good health".⁶⁵ They became known as the "Dorsetshire Hill Bajans", nestled in the hillside community of Dorsetshire overlooking Kingstown. Meanwhile, a smaller settlement that had sprung up in Bequia on the Mount Pleasant estate appears to have been less successful because of that island "being dry and comparatively barren".⁶⁶ A solution had yet to be found for the majority of Barbados' poor whites.

The "Mt Moritz Bajans"

Conditions in Barbados in the early 1860s proved to be the impetus for the approval of official emigration legislation, which had been previously opposed.⁶⁷ Emigration was now seen as the immediate relief for the sufferers of a prolonged drought in 1863, and as a curb on the increasing population.⁶⁸ Thus, Barbadians migrated throughout the region in increasing numbers, including to Grenada. Though their numbers in Grenada were small relative to those in countries like Trinidad and British Guiana, they represented a fairly sizeable influx of immigrants. By 1861, Barbadian migrants were a noticeable presence among Grenada's foreign-born population. Their numbers gradually grew and, by 1891, of the 2,577 citizens from the British West Indies resident in Grenada, Barbadians constituted 1,835, over 50 per cent (see table 1). Though the majority of these Barbadians were of African descent, a small group of poor whites had begun arriving in the 1870s. Between 1860 and 1870, some six hundred to seven hundred poor whites had left Barbados for the Windward Islands.⁶⁹

The 1881 census of Grenada lists a white population of 835: 440 males and 395 females, just under 2 per cent of the total population. As this was within a decade of the arrival of the Mt Moritz Bajans, they made up only a small component of the white population. They probably numbered between twenty-five and fifty, comprising both families and single individuals. The census did not make special mention of the Mt Moritz Bajans community, because it was inconsequential at that time.

The migration of poor whites from Barbados to Grenada was, as shown, shaped by push factors in Barbados, but there were also pull

Table 1. Barbadians as part of Grenada's immigrant population, 1861–1921

Year	Number of Barbadian Immigrants to Grenada	Total Number of Immigrants to Grenada	Barbadians as a Percentage of Total
1861	1,432 ¹	3,512	n/a
1871	2,145 ¹	5,159	n/a
1881	1,180 ²	5,878	n/a
1891	1,835	6,466	28.4
1901	1,812: 993/809 ³	5,552	32.6
1911	1,456: 763/693 ³	4,703	30.0
1921	1,063: 516/552 ³	3,258	32.6

Source: Report and General Abstracts of the Census of 1891, 1901, 1911 and 1921

- 1 Total is for Barbados, Trinidad and other BWI, with Barbados constituting at least a third.
- 2 Total is for Barbados and Trinidad, with Barbados constituting over half.
- 3 Total: Male/Female.

factors in operation. A private request and the Anglican Church aided the establishment of Barbadian poor whites in Grenada, much like in the case of St Vincent. Amongst the estates that received this influx was the Mt Moritz estate, which takes its name from Moritz Hardman, who purchased the 128-acre coffee estate in 1792 from Philbert Fauchier. In 1812, William Stewart, who also owned the Mt Hardman estate, bought the Mt Moritz estate. Mt Moritz produced sugar until the mid-1800s, switching back to coffee once the sugar market collapsed. In January 1866, John Kerr (a Barbadian) purchased the 120-acre cocoa estate from Lewis Gun Munroe, and Barbadians began arriving to work there. In the 1870s, "small groups of fifteen and twenty whites on schooners destined for Grenada, to work there as labourers on the cocoa plantations" were recorded.⁷⁰ In 1875, about a dozen men and women arrived, also to work on a cocoa plantation.⁷¹ In the decades that followed, they established communities in the area of the cocoa estates. The vision, entertained by Governor Hincks, of the poor whites becoming provision farmers was not realised at this point. Rather, it appears that they became a solution to perceived labour shortages on Grenada's estates.

As word presumably travelled back to Barbados of the favourable conditions in Grenada, the population of poor whites working as

agricultural labourers in Grenada grew. By 1891, the population of Mt Moritz, Belle Air and Hermitage, where the majority of Barbados' poor whites had settled and worked, was ninety, comprising thirty-six males and fifty-four females.⁷² Other smaller groups and families were scattered in the area on estates like Beausejour, Grenville Vale, and Grand Mal, the latter owned by Elvira Greaves, a plantation owner of Barbadian origin. The surnames of the early poor white families included Chandler, Medford, Hinds, Elms, Searles, Seales, Dowden, Weeks and Edwards.⁷³

The 1881 census compiler noted, however, that "many persons of mixed blood have improperly and ridiculously returned themselves as 'white'", suggesting that the number was too high.⁷⁴ The same comment was made in 1921, with the compiler suggesting that the white population be reduced by about 10 per cent to provide a more accurate total of white people in Grenada. The 1921 census also pointed out that: "While the schedules were being examined one could not help noticing that persons undoubtedly of mixed blood seemed to have undergone an albescent re-incarnation. The ridiculous aspect is evidenced by the fact that of the issue of the same parents of mixed blood, one was returned as White while another was entered [as] Mixed."⁷⁵ Such comments underscore that authorities found it difficult to align the presence of white people of few means with the notion that whiteness ought to reference wealth and elite status.

In the early 1900s, many of the poor whites began to work and live on the Mt Moritz estate as tenant farmers, creating a stable community by the mid-1900s.⁷⁶ They became practically self-sufficient agriculturally, and self-contained socially, interacting with the outside community mainly through the exchange of agricultural produce at Saturday markets; finally, Governor Hincks's vision was within reach. A Barbadian newspaper reprinted a 31 January 1905 article from the *Federalist and Grenada People* titled "Locals Doing Well in Grenada", stating that:

Mt. Moritz, a settlement in Grenada of Barbadians from the Scotland District of Barbados, is coming to the front. The steady industry of these patient workers has developed the district, turning sterile lands into fertile fields, and making it the source of supply of feathered stock for the town of St. George.⁷⁷

The same article noted that the Reverend Canon Jones-Bateman, the Anglican rector of St George, had established a "private adventure school" so "their children could receive the elements of knowledge". By 1914, N.J. Paterson, the Mt Moritz estate owner, donated a plot of land to the Anglican Church to build a church and school, with the community

numbering around 223 people, according to a Rockefeller Foundation report.⁷⁸ Around the same time, the noted pioneer of tropical medicine Sir Andrew Balfour visited the Mt Moritz community and wrote:

Amongst other places visited was the colony of Poor Whites at Mount Moritz. Canon Walton, who takes a keen interest in these poor people, and is also alive to the claims of hygiene in the tropics, accompanied me. These settlers — some 200 in number — came from Barbados forty years ago. I need not tell you who they were originally, or how they have kept to themselves. [. . .] These unfortunate people — some, remember, with traces of blue blood in their veins — are termed 'Red Legs' and are looked down upon by the prosperous negro.⁷⁹

Steele comments that "[i]n the 1930s the majority of the Mount Moritz Bajans were still poor, hardworking market gardeners, cultivating plots of land seldom bigger than one and a half acres, disregarded and treated with scorn by the rest of the population. [. . .] When they came to town to sell their produce, children shouted at them, 'Poor Backra' or 'Backra Johnny'."⁸⁰ They were also taunted with the song: "Cricket gill and dry bonavist/ Good enough for poor Backra", in reference to their popular diet of sweet potatoes and bonavist beans.⁸¹ They would later popularly be known by the slightly derogatory name "Mung Mung", most likely derived from Grenadians' Creole pronunciation of the Mount in the village's name.⁸²

As the 1921 census noted, the Mt Moritz community was the only segment of the white population that was increasing, representing about 24 per cent of the total white population and about 60 per cent of the white population in the parish of St George. By 1946, the Mt Moritz Bajans and their descendants reportedly constituted 90 per cent of the persons denoted as white, even though the community itself was quite diverse in its racial makeup, as earlier censuses had disparaged.⁸³ The Grenada government acquired the Mt Moritz estate and in 1957 it became part of its Land Settlement Scheme, with many of the residents given deeds to their own plots of land.⁸⁴ The Mt Moritz Bajans and their descendants had become rooted in Grenada, creating their unique Barbadian–Grenadian community after eight decades of residence in the area.

For just over a century (1870s to 1970s), the rural agricultural settlement of Mt Moritz was semi-isolated from the larger surrounding Grenadian society, with only a small number of black and mixed-race individuals/families gaining access to the "closed" community.⁸⁵ In the early 1970s, the predominantly white/mixed community of Mt Moritz began to change, with many migrating to Trinidad, the United States, the United Kingdom

as part of Windrush, Canada, and Australia, especially the latter due to exclusive racial immigration policies at the time, and which today has a sizeable Grenadian-descent community.⁸⁶ Some long-time residents of Mt Moritz moved into the wider Grenadian community, and slowly the surrounding black population also migrated into Mt Moritz through marriage, work and residence.⁸⁷ By the end of the 1970s, the community was virtually integrated. Today it would be difficult for someone without a knowledge of the area's history to account for the present racial mixture, which a recent census recorded as 52 per cent mixed, 10 per cent white, and 36 per cent Black. Some family names of the original settlers of Mt Moritz are still readily identifiable: Chandler, Dowden, Edwards, Greaves, Hinds, Medford, Seales and Searles. It remains a unique and interesting community because of its history, and is well known today for the Mount Moritz Breakfast, a monthly West Indian breakfast offering for Grenadians and visitors.

The history of the Mt Moritz Bajans speaks to the interconnected history of the Eastern Caribbean. Colonial authorities, landowners, churchmen, and the poor whites themselves, found solutions to the poverty of nineteenth-century Barbados by looking towards opportunities close by. While most migrants of the period were obviously of African descent, archipelagic migration patterns also shaped how white people of lesser means attempted to carve out a future for themselves and their families in the region.⁸⁸ In Grenada, the historical presence of Barbadian migrants, including poor whites, has had an enduring impact on island culture and traditions.

NOTES

1. Beck, 235; Smith, *Stratification in Grenada*, 15; Williams, 36.
2. Count Ossie.
3. Arthur Lewis in Bach, 7.
4. Watts, 41–173.
5. Hanna, "Camáhogne's Chronology", 1–11; Martin, *Island Caribs*, 1–77.
6. Martin, *We Navel-String Bury Here*, 7–8.
7. Brizan, 237–47; Hill, "The Impact of Migration", 218–26; Pool, 241–45; Murphy.
8. Harewood, 61–66; Pool, 241–45; *Reports & General Abstracts* 1891, 10, 33; 1901, 10; Steele, 196–97.
9. Hareward, 63; see also Pool, 240–46.
10. "Grenada—From *The St. George's Chronicle* August 5, '71", 3.

11. "Grenada-From *The Grenada Chronicle* July 10", 12.
12. Daniel, 219.
13. H L.O.G., 134.
14. Martin, *We Navel-String Bury Here*, 245-46; Martin, *A to Z of Grenada Heritage*, 29, 57, 59-60, 162-63.
15. See Andrews, "White Trash", 304; Beck, 235-36; O'Neale, 27-32.
16. See *Grenada Report and General Abstracts of the Census of 1921*, 10. For discussion on the flexibility of whiteness, see for example Brereton, *Social Life*, 16-17; Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*; Livesay; Heuman. Also see Fricke, "An Eastern Caribbean Maritime Network" in this special issue.
17. Murphy, ch. 5.
18. Martin, *Island Caribs*, 172-74.
19. Blackburn, 229-61, 315-25, 344-50.
20. See Martin, *Island Caribs*, 263-73.
21. Brizan, 94.
22. Slade, 489-90, 496-97, 499.
23. Cox, 10-32.
24. Steele, 199-218.
25. *Ibid.*, 186-87.
26. Mackie, 107.
27. See Price, 35-37; Reilly, *Archaeology Below the Cliff*, 53-79; Sheppard, 17-39.
28. Handler and Reilly, 30-36.
29. Handler, 1-2.
30. Sheppard, 18-20.
31. *Ibid.*, 18.
32. Henry Whistler quoted in Vaughn, 60.
33. Sheppard, 29. On the Redlegs, see also Keagy.
34. Sheppard, 25; Watson, 131.
35. Beckles, 1-15; Reilly, "Archaeologies of Instability", 3-10.
36. See Beckles, 1-17; Sheppard, 24-26; Watson, 133-34.
37. Sheppard, 68.
38. *Ibid.*, 46.
39. *Ibid.*, 94.
40. *Ibid.*, 94-95.
41. *Ibid.*, 67-70.
42. *Ibid.*, 67-74.
43. Watson, 134.
44. Sheppard, 74.
45. Watson, 134.
46. *Ibid.*, 134.
47. Sheppard, 75; Watson, 134.
48. Watson, 135.

49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid., 138.
52. Ibid.
53. See Brereton, *Caribbean*, 858–59; Thomas-Hope, *The Caribbean*, 835–42.
54. Watson, 48.
55. Ibid., 138.
56. Sheppard, 95.
57. Watson, 141.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid., 142.
60. Ibid.
61. Sheppard, 95–96.
62. Watson, 147.
63. See "Grenada—From *The St. George's Chronicle* August 5, '71", 3; "Grenada—From *The Grenada Chronicle* July 10", 12.
64. Watson, 148; see also Adams, 13–14, 20–22.
65. Watson, 148.
66. Price, 38; Watson, 148.
67. See also Banton.
68. Brown, 34.
69. Watson, 147.
70. Ibid.
71. Keagy, 31; 3rd Report of the Superintendent of Emigration.
72. *Grenada Report and General Abstracts of the Census of 1891*, 19.
73. See N.S.D. "The Mt Moritz Dozen", for details of the original immigrant families.
74. *Grenada Report and General Abstracts of the Census of 1921*, 10.
75. Ibid.
76. See Paterson et al., Indenture, 7 February 1940, and 6 April 1945.
77. "Locals Doing Well in Grenada", Unknown Barbados newspaper from *The Federalist and Grenada People*, 31 January 1905.
78. Paterson, Indenture, February 17, 1913; The Rockefeller Foundation, *Annual Report*, 60–62.
79. Audcent, 22; Balfour, 42.
80. Steele, *Grenada*, 197; Backra = "white".
81. Venis Martin, personal communication. Interview recorded in 1991 in Mt Moritz, St George, Grenada; see also Steele, 197; Andrews, "White Trash", 305; Mendes, "Yellow Legs", 188 for the song but incorrect interpretations. Cricket gill was a popular, drought-resistant variety of sweet potato grown by the Mt Moritz Bajans and is common to Grenada.
82. Martin, *A to Z*, 162–63.
83. Steele, 197.

84. Government of Grenada, *Plan of Mt. Moritz Estate*.
85. See Johnson, *Mt. Moritz Community*, for details of Mt Moritz's integration into the larger Grenadian society.
86. This has led to the common, but incorrect assumption/belief that the original Mt Moritz Bajans came from Australia as some probably shared a similar past with the convicts who were sent to the penal colony there.
87. Martin, *A to Z*, 162–63; see also Alexis, "A Socio-Cultural Overview", and Johnson, *Mt. Moritz Community*.
88. In a similar manner to how the poor whites of Barbados were forced to migrate, economic hardship also pushed white people of fewer means away from St Barths. The majority of them eventually ended up on St Thomas in the 1860s, forming a minority white community that is still present (Roopnarine, 78).

WORKS CITED

- Adams, E. *The Making of the Dorsetshire Hill Community: A Socio-Historical Community*. St Vincent: R & M Adams Book Centre, 2014.
- Alexis, Y. *A Socio-Cultural Overview of the Village of Mt. Moritz from 1900s to 1950s*. Grenada Teachers' College, T.A.M.C.C., St George's, Grenada, 1987.
- Andrews, H.G. "'White Trash' in the Antilles". In *Negro Anthology*, edited by Nancy Cunard, 303–7. 1934. Reprint, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1996.
- Andrews, G.R. *Afro-Latin America: Black Lives, 1600–2000*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016.
- Audcent, G. "A History of Mount Moritz on the Caribbean Island of Grenada from its Origins as a Coffee Plantation Called 'Haut Brion' with Illustrations at the end". Unpublished, 2023.
- Bach, R. "Caribbean Migration". *Migration Today* 10, no. 5 (1986): 7–13.
- Balfour, A. *War Against Tropical Disease*. London: Ballière, Tindall and Cox, 1920.
- Banton, C.A. *More Auspicious Shores: Barbadian Migration to Liberia, Blackness, and the Making of an African Republic*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- Beck, J.C. "The West Indian Supernatural World: Belief Integration in a Pluralistic Society". *Journal of American Folklore* 88, no. 249 (1975): 235–44.
- Beckles, Hilary McD. "Black Over White: The 'Poor-White' Problem in Barbados Slave Society". In *After the Crossing: Immigrants and Minorities in Caribbean Creole Society*, edited by Howard Johnson, 1–15. London: Frank Cass, 1988.
- Blackburn, Robin. *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492–1800*. London: Verso, 1997.
- Brereton, B. "Caribbean: English-Speaking Regional and External Migration, 1830–2000". In *The Encyclopedia of Global Migration*, edited by I. Ness, 2:858–62. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwood, 2013.

- . *Social Life in the Caribbean, 1838–1938*. Kingston: Heinemann Educational, 1985.
- Brizan, George. *Grenada: Island of Conflict*. Oxford: Macmillan Caribbean, 1998.
- Brown, Laurence. "Experiences in Indenture: Barbados and the Segmentation of Migrant Labor in the Caribbean 1863–1865". *NWIG: New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 79, nos. 1/2 (2005): 31–53.
- Count Ossie. "Narration". In *Groundation/Mystic Revelation of Rastafari* by Count Ossie and the Mystic Revelation of Rastafari. Tokyo: Dubstore Records, 1973.
- Cox, E.L. *The Free Coloreds in the Slave Societies of St. Kitts and Grenada, 1763–1833*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984.
- Daniel, G.G. "Summary of Evidence respectfully tendered in behalf of a joint committee of artisans and labourers before her majesty's Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the sugar industry, the condition of the labouring classes, &c. in the West India colonies, now sitting at Barbados". *Report of the Royal West India Commission*, Appendix C, 1:219. London: Printed for Her Majesty's Stationary Office.
- Government of Grenada. *Plan of Mt. Moritz Estate Surveyed for the Dept. of Agriculture, Grenada, BWI*. St George's: Department of Agriculture, Government of Grenada, [c1952].
- . *Plan of Mt. Moritz Estate Surveyed. Land Settlement Scheme with Names of Lot Holders*. St George's: Department of Agriculture, Government of Grenada, [c1952].
- "Grenada—From *The Grenada Chronicle* July 10". *The Times of Barbados*, 27 July 1872, p.12. Bridgetown, Barbados, 1872.
- Grenada Report and General Abstracts of the Census of 1901*. Prepared by N.J. Paterson, compiler. St George, Grenada: Government Printing Office, 1902.
- Grenada Report and General Abstracts of the Census of 1911*. Prepared by G.W. Smith, compiler. St George, Grenada: Government Printing Office, 1911.
- Grenada Report and General Abstracts of the Census of 1891*. Prepared by C.H. Johnson, compiler. St George, Grenada: Government Printing Office, 1922.
- Grenada Report and General Abstracts of the Census of 1921*. Prepared by D. Julian Garraway, compiler. St George, Grenada: Government Printing Office, 1922.
- H L.O.G. "Grenada: An Imperial Poor Relation". *The Eagle: A Magazine Supported by Members of St. John's College* 28 (1905): 300–6.
- Handler, J.S., and M.C. Reilly. "Contesting 'White Slavery' in the Caribbean". *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 91, nos. 1–2 (2017): 30–55.
- Handler, J.S. *The Unappropriated People: Freedmen in the Slave Society of Barbados*. Kingston: University Press of the West Indies, 2009.
- Hanna, J.A. "Camáhogue's Chronology: The Radiocarbon Settlement Sequence on Grenada, West Indies". *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 55 (2019).
- Harewood, J. "Population Growth in Grenada in the Twentieth Century". *Social and Economic Studies* 15, no. 2 (1966): 61–84.

- Heuman, G. *Between Black and White: Race, Politics and the Free Coloreds in Jamaica, 1792–1865*. Praeger, 1981.
- Hill, D.R. "The Impact of Migration on the Metropolitan and Folk Society of Carriacou, Grenada". *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* 54, Part 2 (1977): 189–392.
- Johnson, J.C. *Mt. Moritz Community: From Isolation to Integration*. [S.i], [s.l], 2002.
- Keagy, T.J. "The Poor Whites of Barbados". *Revista de Historia de América* 73–74 (1972): 9–52.
- Livesay, D. *Children of Uncertain Fortune: Mixed-Race Jamaicans in Britain and the Atlantic Family, 1733–1833*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018.
- Mackie, C. *Life and Food in the Caribbean*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1995.
- Martin, J.A. *Island Caribs and French Settlers in Grenada, 1498–1763*. St George's, Grenada: Grenada National Museum Press, 2013.
- . *A to Z of Grenada Heritage. New and Revised*. Brooklyn, NY: Gully Press, 2022.
- . "We Navel-String Bury Here": Landscape History, Representation and Identity in the Grenada Islandscape. PhD diss., Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University, 2023.
- Mendes, A.H. "Yellow Legs". In *Short Stories, Articles and Letters* by A.H. Mendes, 188–201. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press.
- Paterson, R., J.E. Elms, et al. Indenture dated 6 April 1945, No. 108/1945, Liber: F9, p. 95, Registers of Records, Grenada Supreme Court, St George's, Grenada.
- Paterson, R., J.E. Elms, et al. Indenture dated 7 February 1940, No. 35/1940, Liber: A9, p. 297, Registers of Records, Grenada Supreme Court, St George's, Grenada.
- Paterson, N.J. The Right Reverend William Proctor Swaby, et al. Indenture dated 12 February 1913, No. 74/1914, Liber: W7, p. 56, Registers of Records, Grenada Supreme Court, St George's Grenada.
- Murphy, T. *The Creole Archipelago: Race and Borders in the Colonial Caribbean*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021.
- N.S.D. "The Mt. Moritz Dozen". History of Mt Moritz, Mt Moritz 2020 Exhibit and Reunion. <https://mtmoritzbetweenthegaps.wordpress.com/history-of-mt-moritz/>.
- O'Neale, E. *De Red Petticoat: A Selection of Caribbean Folklore*. St George's, Grenada: self-published, 1998.
- Pool, G.R. "Shifts in Grenadian Migration: An Historical Perspective". *International Migration Review* 23, no. 2 (1989): 238–66.
- Price, E.T. "The Redlegs of Barbados". In *Yearbook of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers* 19 (1957): 35–39.
- Reilly, M.C. *Archaeology Below the Cliff: Race, Class, and Redlegs in Barbadian Sugar Society*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019.
- Reilly, M. "Archaeologies of Instability: Order and Disorder in Colonial Barbados". *Journal of Social Archaeology* 2, no. 16 (2016): 216–37.

- Rockefeller Foundation. *Annual Report, 1913–14*. New York: The Rockefeller Foundation.
- Roopnarine, L. "Jews and Frenchies: The White Ethnic Minority in the US Virgin Islands". *Small Axe* 25, no. 2 (2021): 69–82.
- Sheppard, Jill. *The "Redlegs" of Barbados: Their Origins and History*. Millwood, NY: KTO Press, 1977.
- Slade, H.G. "Craigston and Meldrum Estates, Carriacou, 1796–1841". *Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 114 (1984): 481–537.
- Smith, M.G. *Stratification in Grenada*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1965.
- Steele, Beverley A. *Grenada: A History of Its People*. Oxford: Macmillan Caribbean, 2003.
- Thomas-Hope, E. "The Caribbean and Circum-Caribbean Migration, 16th Century to the Present". In *The Encyclopedia of Global Migration*, edited by I. Ness, 2:835–42. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwood, 2013.
- Vaughan, Alden T. *Roots of American Racism: Essays on the Colonial Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Watson, Karl. "'Walk in Nyam Buckras': Poor White Emigration from Barbados, 1834–1900". *Journal of Caribbean History* 34, no. 1 (2000): 130–56.
- Watts, David. *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture and Environmental Change Since 1492*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Williams, J. "Preliminaries to the Study of the Dialects of White West Indian English". *New West Indian Guide/ Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 59, nos. 1/2 (1985): 27–44.

Beyond Indenture: Indian Immigrant Mobility in St Lucia, 1859–1903

TERENCIA KYNEATA JOSEPH

Introduction

The Indian indentured labour system began in earnest in British Guiana, Jamaica, and Trinidad in 1845 after an initial attempt in British Guiana in 1838 and its subsequent suspension in 1843. In the ensuing years, British, Danish, French, and Dutch Caribbean planters participated in the labour scheme to varying degrees until it was terminated in 1920. Almost 500,000 contracted Indian immigrants were requisitioned to work for periods of three to five years, almost exclusively on sugar estates. Since the 1960s, various aspects of the Indian indentured labour system in the Caribbean have attracted scholarly attention. More recently, the Indian presence in Grenada, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, and St Croix has drawn some scrutiny, but there is still much to be researched. One aspect of indenture that has garnered fleeting attention is the continued mobility of Indians after arrival in the host colony, during the eighty-year span of the indentureship.¹ This essay focuses on the British colony of St Lucia, where about 1 per cent of all Indian migrants to the British Caribbean served their contracts on sugar estates. It also examines the patterns of mobility and relocation by Indians from the sugar estates and posits that three key indicators determined the extent of their remigration. These indicators are the status of the economy, the access Indians had to land, and the presence of a sense of community. The sources used are government-generated documents, including blue books, annual reports, reports of commissions, census reports, legislation, official correspondence, and executive and legislative council minutes. These records were supplemented with non-official archival sources

The Journal of Caribbean History 59, 2 (2025): 177–209

DOI: 10.37234/JCH.2025.U1000008

such as memoirs and newspapers. The sources are, therefore, mainly the perspectives of colonial officers, but in a few instances, the voices of Indians filtered through the official documents and non-Indian penholders are present. Lastly, this essay acknowledges the forceful detention and detrimental elements of the labour system while also highlighting ways Indians moved within and around the contracts and laws that tried to confine them to the sugar estates.

From the beginning of their indenture, Indian immigrants defied the legal restrictions on their movements. These individuals had signed contracts or indentures, committing to work for a fixed period in various overseas colonies. When they had completed the mandatory five-year contract, and in some cases an additional five-year residency in the colony — termed the “industrial service” — the majority abandoned work on the sugar estates to return to India. The number of return migrants from St Lucia is significant because it was proportionally greater than that recorded for Trinidad or British Guiana. Of the Indians who did not return, some continued to both work and live on the very estates where they had served their indentures or moved to another estate. Others, while opting to live elsewhere, laboured seasonally on sugar estates, and sometimes as *métairies*, that is, sharecroppers. There were those who became wholly independent of the estates by turning to their own agricultural and alternative endeavours such as animal husbandry and shopkeeping. Some chose to leave the colony for brief periods seeking more lucrative short-term employment while intending to return with their small fortunes to purchase land for farming, or to establish shops and other enterprises. Others decided to migrate to nearby colonies permanently.

In the years following the abolition of slavery, members of the planter class expressed concerns that they no longer had access to a reliable and cheap labour force, hence their interest in sourcing contracted foreign workers, including Indians. Historians have drawn parallels with chattel slavery, comparing recruitment strategies, transportation, and experiences on estates managed sometimes by individuals who were once enslavers.² Historian Brij Lal viewed the positions taken by scholars as a continuum, with some scholars at one end designating it a form of slavery, while also contending that it yielded more positive than negative outcomes.³ Finally, there have been those who have suggested that the welcome escape from the constantly haunting spectre of famine, or drought, or feudal oppression, was also accompanied by many lasting negative effects.⁴

Indian indenture enacted labour migration from India that created a global diaspora. The historiography on this migration to the Caribbean includes the sea voyages,⁵ and Indians' post-indenture activities as they moved away from the estates.⁶ More recently, repatriation to India and intercolonial migration within the Caribbean region have attracted focused attention,⁷ but these have almost exclusively assessed the British Guianan and Trinidadian contexts, with the exception of Lommarsh Roopnarine's work on the Windward Islands. This essay, therefore, picks up where Roopnarine left off by assessing patterns of movement, this time with an emphasis on St Lucia and the specific conditions of indenture that informed the type and degree of migration away from the estates and the colony.

Indians who participated in the indentured labour scheme likely migrated multiple times before stepping aboard a ship to another colonial destination. Some had left their rural homes in India, moving from one village to the next. Others, having faced drought, famine, or loss of their land, oftentimes as a consequence of ruinous East India Company rule and British colonial land-use and taxation policies, travelled to the large cities, seeking employment.⁸ Escape from cultural practices, including social ostracism caused by the limitations and barriers of the caste system, was also a driver of this migration.⁹ These conditions made individuals vulnerable to the false promises of *arkatis* (recruiting agents). Arkatis advertised the indenture scheme as an opportunity to secure high-pay employment on sugar estates for only five years. They also enticed individuals with the prospects of gratuities of land or money, referred to as a "bounty", or of a free return passage to India. What was not emphasised or disclosed were the precise nature of the work involved, the penal sanctions, and the living conditions. Arkatis were also known to resort to physical force to make up their quotas. Within this coercive context, Indians became part of a mass migration of almost one million people, destined for British, French, Dutch, and Danish colonies in the Indian, Atlantic, and Pacific Oceans between 1834 and 1917.¹⁰

St Lucia was among the last British Caribbean colonies to take part in the indentureship system. The local authorities submitted an application to requisition Indian immigrants in 1854. By that date, tens of thousands of Indians had already emigrated to British Guiana, Jamaica, Suriname, Martinique, and Guadeloupe.¹¹ The first indenture immigrants to St Lucia arrived on Friday, 6 May 1859, when the *Palmyra* and its 318 passengers entered the Castries harbour, having embarked from the Calcutta port. The ship's manifest indicated there were two hundred and forty men, fifty-

eight women, four minors (ten to fourteen-year-olds), and five children/infants (under the age of ten). The gender disparity was a feature of the system, with about three women to every ten men.¹² There were attempts to address this imbalance by introducing a quota that would raise the ratio to 4:10, but these attempts were not successful and raised concerns among colonial authorities about the arkatis kidnapping young women and girls. Young men were more likely to migrate, while women stayed behind to care for young children and elderly relatives. Threats to personal safety during the voyage, which lasted on average twenty weeks, deterred some women and was one reason why it was common for strangers to marry at the port, prior to embarking on the journey. This afforded women the protection of their new husbands onboard ship.¹³ When Indian immigrants arrived in St Lucia, they encountered a plantation economy that demanded a fixed and controlled labour force. In response, many Indians used mobility and migration strategies to challenge their contracts and pursue improved working conditions and opportunities.

Population Size and Distribution

St Lucia is the largest (617 square km) of the Windward Islands that introduced Indian indentured immigrants; the others were Grenada (348.5 square km) and St Vincent (344 square km). St Lucia's topography is dominated by a central ridge of mountains forming a spine down the length of the island, giving way to two plains at the extreme north and south of the island, and bottomland valleys on the west and east coasts. It is in these plains and deep valleys that sugar estates were located. Sugar dominated the economic sector as the largest revenue earner and source of employment. Cocoa, coffee and provisions were other minor agricultural pursuits. In the mid-1800s, St Lucia's population of 26,674 people was the smallest of the Windward Islands. The colony was controlled by the 4 per cent "white" minority who were mostly planters of French origin, along with a few British planters and government officials. The eight thousand "coloureds", the mixed-race group, were almost 30 per cent of the population. "Black" people were the largest class and ethnic group at 18,080 people. By 1900, Indians constituted 4 per cent of the population, replacing white people as the largest ethnic minority.¹⁴

The *Palmyra* was the first of fourteen ships that brought Indian immigrants to St Lucia. All ships departed from Calcutta (today Kolkata), with the exception of the *Francis Ridley*, which originated from the Madras

(today Chennai) port. Between 1859 and 1862, a total of 1,608 Indians were distributed to about thirty-five estates throughout the island. While St Lucian planters had been eager to participate in the labour scheme, they often failed to comply with the requirements of the contract. They delayed or skimmed on paying wages. They also failed to provide adequate medical care. Official reports indicated that Indians suffered greatly: they were overworked; many were ill; and the mortality figures were high. In spite of a slight increase in sugar output, the overall outlook was not encouraging. The government did not support further participation in the Indian indentured labour scheme because planters generally failed to meet their obligations; there was no significant benefit to the sugar industry; and it would be difficult to finance a new immigration loan. After 1862, no more Indians were requisitioned. By 1872, all immigrants had served their contracts and were eligible to return to India. The scheme was officially terminated, marking the end of the first phase of Indian indentured labour in St Lucia.¹⁵

For sixteen years, no ships arrived in St Lucia with Indian immigrants. William Des Voeux, who assumed the head of government in 1869, was persuaded to establish central factories or *usines* that would bring rationalisation to St Lucia's sugar industry.¹⁶ At the time, there were about eighty-four sugar estates throughout the island. The intention was for a modern factory to provide refinery services to multiple neighbouring estates; this would cut the cost of production for these small estates, therefore making sugar production more efficient. Along with a few leading planters, Des Voeux was able to raise the funds to purchase some of the machinery. In 1872, the first central factory began operations. By 1878, there were *usines* in Vieux Fort and the three major valleys of Cul de Sac, Mabouya, and Roseau. The *usines* were not being supplied with sufficient cane, a problem that could be solved by increasing the acreage under cultivation. This was eventually the pretext for reintroducing Indian immigrants; Indians were needed to convert forests into cane fields. Thus, in 1878, the *Leonidas* docked at Castries with 580 passengers, the largest shipment of Indian immigrants to arrive in St Lucia up to that point. This moment was the start of the second phase of Indian indentureship in St Lucia. By 1893, a total of 2,819 Indians were distributed to the estates associated with the central factories, therefore concentrating a larger number of immigrants in fewer locations, contrasting with the more diffuse distribution of the first phase.

The small size of the Indian community, its distribution in enclosed, isolated valleys, without an extensive road system that would have

facilitated communication, generated a sense of solitariness and disconnection from their culture and identity. Compared with the sugar estates of British Guiana and Trinidad, which had extensive, contiguous, low-lying areas,¹⁷ St Lucia's sugar pockets were small and scattered throughout the island.¹⁸ Up until the end of the colonial era, the communities that developed in the sugar pockets remained largely isolated. In the 1960s, a hundred years after Indians arrived in the colony, biomedical scientists studying schistosomiasis on the island reflected on the isolating nature of St Lucia's topography. In a chapter titled, "Three Valleys of Saint Lucia", one of the researchers, June Goodfield, recollected:

Most important, its topography provided as ideal a situation as would be possible to find. For the valleys were discrete with individual watersheds, and neither the flora and fauna, nor the water of one merged with that of another. This isolation was mirrored in the communities' lives, for footpaths over the hills were either nonexistent or infrequently used, so there was little social contact.¹⁹

The isolation of these estates was so stark that visitors with an interest in Indians' well-being observed and commented on it. Reverend John Morton,²⁰ who visited St Lucia to establish schools for Indians in the 1880s, having previously done so in Trinidad, lamented that, "[h]ere are three estates within two miles, shut out from all the world to a very considerable extent — the people (Indians) lonely and easily moved by a word of sympathy [. . .]"²¹

In 1891, Major D.W.D. Comins, on a short visit on behalf of the Colonial Office to report on the indenture system and the general welfare of Indians, also made a similar note.²² A brief conversation with a Muslim man underscored the isolating effect of Indians being dispersed in small, remote groups over a relatively large area.²³ The immigration ordinances encouraged the protector of immigrants (who had the responsibility of safeguarding the rights of immigrants and employers and the overall functioning of the labour scheme) to avoid separating family members and *jahaji bhai* (ship brothers and sisters), as well as to consider requests of individuals who wished to be allocated to the same estate.²⁴ The Muslim immigrant sought Comins's intervention to be relocated with his family, to an estate where there were fellow members of their faith. Muslims were the second largest religious group, yet this family was separated from fellow devotees. Similar situations where ethnic bonds were overlooked were likely replicated for caste, language and region, emphasising the challenges of finding community within the St Lucia context. The sparsely and widely distributed Indian population was

unable to recreate an Indian cultural community. Aside from a few people in the early period wearing Indian clothing, some funerary rites and Hosay processions, there were few public displays of Indian culture reported during the period of indenture. Neither were there reports of mosques and temples erected on the estates.²⁵

Indians in the Windward Islands heard from visitors, in particular fellow Indians who had been indentured in or visited Trinidad and British Guiana, of the large communities and the vibrancy of the culture elsewhere in the region.²⁶ Reverend Morton held services with the Indians after their days in the field and fielded questions, which can be reasonably assumed to have included enquiries about his work among the Indian communities in British Guiana and Trinidad, contrasting that context with what he observed in St Lucia. Some of his Trinidadian converts, such as an interpreter named Jageshwar, and teachers John Alladua, John E. Nihall, and D. Gajadhar, settled in St Lucia. They too must have conveyed their knowledge and experiences of Indian culture in Trinidad. James McNeill and Chimman Lal, who were sent by the Government of India to report on the conditions of Indians, provide a vivid description of the Indian community in British Guiana:

The estates in this colony are large settlements of Indians numbering from 400 to 4,000 [. . .] Consequently, friends can be met in very considerable numbers without leaving the estate. On week ends [sic] visits to other estates are frequently made. [. . .] The most popular public festivals celebrated by immigrants are the Phagwa or Holi and the Muharram, the manner of celebration being as in an Indian village.²⁷

Kelvin Singh describes a similar scenario for Trinidad: Indians, for the most part, were settled fairly compactly within specific areas of society and were largely concentrated in the sugar belt. Thus, it was generally with people of their own race and cultural background that the majority of the Indians had daily social intercourse.²⁸ Such revelations, when told to Indians in the Windward Islands, must have enticed them to make the journey to join their fellow countrymen.

During indentureship, hundreds of thousands of Indians embarked on ships headed to various colonial outposts. Many intended to be away for only a few years, during which time they would work to save enough money to return to India in a much better financial state than when they departed. For those who wanted a new start, their savings could be invested in land or some other enterprise. Therefore, when St Lucia-based Indians experienced comparable conditions of unemployment,

few prospects for land ownership, and an inability to establish an Indian community, some returned home, others tried their luck in another colony where conditions were more favourable, while some remained and established themselves independently of the estates in spite of the challenges they and their few remaining countrymen faced. Indeed, both the conditions of indentureship and the broader socioeconomic realities in St Lucia were situations from which Indians actively sought to free themselves.

Evading Indenture

From early in their indentureship, Indians deliberately asserted control over their circumstances by leaving the estates, thereby circumventing and at times openly violating their contracts. Indeed, the first groups of Indian immigrants, who had arrived in May and June 1859, defied the conditions of their indenture by leaving the estates without the required permissions. The half-yearly report (May to December) of the royal jail indicated that twenty-nine people were accused of desertion, which was the most common infraction in the reports of the immigration agent — the official tasked with surveying and regulating indenture on the island. The other Indians listed in the report were imprisoned for insubordination along with refusing to work, or for destroying canes.²⁹ A subsequent report indicated that fifty-eight people were convicted for absence without leave, and two for vagrancy. Most prison sentences were between fourteen and thirty days, sometimes with hard labour.³⁰ The annual reports, prepared by the protector of immigrants over the period 1878–1892, listing complaints brought by estate proprietors, demonstrate that Indians leaving estates without the proper authorisation continued to be a common concern of proprietors in the second phase of Indian indentureship. Absence from estates, absence without leave and desertion, followed by absence from work and refusing to work seem to have been the most common ways Indians resisted their indenture.³¹

So-called “absconders” who were seeking alternative employment sometimes evaded detection by migrating to parts of the island furthest from the estates that they were contracted to, and even, in one instance, by assuming an alias. Stipendiary Magistrate Charles McLean listed a few individuals who had taken such actions:

When at the St. Urbain Estate, Mr. Laporte, the proprietor, informed me that one of his Coolies under Contract named ‘Assancan’ had absented himself for nearly two months, and it was only a few days back that he (Mr. Laporte) learnt

that this Coolie was at the Ressource Estate in the quarter of 'Gros-Islet' in the First District and that to prevent detection, he had adopted the name 'Sandtakie'. Mr. Glass, the Manager of Black Bay Estate, has also informed me that a Coolie under the Contract named 'Pirti' has left the Estate since the 22nd April last and is now supposed to be at the Anse Mahaut Estate in the quarter of Soufriere.³²

Another group of immigrants were accused by planters and colonial officials of constantly absenting themselves from estate work by feigning illness. While it is arguable that planters were overlooking what may have been cases of genuine illness, this was also a practice workers regularly employed on Caribbean estates to avoid work and slow down operations, and which planters had become familiar with during the slavery era.³³ The 1871 immigration ordinance mandated that proprietors send ill Indians to hospital. Failure to do this incurred a fine and/or removal of the Indians to another property. Planters and colonial officials commonly regarded Indians' repeated reports of illness with suspicion, and interpreted them as attempts to evade plantation labour. Others were accused of deliberately taking action that would result in a jail sentence or hard labour, which many may have preferred to the work of cultivating cane.³⁴ Immigration Agent De Brossard observed this, writing in his report:

Very often when sent to Gaol, they feign sickness in order to avoid being put to hard labour, in which case they are received into the Gaol Hospital or kept breaking stones within the precincts of the Establishment. They prefer the work of the prison to that of the Estates, and several of them have expressed a desire to be detained in confinement in order to be fed on the Gaol rations.³⁵

His counterpart, Protector of Immigrants Cropper, who was sometimes viewed as sympathetic to Indians, characterised the defiance of the indentured labourers in the standard colonial narrative of the "indolent Indian",³⁶ "[i]t is well known that many among the immigrants were professional mendicants who would not work and divided their time chiefly between the Gaol and Hospital."³⁷ These views persisted despite the gross neglect by estate managers and government officials of Indian housing, health care, sanitation and overall welfare. These conditions contributed to the deaths of nearly 150 Indians out of a population of 1,218 within the first year of their arrival in St Lucia.³⁸ Subsequent reports revealed similar high mortality rates — calculated by one official to be twice those of British Guiana, Trinidad, Grenada, and Mauritius, prompting an official investigation.³⁹ Some estates were barred from employing Indians, and new legislation mandated state hospitals and the immediate conveyance of Indians for medical treatment when illness was detected or reported.

Official discourse on so-called "Madras"⁴⁰ Indians in particular was explicitly prejudicial. Colonial authorities thought this group to be more willing to abandon the estates, to have strange culinary habits, to be designated as untouchables, and to have a darker complexion.⁴¹ They arrived from the Madras port and were a minority in the Caribbean, partly because planters in British Guiana and Trinidad were prejudiced against them; only one group of 216 individuals arrived in St Lucia from Madras.⁴² They were described by colonial authorities as drunken, insolent, and as having a dislike for estate work.⁴³ In St Lucia, they were singled out by some proprietors for abandoning the estates. Proprietors of the Roseau valley estates, in particular, expressed dissatisfaction with them, largely because they often left the estates for the streets of Castries, a distance of about seven miles. One stipendiary magistrate informed the administrator of the colony of the situation:

The habit of begging, which seems so inveterate in that class of immigrants, is confined to about 30 or 40 individuals, who are no sooner released from punishment for one offence than they are again found in the streets, pursuing their favourite avocation. During the six-month period that the Immigration Agent's Report covers, some of these beggars have been taken up and imprisoned five or six times in succession [. . .]⁴⁴

During the half-year period of January to June 1860, sixty "Madras" Indians were convicted of desertion and vagrancy.⁴⁵

After an experience of twelve months, the opinion of all those who have had an opportunity of judging is that the Coolies imported here in June 1859 in the 'Francis Ridley' were the mere dregs of the population of Madras. The few among them who have any notion of agricultural labour are found to be more active than the Calcutta people; but the greater number are addicted to idleness and intemperance. They refuse to turn out to work with the other Coolies and half the time the planter is obliged to feed them at his own expense, in order to keep them on the estate. Whenever they find an opportunity, they make their escape to Castries; and no sooner are they sent back after a fortnight's punishment than they are again found about the Streets.⁴⁶

The discussion among planters over dissatisfaction with "Madras" Indians centred around a few immigrants who demonstrated their unwillingness to accept the conditions of their indenture by abandoning work on the estates. What officials chose to overlook were the circumstances of the indenture that drove Indians to destitution on the streets. The indenture contract was intended to create an immobile, and thus a reliable, labour force, but from its inception there were Indians

who defied this by fleeing the terrible conditions on the estates. After they had completed their indentures, they could pursue multiple avenues to become independent of plantation labour. Depending on their means, motivations and opportunities, some pursued repatriation, while others chose to establish communities wherever they were able to obtain land, often in the vicinity of the estates, or migrated either short term or permanently to nearby colonies.

Repatriation

Over the forty-year indenture period, six different ordinances were developed to guide the operation of the scheme. The first was passed in 1854 and was followed by the 1857, 1865, 1871, 1888 and 1891 ordinances. Each maintained the fundamentals of the 1854 legislation around the funding of the system, the length of the contracts, the remuneration for employees, and the responsibilities and obligations of employees and employers, but they were increasingly detailed. The 1891 ordinance included the most drastic changes. For instance, it addressed St Lucia-born Indian children, specifying that they were ineligible for the free return passage to India, and it barred non-biological parents and guardians from repatriating or re-migrating with them. When this legislation was introduced, the indenture system was nearing its end in St Lucia. Only one ship arrived after the legislation went into effect, and approximately 35 per cent of all Indian immigrants introduced into the colony, including just fourteen children, fell under its remit. Having survived the years of indenture, Indians now had to contend with the post-indenture landscape and seek out whatever opportunities it afforded them.

In most colonies, immigration ordinances stipulated five-year contracts, upon which the now time-expired immigrant was given a certificate of discharge. The certificate freed individuals to do as they pleased, including continuing work on any estate where work was available, working independently, applying for a passport and migrating to another colony, or purchasing a ticket to return to India. Alternatively, the individual could apply to complete the industrial residence, which required them to re-indenture for another five-year term. On completion, depending on the colony, they could redeem a free return passage, a bounty, or a grant of land.⁴⁷ The St Lucia ordinance differed from this norm, which had significant implications for contracted Indians. A certificate of discharge was not given at the end of the five years. Instead, a certificate of completion was handed over at the end of the ten-year period of indenture

and industrial service. This document freed the immigrants to work for whomever they pleased, but did not grant them the opportunity to leave the colony.⁴⁸ This feature remained part of all the St Lucian immigration ordinances from 1854 to 1888, until the 1891 ordinance revised the clause, allowing Indians to depart the colony on completion of the five-year term. Moreover, restrictions were placed on the number of passports that would be issued for Indians. The protector of immigrants sided with planter interests by limiting the number to six or seven passports per annum, allowing an absence from the colony of just one month.⁴⁹ Indians challenged colonial authorities, insisting that what they had agreed to in India was binding, and that the certificate must be issued at the end of the first five years. They condemned the requirement to remain in the colony for an additional five years as an unsanctioned policy designed to benefit planters and retain control over their labour. Indeed, they argued that it was another coercive measure to immobilise Indians even after the expiration of contracts. It only intensified Indians' resolution to leave the estates and assert their autonomy. A group who arrived on the *Roumania* in 1891 successfully presented their conditions of contract to prove their case and was thereby permitted to return to India after five years.⁵⁰

While the St Lucia and Grenada contracts offered a free return passage to India, or monetary bounty or land grant on completion of the industrial residence, St Vincent's terms were slightly different. Their contract was three years, but by adding two more years to the contract, an indentured labourer would receive £10, and a further £10 was given on completion of the ten-year residency. There was no option of payment in land. These differing possibilities, whether it was accessing lands locally, migration within the region, or repatriation to India, had implications for the choices Indians made when they were free of indenture and likely influenced the extent of their flight from the estates.

Despite the restrictive colonial policies deliberately designed to obstruct repatriation, the St Lucian evidence shows that nearly 60 per cent of Indians who arrived in the colony ultimately returned to India. For most of the first phase, from 1859 to 1872, besides enforcing the industrial residence, proprietors did not introduce measures to retain Indians as part of the permanent labour force. Many proprietors did not keep their end of the contract. There were instances where immigration agents intervened to remove Indians from estates that did not provide adequate health care, proper housing and reasonable hours of work. Indians lodged official complaints that drew attention to abuses by estate

managers, protesting both the withholding of wages and the failure to provide the contractually obligated six days of labour per week. Some proprietors requested that the agent take away their contracted Indians because they could not meet their obligations or because they were dissatisfied with them.

As the contracted period of the various groups of Indians matured, there were no applications to requisition new immigrants. By 1883, four ships had returned Indians who were part of the first phase of the scheme. As noted, over half of the Indian population (62 per cent) repatriated, taking with them their savings, which were not extensive, but were far more than proprietors or members of the government had anticipated. The *Lincelles* (1868) alone carried away 298 Indians, who remitted £2,397.18.8.⁵¹ Additionally, the state paid out £3,097 in bounty, that is, the £10 paid to Indians who served the industrial residence and gave up the free return passage to India.⁵² Planters and officials calculated that the remittances, the bounties and Indians' subsequent departure from the island was a net loss for the colony. The government had taken a £15,000 loan to fund the indentured labour scheme, and in just one disbursement to the *Lincelles* group, a similar sum had left the colony. Financially, the system was not a success for the colonial authorities.

Taking the entire indentureship period into consideration, over 54 per cent of St Lucia Indians chose to leave for India. This represented the highest recorded return migration in the southern British Caribbean. St Vincent recorded a 46 per cent return rate (2,474 arrivals and 1,141 repatriates).⁵³ Grenada's figures were significantly lower: only 9 per cent repatriated.⁵⁴ Up to 1917, British Guiana and Trinidad both recorded notably lower figures than St Lucia, with approximately 28 per cent and 21 per cent, respectively.⁵⁵ The disparity in the rate of repatriation prompts closer examination of the conditions that precipitated it.

It should also be noted that there were immigrants who, on having repatriated to India, later returned to the Caribbean, often by entering into a new contract. Statistical information on this aspect of Indian mobility can provide further insight into Indian experiences, reflections and responses surrounding the indenture, and surrounding decisions to re-indenture and therefore remigrate. Their reasons were varied, including the inability to reintegrate into Indian society, the realisation that socioeconomic conditions in the Caribbean were materially better, and social ostracism from having made an oceanic voyage.⁵⁶ Some also re-indentured to non-Caribbean colonies.⁵⁷

Table 1. Showing the number of Indians repatriating from colonies in the Southern Caribbean

Country	Arrivals	Repatriates
British Guiana	239,149	65,921
Grenada	3,205	380
St Vincent	2,474	1,141
St Lucia	4,427	2,387
Trinidad	143,939	30,022

Source: Adapted from K.O. Laurence 1994; A. Thomas 1996; T. Joseph 2008; G. Brizan 1984

Arnold Thomas highlights that Indians who repatriated from St Vincent chose not to remigrate to the colony. "Between 1871 and 1885, 1,148 Indians [. . .] left St. Vincent for India [. . .] Of those who returned, many remigrated to other sugar colonies, but none returned to St. Vincent [. . .] over 25 percent of the St. Vincent returnees re-emigrated [. . .]"⁵⁸ Regrettably, corresponding data for returning migrants who served their first contract in St Lucia and Grenada are not available, but the St Vincent situation is an indicator that the circumstances are possibly similar. St Vincent recorded the second highest percentage of repatriation. Extrapolating from this, it can be suggested that the same occurred for St Lucia. Although colonial officials often produced very detailed records on indentured labour, the data was not always uniform.⁵⁹

K.O. Laurence remarked that colonial officials were generally intent on providing repatriation ships, in spite of the significant financial costs incurred by the state.⁶⁰ Chronically ill and disabled Indians who were no longer productive were dispatched with great alacrity on the next available steamer to India. In the post-1917 years, however, many Indians waited several years to return home. For some, their dismal and uncertain economic prospects negated any ties they may have developed after ten years of residing in St Lucia. The return journey to India was guaranteed, and a significant group preferred to return to India with their savings and with the hope that conditions there had improved since the time they had left.

The differences in the repatriation figures among the three Windward Islands can be explained by differing economic opportunities, access to private and Crown lands, and an overall feeling of community. St Lucia and St Vincent's economies were dependent on sugar cultivation. Therefore, when the slump in the market occurred, St Lucia and

St Vincent's economies were devastated, while Grenada's cocoa and nutmeg industries cushioned the blow. In spite of the central factory system in St Lucia, estates increasingly found it difficult to offer six days of work as stipulated in the immigration ordinances. St Vincent registered a reduction of 66 per cent in the cultivation of cane between 1884 and 1886.⁶¹ There was little to no alternative labour available for Indians in St Lucia and St Vincent, and in the absence of opportunities to purchase land, there was little choice but to leave the estates, either to return to India, lease or squat on private and state lands, or migrate to another area where the prospects for employment and access to land were brighter.

As mentioned above, Grenada had a slightly different economic circumstance to the other Windward Islands. For one, indentured Indians were employed on cocoa estates, and not solely on sugar estates. The cocoa industry was experiencing exponential growth, and due to the glut on the sugar market, cocoa surpassed sugar as the main income earner for the colony. The majority of Indians in Grenada were concentrated in the cocoa-producing parishes of St Andrew and St Patrick. Nutmeg was also a fast-growing industry, offering an additional option for work and participation within the agricultural sector.⁶² Grenada's remuneration package was also more appealing than those of the other Windwards. Brizan explains that:

Bounties were put aside for indentured labourers – £2 per annum for five years for men, and 1 per annum for women, conditional on their remaining in the Colony. The bounty of those who chose to remain permanently in Grenada was converted into land grants at the rate of £1 for 2 acres. Thus, an immigrant entitled to a bounty of £10 would, if he became a Grenadian, be entitled to 20 acres of land.⁶³

St Vincent did not offer land in its contract, and there was little opportunity to purchase land using the bounty money. Indian immigrants who forfeited their return voyage had at their disposal £20, but very few were in a position to purchase land on those terms.⁶⁴ Much of the land in St Vincent was held by a handful of wealthy planter families,⁶⁵ who also were in prominent positions in the legislative and executive branches of the state. This elite was recalcitrant in its desire to withhold land from the peasantry. Through their positions in the government, they ensured that state land remained out of the reach of the labouring class, including the indentured Indians. The smallest parcel of Crown land for sale was in 40-acre lots, and each acre was valued at £1.⁶⁶ Thus, land ownership was

Table 2. Showing the bounty and land grants offered to indentured Indians

Territory	Bounty	Land
Grenada	£5 women/£10 for men per 5 years	Bounty commuted to land – 10 acres women, 20 acres for men
St Lucia	£10 after 10 years	10 acres – Indians ignored this option; the state seldom offered land
St Vincent	£20 after 10 years	Cost of land prohibitive – lots of 40 acres at £1 per acre

Source: Adapted from A. Thomas 1996; T. Joseph 2008; G. Brizan 1984

virtually unattainable for Indians. In the few instances where they were able to purchase private land, these were mainly mountainside plots.⁶⁷

The immigration ordinances of St Lucia, on the other hand, included the options of bounty or a grant of land in lieu of the free return voyage. Yet, up until the 1890s, the state had not sold any land to Indians; and very few private lands were sold to Indians or to other members of the labouring class. This, in effect, created a similar situation to that of St Vincent. Planters' approach to maintaining access to Indian workers was by permitting them continued use of the half-acre provision lots they were allowed while indentured.⁶⁸ As in St Vincent, the few private properties that were proffered to Indians and Afro-Creoles (African-descended Caribbean people) were on hillsides and in the mountains, since the flatter and better irrigated lands were reserved for the proprietary class to cultivate sugar. In the wake of the sugar crisis, Protector of Immigrants Cropper indicated in 1887 that, although he had made overtures to Indians to take up land grants, "they show no disposition to acquire such property; and the question is often asked by the Coolies who came in the *Leonidas* and the *Chetah*, i.e., in 1878 and 1879, how long will it be before they will be sent back to Calcutta."⁶⁹ Cropper did not disclose why Indians were averse to the offer of land, but it may have been that the offer came too late, only a year or two prior to their eligibility for the free return passage. While Indians in St Lucia and St Vincent were largely denied opportunities to become landowners, those in British Guiana, Grenada and Trinidad had far greater access to purchase land, as its sale formed part of a broader policy to retain Indians as a permanent labour force.

Some colonial observers saw the situation in St Lucia as unacceptable.

Major D.W.D. Comins visited St Lucia in 1891, when official decisions were only just then being made to sell Crown lands to support the development of peasant farming. He was frustrated by the earlier refusal of the authorities to facilitate Indian land ownership, and drew a comparison with the contrasting stance taken in British Guiana and Trinidad:

Opportunities have not been afforded them [Indians] of acquiring land and setting up themselves as independent settlers and agriculturists, but now that the Crown lands have been thrown open to them, they will no doubt eagerly take advantage of the opportunity of rendering themselves independent, and while continuing to work on estates as day-labourers, will devote their spare time to their principal occupation — the tilling and extension of their own grounds [. . .] Looking at the excellent results as regards colonisation and contentment of the immigrant population which have been obtained in Trinidad and Demerara by a liberal policy of throwing open these unused but fertile lands, so that their freehold may be acquired at a nominal price, I am astonished that the same view has not been adopted here.⁷⁰

British Guiana and Trinidad used land as an inducement to encourage Indians to provide labour to the sugar estates. Given their histories of having relatively small labouring populations in relation to arable land, British Guianese and Trinidadian proprietors' policy was to offer land for sale in the vicinity of their estates. By contrast, the small islands of St Lucia and St Vincent pursued a policy that denied members of the labouring class access to land ownership. In Trinidad, the planting interest manipulated both the land grants and the price of land to ensure that they retained a dependable workforce. Historian Marianne Soares Ramesar elaborated on the mechanisms used to that end, noting that:

The authorities sought to retain labour for the estates by increasing the minimum size of Crown Lands available, from 5 to 10 acres after 1875. In 1885, when work was scarce and the labourers needed to find their own livelihood, the minimum acreage granted was reduced to 5 acres, but increased again when the sugar planters considered that too many labourers were removing from the estate areas [. . .] price increases were imposed periodically in order to discourage the drift of labour from the estates; from £1 to £1.10/- at the turn of the century; and to £2 during 1903–5.⁷¹

Rather than outright refusing to sell private land to Indians, Trinidadian planters allowed the sugar market and the demand for labour to determine the price and availability of land for sale. They were able to do this partly because of the increased availability of land on what was a much larger island than either St Lucia or St Vincent.

During the second phase of Indian indentureship in St Lucia (1878–1903), the small and fragile sugar industry was, as noted, devastated by a glut of sugar on the international market in 1884. The estates in British Guiana and Trinidad, while also buckling under the weight of falling sugar prices, were better able to manage the crisis with their more efficiently operated factories and better-quality sugar. However, many estates in St Lucia went under and never recovered; the few able to withstand the impact of the crisis were those associated with the central factories or *usines*, and even they could not maintain full operations. Initially, estates resorted to slashing wages and workdays for all employees, with the exception of indentured Indians, but as the crisis metastasised, even their days of work were reduced. In 1895, four years into their indenture, the *Roumania* group had their livelihood threatened when it seemed that the Cul de Sac *usine* was about to shut down operations. Luckily, at the eleventh hour, local businessmen raised the funds to keep the enterprise running.⁷² The insecurity in the sugar industry, compounded by the inaccessibility of land, must have felt very like the situation Indians had left India to escape. In these circumstances, it is understandable that returning home or migrating elsewhere would have been preferable.

The crisis in the sugar industry in the mid-1880s, and the subsequent collapse of St Lucia's economy, pressured colonial authorities to encourage and support diversification of the agricultural sector. The small peasantry was already leading in that direction, having invested in the cultivation of alternative crops such as coffee, plantain and *farine* (cassava flour). The state therefore pursued measures that would grant peasant farmers access to land to expand their enterprises. The Office of the Colonial Surveyor was established to facilitate the growth of a peasant proprietary class. The Land Credit Ordinance passed in 1896, and the escheatment of abandoned sugar estates gave peasants opportunities to purchase Crown lands. The 1898 report of the colonial surveyor disclosed the extent to which sugar estates were being abandoned, the number of people applying for land, and the extent of the land available. Between 1898 and 1899, twenty-four estates and a village plot totalling 4,219 acres were escheated to the state, and at least eighty-seven applications to purchase land were submitted to the Office of the Colonial Surveyor, which was expressly instituted to create a peasant proprietary class.⁷³ By the late 1890s, the majority of Indians had already repatriated (65 per cent) or remigrated to colonies farther south. Only those who had arrived in 1893 and were still indentured, along with those who had remained in the colony or had left for short periods for seasonal work on the South and Central American mainland, would benefit from the new policy.

Internal Migration

When Indians completed their industrial service, the Office of the Protector of Immigrants had no obligation to continue reporting on their activities, except to take note of the numbers choosing to repatriate, and to accept bounties and land grants. Lists of the individuals who applied for passports and their destinations are not available; neither is data on those who continued living on estates or had set up independently. There are individual references in the annual reports of the protectors of immigrants to persons applying for passports and their intended destinations, but these are not consistent. It is also difficult to provide estimations of the numbers who migrated to other colonies. For this reason, while it is possible to access precise figures of the repatriates, an equivalent analysis is not possible for those who remained in St Lucia or who subsequently left for another colony.

Of the Indians who decided to remain in St Lucia, some continued residing and working on those sugar estates that withstood the downturns in the industry. Some left their original place of employment, migrating to find work on cocoa estates on the west coast, or to communities with relatively high concentrations of Indians in the vicinity of the Cul de Sac, Roseau, and Mabouya valleys, and in Vieux Fort. They were eager to be independent, and accessing land was a motivator to leave the estates. Those who had the resources intended to purchase a plot. Otherwise, there were alternative options to owning land. Some gained access to land through leases or by squatting. There were also Indians who followed the example of Afro-Creole labourers by securing *métayage* (sharecropping) contracts to cultivate sugar cane for either a share of the harvest or of the profits from the sale of the sugar. Depending on the agreement, tools could be supplied by the property owner. In St Lucia, many estates relied on cultivation through the *métayage*; planters were not required to pay wages, and labourers could create their own schedule and determine who would provide assistance in cultivating the fields (often family members), a situation that was beneficial to all parties involved. Indians were entering into these agreements before their indentures expired.⁷⁴

In 1891, the government established the Office of Colonial Surveyor. For a brief period, Protector of Immigrants, Robin P. Cropper, acted in the position. In correspondence to Major D.W.D. Comins, Cropper noted that some of the earlier buyers of private lands were from the first ships that brought Indians to the colony in 1859 and 1860. He also indicated that, for the year 1891, "sixty acres were bought by three coolies in lots

of 20 acres each [. . .]"⁷⁵ and that "there are now five applications for 64 acres".⁷⁶ The government, in its belated attempt to establish permanent Indian settlements, made overtures to Indians by securing lands for their exclusive use. According to Cropper: "[t]he price of the land is small, only £1 an acre, and payments are made by five instalments at intervals of a year. The desire of the Government is to establish five-acre peasant proprietors; but purchasers may have as much as ten acres."⁷⁷ The proprietary class was taking similar action: "[s]ome leading men had also begun to purchase Crown Lands not far from Castries. The design is to form an Indian settlement, chiefly of peasant proprietors, near to the market of the principal town, and close to an extensive sugar estate where spare labourers will always be welcome."⁷⁸

Before these lands were being offered for sale to Indians, it was visible in the various official reports that Indians were eager for land, to become independent of the estates. Comins recorded the livestock owned by 1,640 Indians resident on twenty-two estates in 1891: 228 owned livestock (20 horses, 480 cattle, 109 sheep, and 96 goats), and twenty were in possession of a butcher's licence. The 1891 census further demonstrates that agriculture was the occupation most Indians were able to access, hence the importance of land to the community. Nonetheless, only fourteen were peasant proprietors; 1,815 were agricultural labourers; eight overseers, assistant overseers, or drivers; and two tended stock or pasture. Very few were involved in areas independent of agriculture: four shopkeepers; forty-one indoor domestic servants; nine interpreters, teachers, or catechists; three goldsmiths and jewellers; four office managers, postmen, and porters; three carpenters and blacksmiths; and 567 unemployed.⁷⁹

The first development arising from the government land initiative was in the north of the island close to Castries, which became known as Coolietown.⁸⁰ Its successful establishment encouraged Indians at the opposite end of the island to petition the government for a similar allocation of land to develop their own community. By 1892, the protector of immigrants was able to report on promising beginnings of this southern settlement: "I have much pleasure in reporting that I have seen and eaten of the first of what may become profitable minor industries, namely, excellent rice, English potatoes, and onions."⁸¹ Indians were eager to establish their own communities, and as soon as land was accessible, they were willing to purchase it, especially lots adjacent to those of their countrymen, thus establishing permanent communities. If government officials and sugar estate proprietors had offered land sales to Indians

earlier, they would likely have stymied the extensive Indian emigration from the colony in previous decades.

Intercolonial Migration

The unique clause in the St Lucian immigration legislation, which did not allow immigrants the opportunity to end their contract after five years of service, caused great frustration to those Indians interested in migrating to neighbouring colonies. Indian immigrants complained to the protector of immigrants that they had been informed by recruiting agents in India that they could leave the colony after serving the contract. However, they had now been informed otherwise. Passport applications were made by two groups of individuals: those who were interested in migrating for a short term, that is, individuals who intended to travel to Colón, Panama, to participate in the construction of the canal in the early 1880s; and those lured by the gold rush in Cayenne, French Guiana.

Economic hardship intensified in the post-1884 period and was the primary concern driving both temporary and permanent regional migration off St Lucia's estates. The sugar industry had poor prospects, with depreciated wages and no guarantee of daily work. Comparatively, British Guiana and Trinidad's industries were in stronger positions to withstand the glut in the market: wages were still higher, and there was greater stability in the job market. Additionally, land was available at reasonable prices, a significant incentive for immigrants looking for an alternative to remaining in St Lucia or returning to India. Grenada was a promising option as well because work in cocoa and nutmeg was preferable to the drudgery of labouring in cane fields. Land could also be purchased, and if migration to Grenada did not turn out as planned, Trinidad and British Guiana were just beyond the horizon. These three colonies were also attractive because they were the sites of large Indian communities. This is perhaps least obvious for Grenada, which introduced two-thirds of the number of Indian immigrants to St Lucia. However, Grenada had a higher rate of settlement, with almost 85 per cent choosing to remain on the island.⁸² Those 85 per cent were concentrated in two neighbouring parishes, creating a reasonably sized community and sense of belonging. There was also ease of contact with the large community of Indians merely 125 miles away in Trinidad, which allowed for an inter-island sense of community, supporting more elements of Indian culture than was the case in St Lucia.

As soon as they became eligible to remigrate, Indians in St Lucia

applied for passports to travel regionally. The 1891 Immigration Ordinance mandated that the protector of immigrants should supply passports within a week of the application.⁸³ The Office of the Protector of Immigrants recorded requests for passports to facilitate travel from St Lucia to Cayenne, Colón, Demerara, Grenada, St Croix, and Trinidad. In 1869, there were 122 applications for passports to travel to Trinidad and Demerara. In that same year, an unspecified number of applications were made for travel to St Croix, where a small group of Indians were also close to completing their contracts.⁸⁴ Disappointingly for some of these travellers, the government restricted the number of passports issued to six per year until the 1891 Immigration Ordinance came into effect. Sometimes, Indians delayed their travels in order to migrate with friends and family, inclusive of their *jahaji bhai* and *jahaji bahin* (ship brothers and sisters) with whom they developed strong kinship bonds, forged by the shared transoceanic voyage.⁸⁵ These networks are possibly why Indians did not immediately travel once the legislation took effect, and also why they often travelled in large contingents. A protector of immigrants reported in 1894 that, "During the last three months of the year, more than a hundred of these people, dissatisfied with employment in cane fields for three days a week only, bethought themselves of trying the cacao plantations of Grenada. It is said that the cacao planters of that colony are in need of labourers."⁸⁶ In 1894, Reverend Morton noted that twenty-nine Indians from St Lucia had arrived in the county of Caroni in Trinidad, the centre of sugar production and home to a large community of Indians, illustrating that Indians frequently travelled in large groups.⁸⁷

Colón, Panama, and Cayenne, French Guiana were locations where tidy fortunes could be amassed quickly. The Panama Canal construction began in 1881, attracting thousands of West Indians. Jolien Harmsen et al. have estimated that during the construction period almost one quarter of adult St Lucian males were in Panama.⁸⁸ The wages were the main inducement: an unskilled labourer was paid 9 cents per hour compared with 12 cents a day on the sugar estates.⁸⁹ Indians who had completed their period of industrial residence, or who were awaiting repatriation to India, regarded this as an opportunity. This was a striking decision given that nearly one-third of labourers died between 1881 and 1889.⁹⁰ Despite the extreme risks, they undertook short-term work in Colón, in the hope of returning to St Lucia with substantially greater savings. Some individuals were willing to contravene the indentureship contracts and even bypass the passport application process to benefit from these higher wages. The attraction of higher wages and non-agricultural work

reduced the labour force available to the cane estates in St Lucia. The protector of immigrants responded by enforcing the restrictions on the mobility of Indians who had completed their contracts but were yet to serve the remaining five-year industrial residence:

During the year, a considerable emigration of natives to Panama took place, and disindentured Coolies came to me, sometimes singly, sometimes in groups, pleading the difficulty of getting work and craving permission to go to Panama. In every instance, I firmly refused. I did so for several reasons [. . .] In the interest of the Coolies [. . .] because this Colony was bound to provide for them for five years of their disindentured term [. . .] because permission to go to Panama could not be granted without sanction of the Government of India.⁹¹

Irrespective of official permissions and legal requirements, Indians were willing to flout contracts to seek better-paid work. This issue was raised at the highest government levels. St Lucia's executive council was apprised of the situation, where in one case, an unidentified Indian man was able to go to Colón in 1878 without the requisite papers and to return, "without a passport, [at] the expiration of his ten years' residence [. . .] he had been away for six months but had returned to the estate on which he had served his indenture and resided and worked ever since".⁹²

Indians in such predicaments faced legal sanctions, including being deprived of their right to the free return passage to India or the benefits in lieu of it. This action was applied to two men who had left the island of their own accord: "Pancham and Matabadal, time-expired Immigrants who had left the Colony after completing their term of industrial service without obtaining Passports, thereby forfeiting their claim to return passage to India or to the Bounty in lieu thereof."⁹³ Migrants were aware of these risks, yet many appear to have judged them worth taking in light of the economic benefits they promised.

In the immediate wake of the sugar crisis in 1884, no action was taken to reduce the restriction on travel for Indians. In 1887, the Dennery Sugar Factory Company failed, owing approximately three hundred indentured workers seven weeks' wages and placing them on the breadline. As a result, the government had to find alternative work and housing for those Indians.⁹⁴

The goldfields of French Guiana opened another avenue for short-term employment that St Lucians and St Lucia-based Indians alike were willing to explore. Work as a porter in Cayenne paid 10s. per day, and as much as £3 a week,⁹⁵ which compared favourably with the 1s. per day paid for work on St Lucia sugar estates. The colonial surveyor's office acknowledged

the positive prospects for Cayenne and Panama emigrants when he commented on their ability to purchase land on their return to St Lucia. "Many lots are purchased by people who, unable to find employment at home, leave the Colony and work at the Mines in Cayenne or elsewhere."⁹⁶ Indians took advantage of the change in the law, which allowed them to accept the certificate of discharge on completing their five-year indenture, and in 1900, two years after completing their five-year contract, thirty-two Indians from the *Roumania* applied for passports and subsequently, "left the Colony for the goldfields at Cayenne".⁹⁷ Passage to any of their destinations was facilitated by steamers and canoes to Grenada, and by the steamer run by the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique that left Fort de France, Martinique, on the twenty-fourth of each month en route to St Lucia, with stops in Trinidad, Demerara, Suriname, and Cayenne, and a return via the same route. This steamship also went to Colón, Panama on a different schedule.⁹⁸

Thus, St Lucia's poor economic profile, the restrictions on land ownership, and the small size of its Indian communities dissuaded many Indians from establishing permanent roots in the colony. While there are no precise figures of Indian remigrants regionally, the population censuses for the period 1861–1921 allow for some broad approximations to be made. By 1911, there were only 612 individuals remaining whose birthplace was India, and an approximate 2,000 who were of Indian descent, mostly born in St Lucia. This illustrates that of the roughly 2,000 who did not repatriate to India, the majority had left the island by the turn of the century. Interestingly, there were a few Indians from other colonies: twenty-seven from neighbouring St Vincent; six from Trinidad, who were teachers and interpreters associated with the Canadian East Indian Presbyterian Mission Schools; two from the French Antilles; two from Jamaica; two from Santa Cruz; and one from Demerara. Their presence points to a regional network of Indian communities that exchanged information and moved back and forth across the Caribbean Sea.

In summary, Indians, when released from industrial contracts, left for other colonies in large numbers, keen to start lives elsewhere or hoping to accumulate large savings by working in high-paying, non-agricultural positions in mainland South America. Consequently, as the number of Indians in the bottomland sugar valleys diminished, they became increasingly isolated and desirous of leaving for destinations with better economic options and community. Sarah Morton's recollection of her late father's observations of Indian presence in St Lucia summarised it as follows, "East Indians never seemed to feel at home to any extent

Table 3. Showing the population statistics of people of Indian descent, 1861–1921

Year	Born in India	Born in St Lucia
1861	959	–
1871	303	–
1881	1,374	–
1891	1,932	545
1911	612	1,401
1921	323	1,818

Source: CO 257/13 Census Reports; *St. Lucia Gazette*; St Lucia National Archives

in St. Lucia. Dr. Morton believed this to be owing to the fact that the communities were small and isolated. It was the crisis in the sugar industry, however, that hastened their return to India or removal to other islands.⁹⁹

Conclusion

Individuals who participated in the Indian indentured labour system had often lost their means of income and increasingly were victims of social conditions, such as the outcast Dalits, which placed them as outsiders in India. Embarking on the long journey across the oceans for residence in foreign lands for periods of up to ten years was risky. On completion of their indentureship, Indians could settle permanently in the colony where they had been hosted, return to India, or sail to another colony to reside either temporarily or permanently. This essay has determined that three critical criteria were used by Indians to evaluate which course of action to take: the status of the economy, the availability of land for purchase, and a sense of belonging. Among the colonies assessed — British Guiana, Grenada, St Lucia, St Vincent, and Trinidad — St Lucia possessed fewer of the desired conditions and therefore experienced the highest rates of repatriation, in addition to significant levels of remigration to secondary colonies. In light of St Lucia's weak and volatile sugar-dependent economy, and the absence of other reliable alternative sources of employment, many Indians would have been dissuaded from settling permanently in the colony. While the fate of the sugar industry was not entirely in the control of the planter class, planters and state officials could determine the sale of state and private land. Therefore, had they made land more readily available, and committed to establishing Indian settlements earlier

than the 1890s, they may have provided the elements of land security and community that Indians needed to choose St Lucia as their home.

By investigating the patterns of repatriation and remigration, it was possible to determine that geography, and more specifically topography, played a critical role in the Indian experience of the indenture system. In St Lucia, Indians' feelings of loneliness and isolation were not solely due to the small number of Indians introduced to the colony, but were also due to their locations in the deep sugar valleys that were scattered throughout the island. In Grenada and St Vincent, which are smaller in area and hosted smaller populations of Indian immigrants than St Lucia, Indians may have experienced a greater sense of community because they were generally concentrated in contiguous spaces. All these factors were important in the decision-making that informed the choices Indians made as their terms of indenture expired. Thus, despite the limits of the sources, it is still possible to foreground the deliberate choices Indian indentured labourers made about work, migration, and belonging in the small islands of the Eastern Caribbean.

NOTES

1. Brereton, 103; Lal, "Indian Indenture Historiography", 201; Mahase, 16.
2. Tinker.
3. Lal, "Indian Indenture: History".
4. Ibid. 34.
5. Carlile; Ramdin and Swinton; Brown and Mahase; Dabydeen; Dabydeen, Morley et al.; Parmasad; Roopnarine, "The Indian Sea Voyage"; Shepherd, *Maharani's Misery*.
6. Singh; Clarke, "East Indians"; Clarke, "Residential Segregation"; Potter; Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers*; Choenni; Sookram; Teelucksingh.
7. Roopnarine. "Indian Migration"; Roopnarine, "The Indian Sea Voyage"; Roopnarine, "The Repatriation".
8. Lal, "Indian Indenture: History", 3; Nand, 4–7.
9. Narwate, 274–79.
10. Lal "Indian Indenture: History".
11. Ibid.
12. Comins; Colonial Office (hereafter CO) 253/125/126 Immigration Agent Reports 1859–1862; CO 257/18 Twenty-first Annual Report of the Protector of Immigrants, *St. Lucia Gazette* 1899, 154.
13. Reddock, 27–49.
14. The terms "White", "Coloured" and "Black" were the terms used in official

- and non-official sources of the period. They are used in British official records from the 1840s to 1880s. In census reports the heading "Complexion" was used to capture these categories. The 1891 census used "white", "mixed", "blacks" and "Asiatics" as well as place of origin. Breen, 158–59; CO 257/11 Report on the Census Taken on the Island of St Lucia. *St. Lucia Gazette*, 1891, 3.
15. Joseph, 147.
16. Des Voeux, 210–16.
17. Erhlich, 154, 159.
18. Joseph, 339. Trinidad's sugar belt is located in the St Patrick, Victoria and Caroni counties. In British Guiana the sugar belt included large expanses of flat coastal lands in Bernice, Essequibo and Demerara.
19. Goodfield, 107.
20. Morton pioneered Presbyterian Christian education among Indians in Trinidad, dedicating his life to this mission between 1868 until the turn of the century.
21. Morton, 281.
22. Comins visited the island in 1891 and produced his report in 1893. He was assigned with similar investigations for Trinidad and British Guiana over the period 1891–1893.
23. Comins, 9.
24. The position of the individual assigned by the government with overseeing the functioning of the indenture system was the Immigration Agent from 1859 to 1872. It was later changed to Protector of Immigrant from 1878 to 1903.
25. "Notes from Laborie", *St. Lucia Guardian* No.16, Wednesday 25 July 1906.
26. Morton, 287.
27. India. Commerce and Industry Dept. East India (Indentured Labour), 73.
28. Singh, 40–41.
29. CO 253/126 Return of Days Labour Performed May–December 1859, Copy Immigration Agent Report, A. De Brossard, 31 December 1859.
30. CO 253/127 De Brossard to Breen, 28 July 1860.
31. Comins, 12.
32. CO 253/137 Stipendiary Magistrate Charles McLean to Administrator I.M. Grant, 16 August 1866.
33. Bauer and Bauer, 408; Berti, 6, 97–103.
34. CO 253/126 De Brossard to Breen, 28 July 1860.
35. Ibid.
36. Masurczak, 116–93.
37. CO 253/134 Subenclosure 12 Bi-monthly Report of Special Justice of the 4th District (Vieux Fort) Charles McLean to Administrator Grant, 30 September 1864.
38. CO 253/128 Hincks to New Castle, 23 April 1861; Geoghegan, 134.

39. CO 253/130 Enclosure 6 Dix to McLeod, 30 December 1861.
40. "Madras" Indians refers to individuals originating from southern India, and having left from the Madras (now known as Chennai). They were generally darker in complexion in comparison to Indians from northern provinces.
41. Tinker, 55.
42. Jha, 28–50.
43. Tinker, 55.
44. CO 253/128 Breen to Hincks, 28 March 1861.
45. Ibid.
46. CO 253/127 Breen to Governor in Chief, 2 July 1860.
47. Laurence 385–92; Tinker 129–39.
48. P.P. Fifteenth General Report of the Emigration Commissioners, Appendix No. 58, Saint Lucia, Clause 11, 163.
49. Comins, 8.
50. Ibid.
51. CO 253/140 Immigration Agent Chadwick to Administrator Grant, 14 August 1868.
52. CO 253/142 Inspector of Police Chadwick to Administrator Grant, 11 January 1869. Minors who had been indentured during their parents' contracts also qualified for half the amount of land or money awarded to adults.
53. Thomas "Adaptation and Survival", 3.
54. Brizan, 198–207.
55. Laurence, 365–66.
56. Among Hindus, crossing the ocean resulted in losing one's caste. The living and working arrangements on estates did not allow for caste restrictions to be observed. Misrahi-Barak, 18–36.
57. Roopnarine, "Repatriation", 89.
58. Thomas, "Adaptation and Survival", 3.
59. UNESCO Records of the Indian Indentured Labourers.
60. Laurence, 362.
61. Thomas, "The History of East Indians", 264.
62. Brizan, 152, 246.
63. Ibid., 207.
64. Thomas "The History of East Indians", 287.
65. Jacobs-Browne, 348.
66. Thomas, "The History of East Indians", 136.
67. Ibid., 287.
68. Comins, 7.
69. CO 257/12 Ninth Annual Report of the Protector of Immigrants, *St. Lucia Gazette*, 1887.
70. Comins, 6.

71. Ramesar, 84.
72. Eighteenth Annual Report of the Protector of Immigrants, 1895, *St. Lucia Gazette*, 1896, 372.
73. CO 257/18 Report of the Colonial Surveyor's Office, 14 February, *St. Lucia Gazette* 1898, 160.
74. Beachy, 111–16.
75. Derogatory term used to describe mainly Indian and Chinese labourers. Hayot, 81–90.
76. Comins, 14; Joseph, 258.
77. Fifteenth Annual Protector of Immigrants Report, 1892 *St. Lucia Gazette*, 1893, 217.
78. Ibid.
79. Comins, Appendix A.
80. Ibid. The community has maintained that title and is still known as a Coolietown.
81. CO 257/14 Fifteenth Annual Protector of Immigrants Report, *St. Lucia Gazette*, 1893, 217.
82. Sookram, 30.
83. The Immigration Ordinance, 1891, *St. Lucia Gazette*, 49.
84. CO 253/142 Inspector of Police Chadwick to Administrator Grant, 11 January 1869.
85. Mohammed, 2.
86. CO 257/16 Seventeenth Annual Report Protector of Immigrants, *St. Lucia Gazette* 1895, 324.
87. Morton, 288.
88. Harmsen et al., 241.
89. Ibid., 94.
90. Brown, 191–98.
91. CO 257/12 Eighth Annual Report of the Protector of Immigrants, 26 November 1886.
92. CO 256/13 Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Council, 16 August 1894.
93. CO 256/22 Minutes Proceedings of the Executive Council for 1st half ending 30 June 1901.
94. CO 256/10 Minutes of Executive Council, 25 July 1887.
95. Harmsen et al., 242.
96. CO 257/18 Report of the Colonial Surveyor's Office, 14 February, *St. Lucia Gazette* 1898, 160.
97. CO 257/21 Report of the Protector of Immigrants 1901, *St. Lucia Gazette* for 1902, 268.
98. *Voice of Saint Lucia*, July 17, 1886.
99. Morton, 288.

WORKS CITED

- Bauer, Raymond A., and Alice H. Bauer. "Day to Day Resistance to Slavery". *Journal of Negro History* 27, no. 4 (1942): 388–419. JSTOR. Accessed 15 December 2025. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2715184>.
- Beachy, R.W. *The British West Indies Sugar Industry in the Late Nineteenth Century*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1957.
- Berti, Ilaria. "'Feeding the Sick upon Stewed Fish and Pork': Slave Health and Food in West Indian Sugar Plantation Hospitals". *Food & History* 14, no. 1 (January 2016): 81–105. Brepols. doi:10.1484/J.FOOD.5.113856.
- Breen, Henry Hogart. *St. Lucia: Historical, Statistical, and Descriptive*. London: Frank Cass, 1884.
- Brereton, Bridget. *A History of Modern Trinidad, 1783–1962*. Kingston: Heinemann, 1982.
- Brizan, George. *Grenada: Island of Conflict*. London: Macmillan, 1998.
- Brown, Laurence, and Radica Mahase. "Medical Encounters on the Kala Pani: Regulation and Resistance in the Passages of Indentured Indian Migrants, 1834–1900". In *Health and Medicine at Sea, 1700–1900*, edited by David Boyd Haycock and Sally Archer, 195–212. Boydell & Brewer, 2009.
- Brown, Robert M. "Five Years of the Panama Canal: An Evaluation". *Geographical Review* 9, no. 3 (1920): 191–98. JSTOR. Accessed 23 December 2025. <https://doi.org/10.2307/207257>.
- Carlile, J., ed. *Journal of a Voyage with Coolie Emigrants from Calcutta to Trinidad* by Captain and Mrs Swinton. Alfred W. Bennett, 1859.
- Choenni, Chan E.S. "Hindostanis in Suriname 1873–1920: Indenture, Plantations and Beyond". *Nidān: International Journal for Indian Studies* 1, no. 1 (July 2016).
- Clarke, C.G. *East Indians in a West Indian Town: San Fernando, Trinidad 1930–70*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1986.
- . "Residential Segregation and Inter-Marriage in San Fernando, Trinidad". *Geographical Review* 61 (1971).
- Comins, D.W.D. Note on Emigration from the East Indies to St. Lucia. Calcutta, 1893.
- Dabydeen, Cyril. "Shaping the Environment: Sugar Plantation, or Life after Indentured Labour". In *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture*, edited by Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, Renée K. Gosson, and George B. Handley, 58–69. University of Virginia Press, 2005.
- Dabydeen, David, Jonathan Morley, Brinsley Samaroo, Amar Wahab, and Brigid Wells, eds. *The First Crossing: Being the Diary of Theophilus Richmond, Ship's Surgeon Aboard the Hesperus, 1837–8*. Guyana: Caribbean Press, 2010.
- Des Voeux, William. *My Colonial Service in British Guiana, St. Lucia, Trinidad, Fiji, Australia, New Foundland and Hong Kong, with Interludes*, Vol.1. London: John Murray, 1903.

- Erhlich, A.S. *East Indian Cane Workers in Jamaica*. Wycomb: University Microfilms, 1969.
- Geoghegan, John. Note on Emigration from India. PP (HC), 1874, vol. XLVII, no. 314.
- Goodfield, June. *Quest for the Killers*. Boston: Birkhäuser, 1987.
- Harmesen, Jolein, Guy Ellis, and Robert Devaux. *A History of St. Lucia*. Vieux Fort: Lighthouse Road, 2014.
- Hayot, Eric. "Coolie". In *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature*, edited by Rachel C. Lee, 81–90. Taylor & Francis, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315779089-15>.
- India. Commerce and Industry Dept, James McNeill and Chimman Lal. East India (Indentured Labour): Report to the Government of India on the Conditions of Indian Immigrants in Four British Colonies and Surinam. H.M. Stationery Off., 1915.
- Jacobs-Browne, J.D. "Aspects of the Social History of St. Vincent 1897–1979". PhD diss., University of the West Indies, 2011.
- Jha, J.C. "Indian Heritage in Trinidad, West Indies". *Caribbean Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1973): 28–50.
- Joseph, Terencia. "A History of Indian Indentured Labour: The Saint Lucia Experience". PhD diss., University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, 2008.
- Lal, Brij V. "Indian Indenture Historiography: A Note on Problems, Sources, and Methods". *Pacific Studies* 6, no. 2 (1983), Article 5. BYU–Hawaii Digital Collections. <https://digitalcollections.byuh.edu/pacific-studies-journal/vol6/iss2/5>.
- . "Indian Indenture: History and Historiography in a Nutshell". *Journal of Indentureship and Its Legacies* 1, no. 1 (2021): 1–15. JSTOR. Accessed 10 December 2025. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.13169/jofstudindentleg.1.1.0001>.
- Laurence, K.O. *A Question of Labour: Indentured Immigration into Trinidad and British Guiana, 1875–1917*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1994.
- Mahase, Radica. *Why Should We Be Called 'Coolies'? The End of Indian Indentured Labour* (1st ed.). London: Routledge, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003131991>.
- Masurczak, Pia Florence. "[No] Excuse for Idleness: Leisure and Idleness in British Colonial Discourse, c. 1770–1900". PhD diss., University of Freiburg, 2016.
- Misrahi-Barak, Judith. "Indentureship, Caste and the Crossing of the Kala Pani". *Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences* 14, no. 2 (2017): 18–36.
- Mohammed, Patria. "Changing Symbols of Indo-Caribbean Femininity". *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, no. 6 (2012): 1–16.
- Morton, Sarah. *John Morton of Trinidad: Journals, Letters and Papers*, edited by Sarah E. Morton. Toronto: Westminster Company, 1916.
- Nand, Brahma. "Nature and Causes of Famines in Colonial India". Special Joint Conference 2011. Association for Asian Studies International Convention of Asia Scholars, April 2011.

- Narwate, Balaji. "A Sociological Study of Social Reforms Movements for Women's Empowerment in 19th Century India". *NAVJYOT International Interdisciplinary Research Journal* 14, no. 1 (March 30, 2025): 274–79.
- Parmasad, Kenneth. "Power and the Body: Medicinal Practices on Board the 'Coolie' Ship". In *Beyond Tradition: Reinterpreting the Caribbean Historical Experience*, edited by H. Cateau and R. Pemberton. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2006.
- Potter, Lesley. "The Post-Indenture Experience of East Indians in Guyana, 1873–1921". In *Indenture and Exile: The Indo-Caribbean Experience*, edited by Frank Birbalsingh, 71–92. Mawenzi House, 1989.
- Ramdin, Ron, and Swinton. *The Other Middle Passage: Journal of a Voyage from Calcutta to Trinidad, 1858*. London: Hansib, 1994.
- Ramesar, Marianne. *Survivors of Another Crossing*. Kingston: University of the West Indies, 1994.
- Reddock, R. "Indian Women and Indentureship in Trinidad and Tobago 1845–1917: Freedom Denied". *Caribbean Quarterly* 32, nos. 3–4 (1986): 27–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00086495.1986.11671699>.
- Roopnarine, Lomarsh. "Indian Migration during Indentured Servitude in British Guiana and Trinidad, 1850–1920". *Labor History* 52, no. 2 (May 2011): 173–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0023656x.2011.571473>.
- . "The Indian Sea Voyage between India and the Caribbean during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century". *Journal of Odyssey Caribbean History* 44, no. 1 (2010): 48–75.
- . "The Repatriation, Readjustment, and Second-Term Migration of Ex-Indentured Indian Labourers from British Guiana and Trinidad to India, 1838–1955". *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 83, nos. 1–2 (2009): 71–97. Accessed 20 October 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1163/13822373-90002459>.
- Shepherd, Verene. *Maharani's Misery: Narratives of a Passage from India to the Caribbean*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2002.
- . *Transients to Settlers: The Experience of Indians in Jamaica, 1845–1950*. Leeds: Centre for Research in Asian Migration, 1994.
- Singh, Kelvin. "Indians and the Larger Society". In *Calcutta to Caroni: The East Indians of Trinidad*, edited by John La Guerre, 40–41. 2nd Rev. ed. St Augustine: Extra Mural Studies Unit, University of the West Indies, 1985.
- Sookram, Ron. "Immigrants to Citizens: The Indian Community in Grenada, 1857 to the Present". Brunel University. n.d. Accessed 23 December 2025. <https://www.brunel.ac.uk/creative-writing/research/entertext/documents/entertext063/ET63SookramRevsED.pdf>.
- Teelucksingh, Jerome. "Aspects of Life and Living of Indentured Indians in Trinidad". *Indenture Papers: Studies on Girmitiyas* 4 (2024): 29–38. giritmit.ac.fj/ip-2024-teelucksingh/.
- Thomas, Arnold. "Adaptation and Survival of the Indians of St. Vincent and the

Grenadines". Presented at the Global Conference on Slavery, Indentured Labour and Their Impact on Present Societies, 6–10 June 2023.

———. "The History of East Indians in St. Vincent: From Indenture to Secondary Migration". Unpublished Manuscript. 1996.

Tinker, Hugh. *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830–1920*. Oxford University Press, 1974.

Amelioration, Amalgamation and Protest:

The Virgin Islands in the 1940s and 1950s

JOY D. LEWIS

Throughout the Caribbean, migration and movement is not at all unusual. Indeed, the extensive nature of migratory movement has led Lara Putnam to examine migration in the context of "borderlands". According to Putnam, "borderlands are wider than borders" and exist where the populace of two "states [. . .] displays a uniformity of language, culture, ancestry, and allegiance".¹ The Virgin Islands can be seen as a prime example of such borderlands. By the twentieth century, the then Danish West Indies, now Virgin Islands of the United States, were Danish almost solely in name. Socially, the territory was "little tied to Denmark. [. . .] The Danish language was hardly spoken, and English was the popular language spoken and taught in the schools. English was even adopted as one of the official languages, and teachers were recruited in the British islands to teach in the schools".² Therefore, in 1917 when the Danish West Indies was sold to the United States, a borderland had already been firmly established through migration and other interactions with their nearby British counterpart. This centuries-old relationship saw British and US Virgin Islanders cross both water and borders so frequently and consistently that they created an intertwined and interdependent relationship.

Through this relationship, the labour and economic and familial contributions of British Virgin Islanders had an impact on and improved the development of the US Virgin Islands. The British islands in turn benefited from the continual exchange of goods, services, money and ideas from the American islands and islanders. The relationship was so intertwined that the two Virgin Islands frequently sought ways to

The Journal of Caribbean History 59, 2 (2025): 210–243

DOI: 10.37234/JCH.2025.U1000009

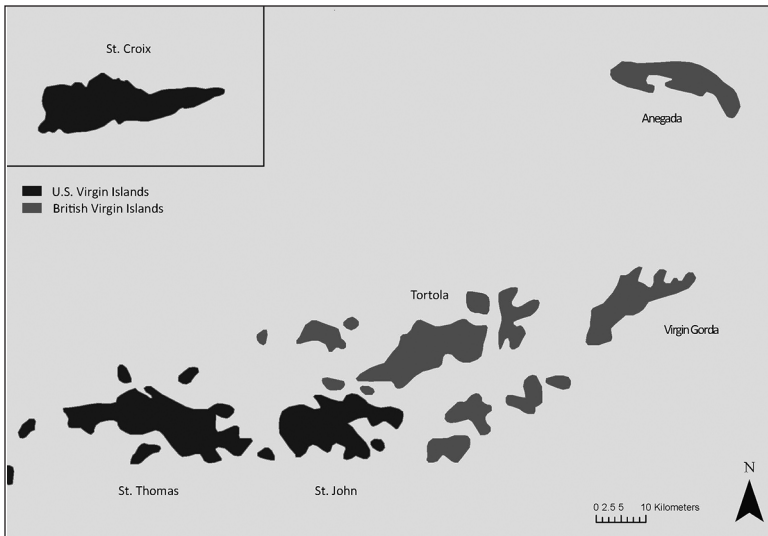


Figure 1. Map of the British Virgin Islands and the United States Virgin Islands. *Source:* Gabriëlle La Croix

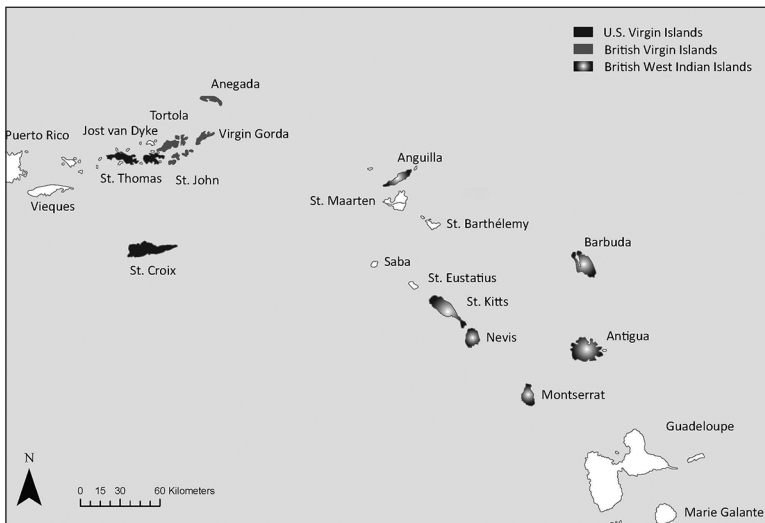


Figure 2. Map of the Leeward Islands. *Source:* Gabriëlle La Croix

achieve closer association with each other. For example, the British Virgin Islands would deliberately rebuff closer relationships with other British territories.³ Geographic proximity played a crucial role in the interconnectedness, but the indifference and, at times, neglect by their mother countries also strengthened this bond. According to Jeppe Mulich,

such “[r]egional integration [was] spurred on by trans-imperial commercial networks [which] served to tighten relations among colonial territories of multiple empires, fostering a growing degree of economic interdependence in the process.”⁴

Today, the Virgin Islands are an archipelagic island-chain divided into two national groups governed by the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The territories trace the roots of their relationship at least as far back as the 1600s, when “the English officer in charge of Tortola gave the Danes on St. Thomas permission to use anything they found on the island”.⁵ Over the centuries, this relationship continued through good times and bad, such as when islanders assisted each other in the wake of slave insurrections, natural disasters and economic hardships. The relationship endured through the twentieth-century change in imperial power. This article focuses on the 1940s and 1950s — a significant period in the Virgin Islands’ shared history — and on how conditions on the British islands served to bind them closer and closer to the American islands. It delves into some of the issues that caused those on the British side to protest, demand more autonomy *and* seek to strengthen their ties to the American islands, which are seemingly contradictory things to desire. These demands, however, are not so curious when one considers the relationship both Virgin Islands had with their respective mother countries.

It has long been understood that the interest mother countries had in their colonies often lay in the perceived benefits those colonies could provide. For the United States, in the early twentieth century, the worth of the US Virgin Islands primarily lay in their harbour and defence capabilities; otherwise, they were seen as a financial burden. In 1931, US President Herbert Hoover would be quoted as referring to the US Virgin Islands as “an effective poor-house [. . .] viewed from every point except remote naval contingencies, it was unfortunate that we ever acquired these islands”.⁶ Similarly, the British struggled to find any benefits from their Virgin Islands. They were small with no precious minerals, and their mountainous terrain made it difficult, if not impossible, for profitable large-scale agriculture to develop. For the most part they were seen as nothing *but* a financial burden, which led to much neglect by the British. All these factors led the two territories to turn to each other time and time again in the early and mid-twentieth century.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the world suffered through and survived two world wars and a devastating economic crisis. The Virgin Islands dealt with those global issues as well as issues specific

to themselves. The newly American islands dealt with a change in imperial power; a change many thought would bring quick and vast improvements. Rather, the territory was assigned a supposedly temporary naval government whose main focus was on defence efforts, not on the mostly black and brown residents. It was not until nearly ten years after the transfer that a "congressional enactment granted United States citizenship to several categories of Virgin Islanders".⁷ The conveyance of full citizenship led to massive out-migration to the continental United States, which further distressed the local economy and labour market. In the same timeframe, the British islands dealt with the ramifications of the dissolution of their Legislative Council, British neglect and their own massive outward migration.

In the 1930s, economic and social deprivation along with a lack of political power led to a series of riots across the Caribbean. The Virgin Islands were not exempt, although the islanders did not resort to violence.⁸ By the 1940s and 1950s, the stage was set for great turmoil and upheaval on both sides. The Virgin Islands were dealing with the implementation and enforcement of major immigration and labour regulations on the American side, political unrest on the British side, and continued depressed economies on both. This period also saw several proposals for amelioration and amalgamation. Over the centuries, Britain, Denmark, and later the United States, often failed to support their island colonies in ways the islanders truly needed. They offered little financial support and saddled the colonies with poor administrators and regulations that were often illogical and contrary to the needs of the people; leaving them to depend heavily on each other.⁹ Despite the failure to officially unite, their enduring interconnectedness continued to have a significant impact on the growth and development of both territories. Additionally, the confidence and security offered by this relationship would influence the economic, administrative and developmental demands that British Virgin Islanders made to the British government.

Transfer and Transformation: The United States and the Danish West Indies

In the nineteenth century, the United States tried and failed to acquire Mole St Nicolas in Haiti and the Bay of Samaná in Santo Domingo for use as coaling stations. Acquiring either location would have given the United States a strong defence base in the Caribbean.¹⁰ The United States also turned their attention to the Danish West Indies, whose location

was similarly ideal for United States military purposes. This interest led to a purchase agreement being negotiated with Denmark, but in 1867 the agreement failed to be ratified by the US Senate. Then, in the late 1800s, the projected and then actual construction of the Panama Canal increased the United States' perceived need for military bases at "strategic points" in the Caribbean. Acquiring the Danish West Indies would therefore "enable the United States to defend the approaches to the Panama Canal, and [. . .] prevent the islands from falling under the control of nations hostile to the United States"¹¹ By the 1910s, with the outbreak of World War I, the acquisition of the Danish West Indies had become a necessity for the United States in more ways than one. Prior to the war, there had already been a long-held, but ultimately unfounded, fear that Germany wanted a foothold in the Caribbean. During the war, as Germany advanced across Europe, the United States became concerned that Denmark could fall to the Germans. If Germany took control of Denmark, and by extension the Danish West Indies, it would put Germany literally at the United States' back door. In 1916, after intense negotiations, the United States and Denmark were able to successfully conclude a treaty. Denmark sold the Danish West Indies to the United States for twenty-five million dollars.¹²

On 31 March 1917, the Danish West Indies were officially transferred to the United States of America.¹³ After the purchase and transfer of the colony to the United States, and for the next few decades, a flood of immigrants primarily from the Eastern Caribbean would seek to enter the now Virgin Islands of the United States.¹⁴ The issue of admitting aliens into the US Virgin Islands was one that would come up often in the early twentieth century. The American colony proved almost as attractive to migrants from the West Indies as the continental United States was to migrants from Mexico, Europe and Asia. In the twentieth century, the United States, a nation built through immigration, had continued to be the destination of those seeking refuge and better opportunities. The overwhelming number of prospective immigrants forced the United States to create and amend legislation in an attempt to manage the constant flow of people seeking entry into the United States and her possessions. Yet, when it came to this specific American territory in the Caribbean, immigration regulations were often slow to be enforced.¹⁵

The Immigration Act of 1917, which implemented a literacy test and increased the amount of taxes paid by newly arrived immigrants, was the United States' first widely restrictive immigration measure.¹⁶ Luckily for prospective immigrants to America's newest possession, it was deemed

not applicable in the Virgin Islands. This decision allowed the free travel "which had been the rule during their joint ownership by the British and the Danes" to continue almost completely unrestricted into the 1920s.¹⁷ However, on 1 June 1925, the naval governor of the US Virgin Islands proclaimed that the US Immigration Act of 1924 *would* apply to the islands. This new act further restricted immigration by limiting the number of people allowed entry into the United States through a national origins quota system.¹⁸ The act would have increased restrictive immigration regulations to the point that migration to the US Virgin Islands would have been almost impossible, *if* enforced. Despite the 1925 assertion by the naval governor, the US Virgin Islands continued to express a blatant disregard for immigration regulations up until 1938, when the active enforcement of the 1917 and 1924 Immigration Acts finally began.¹⁹ This enforcement greatly disrupted the established relationships that existed between the US Virgin Islands and other Caribbean colonies, particularly the British Virgin Islands. It led the US Virgin Islands to seek means by which amendments or concessions could be made for specific "aliens".

In 1940, the subject of admitting aliens into the US Virgin Islands led the Immigration and Naturalization Service of the Department of Justice, along with Governor of the US Virgin Islands, Lawrence W. Cramer, to decide "that British subjects domiciled in the British Virgin Islands and French citizens domiciled in the French island of St. Bartholomew [sic] seeking admission into the [United States] Virgin Islands for business or pleasure for a period of less than 30 days on any one visit [could] present a nonresident alien's border crossing identification issued by the immigration authorities of the Virgin Islands".²⁰ In the mid-1800s, settlers from St Barthélemy had migrated to St Thomas. As with British Virgin Islanders, the Danes allowed this migration to occur without much restriction. It can therefore be deduced that twentieth-century concerns for these two categories of immigrants, along with subsequent concessions, were made based on their historic relationships, traditional links, familial ties and economic concerns.²¹ Additionally, British Virgin Islanders, in particular, benefited from the general positive opinion of them that was disseminated via the local US Virgin Islands press. British Virgin Islanders were considered to be good, law-abiding workers and it was felt that they were highly "adaptable to the customs and habits of the natives".²² This perception of British Virgin Islanders led to many "kindly attitudes" towards them and led to "much willingness" in facilitating their entry into the United States' colony.²³

While US Virgin Islanders may have been ready and willing to make

immigration concessions, the United States federal government was not. The United States was hesitant to entertain immigration concessions in the territories that would also by default be applicable in the rest of the country. In the 1940s, with the onset of war, the United States was forced to reconsider their stance on certain immigration concessions. After initially taking the position of neutrality, the United States entered World War II after the attack on Pearl Harbor. During this war, the strategic location of St Thomas in relation to the continental United States, the Panama Canal, and the Atlantic Ocean, was once again highly lauded for American military and defence purposes. However, St Thomas had not played as great a military role as had been imagined during World War I. Furthermore, the military installations constructed for that war had been "civilianised", and many of the buildings were being used for non-military purposes.²⁴ To utilise St Thomas better during World War II, improvement had to be made to the harbour facilities and the existing military buildings. Much more importantly, a new aircraft and military base had to be quickly constructed. This necessitated a larger labour force than was available from amongst the native-born US Virgin Islanders.

Hundreds of migrants entered the US Virgin Islands during this period, but great effort was expended to secure specifically the labour of British Virgin Islanders.²⁵ This practice made it obvious that not only was the labour contribution of British Virgin Islanders considered instrumental to the completion of the base, but that it was also preferred. In January 1941, the commander of the defence base, after announcing the opening of three hundred job positions, announced that he "would be happy to use Tortolians since they seem to assimilate with the natives in an agreeable manner".²⁶ Tortolians were so preferred that the officer in charge specifically requested that the status of over 250 Tortolians, who had entered St Thomas through the "back door" (that is, by simply crossing the narrow strait between the islands) be legalised by special arrangement.²⁷ In 1941, special arrangements were made for labourers working for national defence projects to receive immigration waivers. However, in 1944, with the cessation of those special projects, the waivers were rescinded.²⁸ Despite the earlier intercessions made on their behalf, many British Virgin Islanders were caught up in the wave of deportations.²⁹

Conflict in the British Virgin Islands: The 1940s and John August Cockburn Cruikshank

While the United States was trying to address immigration concerns in the US Virgin Islands, the British Virgin Islanders were facing their own issues. These issues led them to both seek political concessions and to formalise their traditional connections with their American counterparts. In the 1940s, the British Virgin Islands was in an unremittingly depressed economic state and the islanders were continuously seeking ways by which they could alleviate their situation. Whereas most in similar circumstances would look to their home government, it was quite evident that British Virgin Islanders had very little faith in theirs. Many British Virgin Islanders felt that their only hope of redemption, economic or otherwise, was linked to the US Virgin Islands. The British Virgin Islands were woefully underdeveloped and lacking in basic social infrastructure. British Virgin Islanders held many grievances against Britain, especially when comparing their lot with that of the US Virgin Islanders. It was neglect that had forced the people to turn outward to satisfy their fundamental needs. One elderly farmer said that in "St. Thomas, President Roosevelt regulates everything you do from birth to death. In Tortola, King George does not care a damn whether you are alive or dead".³⁰

The people's dissatisfaction with His Majesty's government was tied to the indifference of his representatives and their attitudes towards the islands and islanders. In 1940, Sir Gordon James Letham, the governor of the Leeward Islands, was disinclined to expend any effort to improve conditions in the British Virgin Islands. Indeed, Letham was more than willing to allow the US Virgin Islands to continue being the British Virgin Islands' major system of support. Letham felt the islands could "carry on at present reasonably well owing to the continuing trade with the American islands, coupled with a present demand for labour in those islands".³¹ With Britain content to shirk the bulk of its responsibilities, it is not surprising that British Virgin Islanders were disillusioned. In August 1943, British Virgin Islanders unsuccessfully petitioned the Anglo-American Commission for help in securing easier access into the US Virgin Islands.³² The Anglo-American Commission had been established one year earlier "for the purpose of encouraging and strengthening social and economic co-operation between the United States of America, its territories and bases in the Caribbean area and the United Kingdom and the British West Indian Colonies".³³ The commission, with the mission of "strengthening social and economic co-operation" between the two

relevant nations, seemed an appropriate body to appeal to. This was but one of several attempts at securing ameliorative immigration measures into the US Virgin Islands.

By the mid-1940s, disenchantment had grown as people faced more of Britain's broken promises, poor administration, and the appointment of a commissioner they judged inefficient. On the individual islands within the British Leeward Islands, the commissioners represented the governor, who resided in Antigua. In the British Virgin Islands specifically, in many instances, "the Commissioner was also the Medical Officer and the Magistrate. As time went on, he assumed other positions such as Treasurer, Registrar of Births and Deaths, and Superintendent of Public Works, for what little Public works there were". Additionally, by the 1940s, to the average British Virgin Islander, the commissioner represented the "Government" and the "Government was regarded as an institution that wanted to take as much money from the people for taxes as possible; but as to what was done with the tax money, no one really was accountable to the people."³⁴

In 1946, John Augustus Cockburn Cruikshank was appointed as commissioner of the British Virgin Islands. Cruikshank's administration would come to be highly criticised by his constituents. From 1902 onward, after the abrogation of the British Virgin Islands' Legislative Council, the administration of the British Virgin Islands had been "the responsibility of the Commissioner assisted by the Executive Council which served primarily in a consultative and advisory capacity".³⁵ In reality, the early Executive Council rarely met outside ceremonial occasions. The council therefore played "an insignificant role in politics", especially as the commissioners "sought to take the sole initiative in the formulation and implementation of policies".³⁶ In the 1940s, Cruikshank's administration was no different. The people, who had been seeking the restoration of constitutional government since the 1930s, were unhappy with the lack of progress in that regard. They were also displeased with Cruikshank's failure in securing ameliorative immigration measures that would re-establish the open and unregulated relationship with the US Virgin Islands that they had been accustomed to prior to the strict implementation of federal immigration and employment laws in the 1930s and 1940s. It was against this background of mounting dissatisfaction that Cruikshank was obliged to act, positioning himself as an advocate for greater collaboration between the two Virgin Islands.

In August 1948, Cruikshank appealed to Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Leeward Islands, Earl Baldwin of Bewdley, as well as to

the government of the US Virgin Islands, to give consideration to "certain proposals relating to the political future of the British Virgin Islands".³⁷ Cruikshank believed that the British Virgin Islands, with its population of just 6,000 persons, *needed* to be integrated with another territory so that, "in combination with a larger population, they [would] eventually become an economic unit".³⁸ From a strictly administrative and technical viewpoint, integration or closer association with a fellow British West Indian territory would have allowed the United Kingdom to introduce centralised control and accounting. Geography, however, precluded the British Virgin Islands' full amalgamation with a more populous British dependency.³⁹ Cruikshank, therefore, proposed that the US Virgin Islands, the British Virgin Islands' most immediate neighbours, be the territory to which his presidency be joined. This was an extraordinary position for Cruikshank, as a representative of the British government, to take: to advocate for the very colony that he administered to be proffered to another nation.

In addition to being a natural geographic unit, Cruikshank pointed out that the American and British islands were economically interdependent and would both be more viable if treated as one economic unit. The two territories relied on each other to provide their respective needs. St Thomas consumed all the meat, fruit, vegetables and charcoal that the British islands could produce, while the British islands bought all their manufactured goods in St Thomas and provided that island with key labour. In many ways, the two territories were already operating as one. Early in his administration, Cruikshank was notable for going from village to village, and from island to island, talking with the people.⁴⁰ It is not hard to imagine that Cruikshank's advocacy was a result of listening to the protestations of his constituents that the territories should officially be unified politically and economically. Cruikshank therefore pointed out that forcing closer associations with other British West Indian colonies would not alter the interdependency of the American and British Virgin Islands. Not only were they already interdependent, they were in fact better served to remain that way.⁴¹ Cruikshank also pointed out that British Virgin Islanders would prefer American rule, as there was considerable discontent at the lack of development that the islands were experiencing under British administration. Apart from agriculture, charcoal burning, and cattle rearing — with the resulting products being sold in the most readily accessible market of the US Virgin Islands — there were no industries. The British Virgin Islands were also lacking basic infrastructure and utilities such as electricity, gas, roads, drainage,

water supply, telephones and ice factories. British Virgin Islanders were so accustomed to mistreatment that, when the British *did* intervene, they were justifiably suspicious of the intentions.⁴² Cruikshank highlighted the fact that the British Virgin Islanders were especially suspicious of a "Closer Association", which seemed to concentrate "too much on political and too little on administrative integration".⁴³

Cruikshank concluded that selling the islands to the United States would solve both the problems of the British Virgin Islands and of the United Kingdom. From the United Kingdom's perspective, not only were the islands small, but they were also socially and physically removed from the rest of the British West Indies. The British Virgin Islands produced very little and what they did produce was already being sold in American markets by way of the US Virgin Islands. Their products, therefore, were of no benefit to the United Kingdom or to British trade. The islands also had no significant mineral resources that the United Kingdom could develop. In regard to British national defence, it was unlikely that the United Kingdom would ever utilise these islands. Most importantly, the islands required administrative sums which seemed disproportionately large in relation to their small size. Not only did the colony generate considerable overhead costs, in the eyes of the United Kingdom, but it was also likely to need permanent financial assistance while providing no economic or military value.⁴⁴ On paper, and in reality, there were more viable arguments for the United Kingdom to rid itself of the British Virgin Islands than there were reasons to keep it.

To Cruikshank, the sale or transfer to the United States was a reasonable solution for *both* the United Kingdom and the British Virgin Islanders. A transfer could also be beneficial to the US Virgin Islands, who would be appreciative of affordable labour and the ability to acquire fresh produce and cattle that would now be exempt from American employment and agricultural importation restrictions. Moreover, familial relationships between the two territories would be reinforced, and the traditional interaction between them could resume unrestricted. From a security point of view, it would presumably also be more convenient to have all the Virgin Islands under the control of one nation: the United States. Militarily, the British island of Anegada, a mostly uninhabited mountain-less island, would be ideal for aviation purposes. Unification would also relieve the Department of Justice of the burden of immigration control between the two territories.⁴⁵

Cruikshank was not unaware that the desired transfer was also a double-edged sword that could have disadvantageous consequences

within the British Virgin Islands. Unification could potentially lead to disastrous outward migration of British islanders to St Thomas or to the American mainland, which would further hinder development in the British islands. Cruikshank was concerned that, by becoming American citizens, British Virgin Islanders could acquire undesirable characteristics such as "laziness". To Cruikshank, many in the American Virgin Islands had become dependent on the welfare system. He feared that British Virgin Islanders might abandon their industrious nature and follow suit if the same public assistance became available to them. There were also apprehensions that the "formerly British" islanders, despite their generally positive relationships, could be treated as "second-class" citizens in comparison to native born US Virgin Islanders. Despite these concerns, Cruikshank, and many of his constituents, believed that the material advantages of unification outweighed any potential social disadvantages for British Virgin Islanders.⁴⁶

Cruikshank's proposal was received by the governor of the Leeward Islands and then forwarded to the secretary of state and the Colonial Office, where much discussion was elicited. Rather than examine their own failings in the administration of the British Virgin Islands, British officials were highly dubious about Cruikshank's assertions that the best path forward for the territory was unification with the US Virgin Islands, rather than ameliorative measures. The official responses to Cruikshank's proposal were measured. It was in confidential letters and handwritten notes on memoranda that unvarnished thoughts and opinions in regard to the proposal appeared. Many officials seemed more concerned with criticising the proposal's author, the proposal itself, the American administration of the US Virgin Islands, and the impact it had on the British islands, than they were concerned with truly solving the problems of the British Virgin Islanders.⁴⁷

Ultimately, the British determined that selling the islands was *not* an option, so ameliorative measures would have to be sought. One of the aforementioned memo writers, identified only by the initials S.P., had seemingly concurred with "those that believe that the result of American dollar spending in the U.S. islands has been to convert the inhabitants to a parasitic way of life, which has advantages over that of British Virgin Islanders only from a strictly material point of view".⁴⁸ He then, perhaps begrudgingly, concluded that despite those factors, continued association with the US islands should be facilitated, stating that the "obvious line of action" was in fact to "remove the present restrictions upon [British Virgin Islanders'] access to the markets of St. Thomas and St. Croix in the

American islands".⁴⁹ That could only be achieved by appealing directly to the authorities in Washington, whom he hoped would consider the request on humanitarian grounds.⁵⁰ In January 1949, the secretary of state for the colonies sent a letter to the colonial attaché in Washington in which he pleaded the case of the British Virgin Islands. Firstly, the United States authorities needed to understand that the "whole" economy of the colony of the British Virgin Islands was dependent on the American islands. Furthermore, the British Virgin Islands was entirely agricultural and sold its produce to the American islands. The British islanders bought their necessities from the American islands, used American currency, and banked in St Thomas, where the only bank for the two colonies was located. Finally, restriction of exports to the islands would entail real hardship for British Virgin Islanders.⁵¹

In 1949, Governor of the Leeward Islands, Earl Baldwin, made known *his* feelings on the subject of unifying the British and United States Virgin Islands. In a memorandum authored by Douglas Smith of the Colonial Office, it is revealed that Baldwin was against the idea of a transfer to the United States. Baldwin felt that the strength of the British Virgin Islands' opinion on the matter was not really known. He felt that a "referendum and not merely an expression of opinion in a revived Legislative Council would be necessary to discover the strength of opinion on this point."⁵² He also believed that there was not enough proof that a transfer was being seriously considered by British Virgin Islanders. Yet, in that same memorandum, it was revealed that the [British] Virgin Islands Executive Council *had* given their support to the idea of the British islands joining the United States. Baldwin additionally dismissed the suggestion on the grounds that it would be a "betrayal of the islanders in the view of the colour ban in the United States".⁵³ This reasoning was as faulty as the assertion that there was not strong enough proof that closer association with the American islands was what British Virgin Islanders desired. The issue of racism against them was not something British Virgin Islanders were concerned about. Most were only interested in migrating as far as the US Virgin Islands, which had the same racial composition as the British Virgin Islands. Baldwin's argument would have been stronger if he had cited British Virgin Islanders being negatively affected by *classism*, which was a much more real threat.

Lastly, Baldwin was suspicious of Cruikshank's motivations behind writing what he saw as "pro-American proposals". Baldwin was convinced that Cruikshank's marriage to an American had made him biased in his opinions.⁵⁴ Baldwin was not the only person to make note of Cruikshank's

marriage. Ralph T. O'Neal in a reflection on past administrators wrote, "[o]ne significant change in the Commissioner was that he came here as a Bachelor and left as a married man."⁵⁵ In light of Baldwin's suspicions about Cruikshank's wife and her influence, this comment perhaps has more import than meets the eye.

Baldwin, with his suspicions about Cruikshank's motivations, clearly was not in favour of the islands being transferred to the United States. Interestingly, he was open to the idea of the islands being placed under the administration and jurisdiction of Canada through a trusteeship agreement.⁵⁶ A.N. Galsworthy of the Foreign Office, in September 1949, also indicated a preference for transferring the islands to Canada, which was a member of the Commonwealth, rather than to the United States. Despite his preference, Galsworthy ultimately recommended that the suggestions of transfer be dismissed. Galsworthy was concerned that any such action would be embarrassing to the United Kingdom and, therefore, was something that should be avoided at all costs. Furthermore, he was not sure that relinquishing control of the islands to Canada would be the most logical move from the viewpoint of British Virgin Islanders, who persisted in their belief that they should be united with the American islands. Overall, Galsworthy felt that all other solutions to the problems of the British Virgin Islands needed to be exhausted before any transfer proposal could be seriously considered.⁵⁷

While British officials debated and dismissed suggestions as to how the British Virgin Islands should be administered, British Virgin Islanders continued to advocate for unification with the American islands. The reasons British Virgin Islanders' allegiances lay with the US Virgin Islands are readily apparent in a 27 September 1949 memorandum to Sir George Seel, Comptroller for Development & Welfare in the West Indies. This correspondence highlighted the fact that the British Virgin Islands not only communicated with the US Virgin Islands more easily than with the other parts of the Federation of the Leeward Islands, but that those islands had also been for "reasons of communication [. . .] much neglected" by governors of the Leeward Islands.⁵⁸ The governors of the Leeward Islands had very little communication with the colony. Direct interaction occurred even less. The governor of the Leeward Islands' habit of being somewhat detached from his constituencies stretched back to the 1700s. As noted by Elsa Goveia, the governor "as a rule [. . .] spent most of his time there [Antigua], paying only an occasional visit to the outlying colonies".⁵⁹ Therefore, not only had "those islands [. . .] not been very lucky for a good many years past in the way of Governors", it had been

"pretty consistent policy to leave the Virgin Islands to run themselves".⁶⁰ The British Virgin Islands simply *existed* within the Presidency of the Leeward Islands; the colony seldom operated as, or was even regarded as, an active member of the presidency.

To be clear, British neglect in the Leeward Islands was not confined to the British Virgin Islands, but rather extended to the entire region. Paul Blanshard, writing in the 1940s, pointed to the fact that the British Colonial Office had "been criticized for indifference and callousness concerning the needs of the area", as well as for "sending old and second-rate governors who visit[ed] the [Leeward Islands] colony as 'birds of passage' before retirement".⁶¹ For British Virgin Islanders, Commissioner Cruikshank would come to be seen as one such second-rate administrator, especially as he at times seemed to actively play both sides of the fence. For example, Cruikshank was "credited for putting the Presidency in 'Grant in Aid', meaning that the United Kingdom Government would appropriate a sum of money to help operate the Government and provide some services for the people".⁶² The funds received were enough to build a reservoir and a catchment that would have ensured a water supply, however limited, but Cruikshank elected to allocate the funds for "the Hospital and Government House only".⁶³ It is important to note that the commissioner's office was located in the hospital, and he resided at the Government House. In light of this and similar self-serving behaviour by Britain's representatives, when given the *de facto* free reign to operate as they saw fit, the British Virgin Islands sought to operate in conjunction with the American islands.⁶⁴

The Demonstration: British Virgin Islanders Demand Amelioration or Amalgamation

By the late 1940s, British Virgin Islanders were even more inclined to align themselves with the US Virgin Islands. In his 1948 report, Cruikshank had pointed out that the dissatisfaction of his constituents could lead to conflict. Specifically, he felt that the reconstitution, or rather the delay in the reconstitution, of the local Legislative Council would lead to protest by public demonstration or through a plebiscite, which would most likely favour a transfer and almost certainly embarrass the United Kingdom.⁶⁵ The predicted protest occurred in November 1949.

British Virgin Islanders had for years been increasingly vocal about their needs for the colony's development or, in lieu of that, amalgamation with the American islands. In February 1946, with the appointment

of Cruikshank, British Virgin Islander Howard R. Penn authored a *Memorandum on the Needed Improvements in the British Virgin Islands*. While Penn thanked the government for the funds already disbursed to build schools, catchments, cisterns and extensions to the hospital, he also made an impassioned plea for more assistance. Penn requested the establishment of banking facilities, an ice plant, a motor launch, an electric light plant, home industries, hotels and agriculture, and improvements to the roads. In regard to the roads, Penn pointed out that no real growth could take place "without fairly good roads to open up the possibilities of internal development, and to serve as an attraction to strangers and tourists".⁶⁶ The construction of an ice plant and a motor launch would have aided the fishing industry by allowing local fishermen to preserve their catch in a method other than salting which "did not find great favour in American markets".⁶⁷ Moreover, an ice plant would ensure that, if there were any attempts to prevent the entrance of their livestock into the American islands, they would have the option of exporting refrigerated meat to other markets. Similarly, the establishment of some sort of banking facility was important for the British Virgin Islands. According to Penn,

[a] small bank or Lending Agency is a real need here. For decades this Presidency has been suffering from financial erosion, almost everything has been taken from it and very little put back, the result is the poor economy of today. Little progress can be expected in a country where no loans can be obtained for any development whatever. If some plan can be worked out providing some form of banking facilities, and making loans available for sound development without impairing the present financial relations with the American Islands, and the free use of American currency, a great step forward will have been made.⁶⁸

Penn was very clear that any action taken to establish local banks was to be done without sacrificing the financial relationship British Virgin Islanders then shared with the American Islands. As a whole, it was evident that while British Virgin Islanders were seeking improvements, they were conscious of the fact that their survival had for so long been dependent on the American Islands. They were therefore careful to do nothing that could negatively impact that relationship. That caution proved to be wise, as many of their requested improvements were ignored or inadequately fulfilled, leaving British Virgin Islanders to continue to lean heavily on the US Virgin Islands.

In 1947, Secretary of State for the Colonies, Creech Jones, approved the reintroduction of the Legislative Council of the British Virgin Islands. Neither the governor of the Leeward Islands nor the commissioner of the

British Virgin Islands took any action towards the reintroduction.⁶⁹ This inaction was seen as another egregious act in a long list of them, and the people were fed up. By early October 1949, political unrest was brewing. Meetings were held by young men dissatisfied with the commissioner's rule. Additional claims of irregularities in government and cries for a new constitution based on representative government were made. Cruikshank soon felt compelled to request that police officers be brought temporarily from Antigua to curb the growing tension.⁷⁰

By the end of the month, Theodolph Faulkner of Anegada was lending his voice to the growing discontent. As a young man, Faulkner had been forced to migrate from his home in Anegada, the northernmost of the British Virgin Islands, after the island's shark industry closed in 1929. Faulkner first went to Aruba where he worked at an oil refinery. He then migrated to Curaçao and the Dominican Republic before returning home. He found that conditions had changed little in the time he was away. Faulkner began to write letters to the government about the sad state of affairs in Anegada, but he was ignored.⁷¹ In 1949, Faulkner's ire was raised further by the deplorable medical conditions in Anegada, which made it necessary for him to take his pregnant wife for treatment on Tortola, where the only medical officer was stationed.⁷² While the doctor should have made monthly visits to the outer islands, this often did not take place for as many as three or four months. Those on the outer islands in need of urgent medical care were often obliged to travel by sailboat to Tortola, a journey that could take hours depending on the winds. Once on Tortola, Faulkner was angered further by the treatment they received at the lone hospital, as well as the medical officer's refusal to see his wife.⁷³ He publicly and loudly criticised Cruikshank and his administration.

Articulating "many of the social ills and discontent" in the colony, Faulkner was particularly critical of what he perceived to be the extravagant and careless spending of taxpayers' money.⁷⁴ As reported in the 31 October issue of the *Daily News*, \$24,000 had been allocated for the rehabilitation of the British Virgin Islands' Government House, which was also the residence of the commissioner and his wife.⁷⁵ This figure, considered reasonable by the commissioner, seemed woefully extravagant when compared with the \$25,000 that was supposedly reserved for the building and maintenance of roads for the entire island of Tortola. The deplorable conditions of those very roads had for months garnered much negative comment. A satirical article on the subject had appeared in the January 1949 issue of the *Torch*. The author, going by the pseudonym

"Eavesdropper", had implored the commissioner to S.O.S. (save our shoes) from the roads that had been "gnawed away by time and the forces of nature".⁷⁶ The people simply could not fathom how Cruikshank could deem it responsible administration to renovate his personal accommodations to the tune of \$24,000, which was only a thousand dollars less than what he allocated for islandwide roadworks. This decision was one that Faulkner saw as nothing more than continued financial mismanagement, and was enough for him to voice his outrage publicly.

Joseph R. O'Neal, who had worked with Cruikshank as a member of the Executive Council, did not just see Cruikshank's actions as financial mismanagement; he saw it as an outright abuse of power. According to O'Neal,

At the government reservoir [. . .] one faucet led to Government House and the other to Town. The reservoir was divided into two, which allowed Cruikshank to take half of [the] Public Works' 100,000 gallons grant of water, all of which was supposed to be for the use of Town residents. The Territory also had a grant of \$124,000 for the maintenance and repair of public buildings and he took half of that to refurbish Government House, or 'Mt. Olympus' as [O'Neal] took to calling it. At a meeting [O'Neal] had with Cruikshank [. . .] [he] told him that it appeared he could only divide by two.⁷⁷

Despite the discrepancy in funding amounts, it is highly likely the *Daily News*, Faulkner, and O'Neal were all referring to the same grant, and they were all incredulous that half of the funding (no matter the amount) would be allocated solely for the benefit of one man: the commissioner. Actions such as these cemented in the minds of the people that Cruikshank was not a reasonable or competent administrator, despite his earlier attempts to placate them by advocating for closer association with the US Virgin Islands.

In his criticism of the way the British Virgin Islands was being administered, the Executive Council was also not spared Faulkner's wrath, or, as Carlton de Castro so eloquently termed it, "the piercing dagger of truth".⁷⁸ Faulkner was critical of decisions made by council members, specifically the reappointment of an expatriate as surveyor of works, when the post could have been just as adequately filled by a native. On 10 November 1949, the *Daily News* reported that the Executive Council in Tortola had been petitioned to resign. One of the petition's most scathing complaints against the council members was that it was "evident that the British Virgin Islands [had] become afflicted with a dictatorial form of Government".⁷⁹ Their resignation was demanded. Two weeks later, the people of the British Virgin Islands made another

demand, this time for the removal of the British-appointed commissioner.

On 24 November 1949, over 1,500 persons marched in protest against Commissioner Cruikshank and his governance in the British Virgin Islands.⁸⁰ The protest was led by Theodolph Faulkner, Glanville Fonseca, and Carlton de Castro, together known as the "United Three".⁸¹ Participants came from throughout the colony. The placard-carrying marchers descended upon the capital city of Road Town in peaceful protest. The placards included calls to do "Away with One Man Rule", "Down with Cruikshank", and "We Want Government Of, By and For the People".⁸² The speakers were clear in stating that they had no confidence in Cruikshank's administration and wanted his removal from the post of commissioner. Additionally, the protestors also requested that steps be taken to remove the immigration barriers that prevented British Virgin Islanders from obtaining employment in St Thomas. If modifications that would permit "closer union of the peoples of the two colonies" were unattainable, the protestors felt that the annexation of the two sets of islands was a satisfactory alternative.⁸³

On 29 November 1949, the *Daily News* published the article "Divine Discontent Reaches Tortola", which commended the protest as "an important advancement in a people who for years have lived in British type misery under the shadow of fear". The article highlighted the major points that led the people to protest in the first place, chief among them being the lack of political voice in regard to the management of their own affairs and the implementation of acts believed to be detrimental to the general welfare of the colony. Also reiterated was the belief by the reformers that if better living conditions could not be secured for the colony's residents by the British government, they would be better suited to be transferred to the jurisdiction of the United States.

In December 1949, leaders of the reform movement in Tortola announced plans to petition the Caribbean Commission (an institution meant to strengthen the social and economic cooperation between the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and France in the Caribbean region) for aid in relieving conditions in the colony, as well as to use their influence to bring about reforms in United States' immigration laws, which were affecting British Virgin Islanders adversely.⁸⁴ In the actual petition, the British Virgin Islands' Progressive League, which Faulkner had founded, implored the Caribbean Commission to find a way "to give genuine British Virgin Islanders easier access to the American Virgin Islands even though they may not be permitted to go further afield in United States territory".⁸⁵ On 15 January 1950, Glanville

Fonseca wrote to the governor of the Leeward Islands, Earl Baldwin of Bewdley, regarding a new constitution for the British Virgin Islands.⁸⁶ In his letter, he referenced a petition he had organised that had garnered 1,100 signatures. Those 1,100 signatories represented approximately one-fifth of the population.⁸⁷ Within the petition were several criticisms of the governance of the British Virgin Islands. A key criticism was that:

From the opening of the present century [the] Petitioners have been governed by a Commissioner appointed by the Right Honourable The Secretary of State for the Colonies. The people of the Presidency have no voice in the making of the laws whereby they are governed. Matters of policy are decided by the Commissioner in his Executive Council with the assistance of Officials nominated by him, and of certain Unofficials; but the feelings and wishes of these Unofficials have continuously been flouted and ignored.

In the meantime changes have taken place in the other Presidencies of the Colony, giving to the people a greater voice in their affairs. In the neighbouring islands of the American Virgin Islands political progress has gone forward, so that our unrepresented status has become a subject of scorn and ridicule difficult to explain away or endure.⁸⁸

The petitioners demanded the promised reconstitution of the Legislative Council, a restructured Executive Council, and the problems of monetary devaluation and emigration, be addressed.⁸⁹

The people's carefully drafted petition was unfortunately met with much scepticism. Baldwin questioned whether signatories fully understood the cause to which they were lending their name.⁹⁰ He also questioned the authenticity of the signatures, presumably because several seemed to be written by the same hand. What the officials failed to take into account was the fact that they had not provided adequate education in the colony. Consequently, many of the people were illiterate and required someone else to sign their names for them. Additionally, the apparent repetition of some names was construed as an attempt to pad the petition. Yet, there was another less insidious explanation. The presence of the "same" name may have occurred because fathers, sons, uncles and cousins were frequently christened with the same name, and were seldom, if ever, distinguished by suffixes such as junior or senior. Even if the petition was padded, it did not negate the fact that the people were dissatisfied, disgruntled and desirous of change. The demonstration and subsequent petitions were the only ways this disenfranchised group of people felt they could be heard. Their continued demand for a closer relationship with the United States Virgin Islands was a testament to how reliant on those islands the British Virgin Islands continued to be.

Town and Country: The 1950s Onwards

In the 1950s, the United States' restrictive immigration and labour regulations continued to hamper the relationship between the US Virgin Islands and the British Virgin Islands. British Virgin Islanders were continuing to experience great hardship in entering the neighbouring colony; and the American islands were experiencing hardship in securing an adequate supply of labour. Appeals were made to the Senate and House Committees on Interior and Insular Affairs. In a memorandum dated 26 December 1951, the British Embassy made appeals to the US Secretary of State to "promote, either by legislation or by administrative relaxation or modification which would reduce or eliminate the hardships now being caused to the British Virgin Islanders by the enforcement in the United States Virgin Islands of United States federal legislation".⁹¹ The memorandum went to great lengths to outline the relationship between the colonies and the harmful effect the full implementation of federal legislation was still having on the islands, despite the creation of the Inter-Virgin Islands Conference in May 1951. The memorandum also reiterated the fact that, for the previous two hundred years, the people of the two colonies had been "encouraged to live together as a single economic unit, [had] been encouraged to inter-marry, and [had] been encouraged to regard themselves as 'Virgin Islanders' irrespective of international frontiers."⁹² That those policies had been "reversed by the application to [. . .] the Virgin Islands of legislation framed to cover the whole of the United States" would necessitate special legislation specific to the unique needs of the entire Virgin Islands.⁹³

For any significant progress to be made, the British Virgin Islands needed a champion for their cause, and they found one in the form of Sir Kenneth Blackburne, the new governor of the Leeward Islands, who served from 1950 to 1956. Unlike some British and colonial officials, Blackburne was acutely aware of the importance of the relationship between the British and United States Virgin Islands, summarizing the relationship as follows:

If for two hundred years the British Virgin Islanders had not been encouraged to develop their islands as the 'country' and to regard St. Thomas as their 'town' in a single community of Virgin islanders, their population today would not be so large, and their pursuits and their trade would have developed along different lines. It would seem that the Government of Great Britain and of the United States as trustees for the people of these islands have a duty to safe guard their interests, and that exceptional measures should now be taken to deal with what is, at least in the Caribbean, an exceptional situation.⁹⁴

During this period of time, the US Virgin Islands attracted British subjects from throughout the Caribbean, but it was protecting the special relationship between the two Virgin Islands, with which Blackburne remained very concerned. Blackburne was especially vocal about what he considered to be artificial divisions between the Virgin Islands and the need for them to be eliminated. To this end, Blackburne authored his own memoranda and proposals for ameliorative measures. He also organised several meetings with key members of the United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Customs, Immigration and Naturalization Department, Labor Department, and State Department. Blackburne was cognizant of the fact that the two colonies had a relationship so intertwined that the British islands were seen as being the country to St Thomas' town, "with the corresponding differences in standards of living normally prevailing in agricultural and urban communities".⁹⁵ Blackburne was therefore duly concerned at the implementation of immigration regulations that served to restrict or complicate the entrance of British Virgin Islanders into the American islands. In his communications with the United States, Blackburne was clear that he was only seeking concessions for the British Virgin Islands, stating,

We do not ask for special treatment for anyone except British Virgin Islanders [. . .] the American authorities can rest assured that the grant of special immigration facilities for British Virgin Islanders would be limited on our side to natives of the British Virgin Islands and would not provide a loophole whereby other persons can enter United States territory without visas.⁹⁶

Blackburne's petitions to the United States on behalf of British Virgin Islanders were notable, as they were the only British West Indian subjects for whom he made such specific requests. Blackburne's outsized efforts in securing ameliorative measures for the British Virgin Islands were also seen with the creation of the Inter-Virgin Islands Conference. The efforts of the conference would define much of the relationship between the British and United States Virgin Islands in the 1950s.

In 1945, France and the Netherlands joined the Anglo-American Commission, subsequently renamed the Caribbean Commission.⁹⁷ In 1943, British Virgin Islanders had brought petitions to the then Anglo-American Commission that were "probably outside the jurisdiction of the commission".⁹⁸ It would quickly become apparent that the Caribbean Commission was also not the most efficient forum in which to address issues wholly unique and specific to the combined Virgin Islands. This realisation led Blackburne, in his capacity as the governor of the Leeward

Islands, along with the governor of the US Virgin Islands, to initiate talks between their imperial powers. In May 1951, the Inter-Virgin Islands Conference was established. This new conference was an avenue by which matters of common interest to the British and United States Virgin Islands could be discussed. The creation of such an organisation for two dependencies as small as the British and US Virgin Islands was as unique as the issues the conference was meant to address. As Norwell Harrigan succinctly explains,

The Inter-Virgin Islands Conference was perhaps unique [. . .] [because] it operated at the lowest level and smallest scale thus far devised (in that it was purely local in scope and involved two island territories of less than 200 square miles and fewer than 60,000 people) for the resolution of problems of interdependence across national boundaries.⁹⁹

The conference addressed problems with immigration, labour, communication, customs, disaster coordination, fishing, public works, safety at sea, taxation, tourism, wildlife preservation, adequate landing facilities, harbour arrangements and passenger shelters, and last but not least, medical and health services.¹⁰⁰ The conference was an important problem-solving medium. There were cases that required major compromises on both sides, and situations that found solutions on a local level but did not find favour with or approval from one or the other home government. Immigration was an issue that was difficult to find appropriate solutions for. As in the 1930s and 1940s, the United States continued to be hesitant to implement laws in the US Virgin Islands, that, while beneficial to those islands, would be detrimental if applied elsewhere. Yet, through calculated manoeuvring, the conference was successful in gaining a few significant immigration concessions, including "a simplified procedure for temporary admission into the U.S. Virgin Islands".¹⁰¹ This immigration concession, adopted in early 1956, was applicable only to British Virgin Islanders and allowed them to be "admitted for periods of up to one year for the purpose of contract employment".¹⁰²

An issue that found no resolution, but continued to arise on several occasions, was the possibility of annexing the British islands to the American-owned ones. The topic was broached by both nations. While annexation may have seemed the best and most logical solution to labour issues in the US Virgin Islands and the economic and political hardships experienced by the British Virgin Islands, some felt that ameliorative measures remained the logical and perhaps better solution for British

and US Virgin Islands intercourse. The relationship between the two Virgin Islands through the 1950s was by no means a perfect one, but it was important. It was a relationship forged by proximity and defined by shared labour, goods, services, money, ideas and families.

An Enduring Connection: Amelioration but Not Amalgamation

The British Virgin Islands faced a long road towards development, empowerment and representation. They would eventually achieve these things, partially through self-determination, and partially through their relationship with their American counterparts. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the administrative costs for the colony had been kept at a minimum. According to Hugo Vanterpool, the "level of stringency in administrative cost had reached such a point, that the presidency by the late 1940's was inadequately manned".¹⁰³ This in turn often left one man to carry "the burden of three or four".¹⁰⁴ The appointed commissioners often served as doctor and magistrate, among other duties, which consequently resulted in inadequate administration, particularly in "health, education and social services".¹⁰⁵ The appointment of J.A.C. Cruikshank in 1946 exacerbated these issues, especially as he often seemed more vested in securing his own personal comforts over the needs of his constituents. Conditions in the British Virgin Islands under Cruikshank led the people to demand that unfettered access to the US Virgin Islands be restored along with an elected Legislative Council.

In 1947, there were two regional conferences centred around the issue of closer associations among British colonies. At the *Conference on the Closer Association of the British West Indian Colonies*, held in Jamaica, the British Virgin Islands declined the invitation to be a part of the proposed Federation of the West Indies. At the *Closer Union Conference of the Colony of the Leeward Islands* in St Kitts, the British Virgin Islands submitted a resolution that "among other things asked for continued free use of US currency, and for an elected Legislative Council".¹⁰⁶ This resolution was unanimously carried. It was then passed by the secretary of state for the colonies, but its actual implementation was delayed by Commissioner Cruikshank.¹⁰⁷ This delay, along with other issues of administrative mismanagement, angered the people. The aftermath of the 1949 protest against Cruikshank saw the long-awaited restoration of the Legislative Council in 1950. With that hurdle passed, the next item on the agenda was the relationship with the United States Virgin Islands. The 1951

creation of the Inter-Virgin Islands Conference addressed many issues of mutual concern to the two colonies.

Throughout the 1950s, the British Virgin Islands continued to distance themselves from the other British West Indian colonies, while seeking to maintain and strengthen their ties to the US Virgin Islands. In 1958,

the Colony of the Leeward Islands ceased to exist as preparation was made for it to join the wider West Indies Federation. The British Virgin Islands with its new taste of representative Government, opted to stay out of the Federation, arguing for preferred closer ties with the United States Virgin Islands. It argued that if conditions were so poor when it was part of a smaller Colony of the Leeward Islands, it would be much worse, when it became swallowed up in a larger Federation of the West Indies. Britain granted its request and allowed it [. . .] to become a colony in its own rights, answerable directly to the Colonial Office in London.¹⁰⁸

The demand for representative government, while also demanding closer association with a colony belonging to another nation, may seem anomalous, but to British Virgin Islanders it made perfect sense. It allowed them to have the best of both worlds. Arguably, the British Virgin Islands benefited more from the relationship than the US Virgin Islands, but both sides did indeed benefit. Their long interdependent history as borderlands, first of the British and Danish empires and then of the United Kingdom and the United States, allowed the British Virgin Islands the power to reject suggestions of further integration into British government. The ties that bound them remained strong. So much so that by the 1950s, despite the challenges of allowing this interconnectedness to continue, the United States, the United Kingdom, and their representatives, were forced to acknowledge the importance of this relationship and take legislative action to secure more and more ameliorative concessions, highlighting how the strength of the borderland shaped both British and American imperial policies.

NOTES

1. Putnam, 7.
2. Dookhan, *A History of the Virgin Islands of the United States*, 247.
3. Vanterpool, 259.
4. Mulich, 50.
5. Varlack and Harrigan, *American Paradise*, 15.
6. "The transfer of an 'effective poor-house': From the Danish West Indies to the U.S. Virgin Islands", *Daily News* (US Virgin Islands), 30 March 2019.

- https://www.virginislandsdailynews.com/news/the-transfer-of-an-effective-poor-house-from-the-danish-west-indies-to-the-u/article_216afec6-7439-587e-89ab-1c0a9b0ebc7d.html.
7. Dookhan, *A History of the Virgin Islands of the United States*, 275.
8. Ibid., 278.
9. Augelli, 51–52, 57–58.
10. Zabriskie, 25.
11. Dookhan, *A History of the Virgin Islands of the United States*, 248.
12. Ibid., 258.
13. Ibid., 259.
14. Harrigan, *The Inter-Virgin Islands Conference* (1980), 20.
15. Committee on the Judiciary, *Nonimmigrant Alien Labor Program on the Virgin Islands of the United States*, 3.
16. "The Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson-Reed Act)", US Department of State website, 22 March 2024, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936>.
17. Committee on the Judiciary, *Nonimmigrant Alien Labor Program on the Virgin Islands of the United States*, 3.
18. "The Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson-Reed Act)", US Department of State website, 22 March 2024, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936>.
19. Committee on the Judiciary, *Nonimmigrant Alien Labor Program on the Virgin Islands of the United States*, 3, 4; *Annual Report of the Governor of the Virgin Islands for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1938*, 19.
20. US National Archives, College Park, MD. Office of the Territories Central Files 1907– 1951, RG126, Box 1225- 5. Breckinridge Long, Assistant Secretary of the Department of State in an 8 October 1940 letter to the Honourable Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of the Interior refers to the French island of St Barthélemy as St Bartholomew.
21. Jarvis, *The Virgin Islands and their People*, 50–61.
22. Krigger, 24.
23. Ibid.
24. Joseph Reynold O'Neal, *Life Notes*, 108.
25. Boyer, 166–67.
26. Krigger, 24.
27. *Daily News*, 25 March 1941. Going through the "Back door" or the "window" meant entering the US Virgin Islands without going through the proper immigration channels.
28. *Annual Report of the Governor of the Virgin Islands to the Secretary of the Interior. Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1945*, 13.
29. Committee on the Judiciary, *Nonimmigrant Alien Labor Program on the Virgin Islands of the United States*, 5.
30. National Archives at Kew, UK, Foreign Office (hereafter FO) 371/74244, Letter from Commissioner to the Governor of the Leeward Islands, 5 July 1948.

31. National Archives at Kew, UK, Colonial Office (hereafter CO) 1042/345, Letter to Comptroller for Development and Welfare from Governor of the Leeward Islands, G. Letham, 7 December 1940.
32. Harrigan, *The Inter-Virgin Islands Conference* (1980), 21.
33. Stockdale, 213.
34. Ralph T. O'Neal, "Seeds of Discontent", 239.
35. Dookhan, *A History of the British Virgin Islands*, 218.
36. *Ibid.*, 219.
37. FO 371/74244, Letter from BVI Commissioner JAC Cruikshank to the Governor of the Leeward Islands, Baldwin of Bewdley, 5 July 1948.
38. FO 371/74244, Letter from BVI Commissioner to the Governor of the Leeward Islands, 5 July 1948.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Ralph T. O'Neal, "Seeds of Discontent", 241.
41. National Archives at Kew, UK, CO 537/6121A, Memorandum, 2 October 1948.
42. FO 371/74244, Letter from BVI Commissioner to the Governor of the Leeward Islands, 5 July 1948.
43. CO 537/6121A, Memorandum, 2 October 1948.
44. FO 371/74244, Letter from BVI Commissioner to the Governor of the Leeward Islands, 5 July 1948.
45. *Ibid.*
46. CO 537/6121A, Memorandum, 2 October 1948.
47. CO 537/6121A, Memorandum, 19 October 1948.
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*
51. CO 537/6121A, "United States Export Restrictions" Letter to the Secretary of State of the Colonies from the BVI Commissioner, 4 January 1949; forwarded to the Colonial Attaché, 29 January 1949.
52. National Archives at Kew, UK, CO 537/4887, Memorandum from D. Smith to Galsworthy and Beckett, 12 September 1949.
53. CO 537/4887, Memorandum, 12 September 1949.
54. *Ibid.*
55. Ralph T. O'Neal, "Profile", 205.
56. CO 537/4887, Memorandum by Galsworthy, 19 September 1949.
57. CO 537/4887, Memorandum, 19 September 1949.
58. CO 537/4887, Memorandum to Seel, 27 September 1949.
59. Goveia, 52.
60. CO 537/4887, Memorandum, 27 September 1949.
61. Blanshard, 177.
62. Ralph T. O'Neal, "Seeds of Discontent", 241.
63. *Ibid.*, 241.

64. Blanshard, 177.
65. FO 371/74244, Letter from BVI Commissioner to the Governor of the Leeward Islands, 5 July 1948.
66. National Archives at Kew, UK, CO 1042/343, Enclosure "Memorandum on the Needed Improvements in the British Virgin Islands" by H.R. Penn, February 28, 1946. Cruikshank to Blackburne, 4 March 1946.
67. CO 1042/343, Enclosure Cruikshank to Blackburne, 4 March 1946.
68. Ibid.
69. National Archives at Kew, UK, CO 152/546/4, Memorandum to Thomas Lloyd, 29 March 1950.
70. *Daily News*, 12 October 1949, 1.
71. Walters-Faulkner, 248.
72. Ralph T. O'Neal, "Seeds of Discontent", 242.
73. Ibid.
74. Lettsome, 243.
75. *Daily News*, 31 October 1949.
76. *Torch*, January 1949.
77. Joseph R. O'Neal. *Life Notes*, 61.
78. *Daily News*, 31 October 1949; the author of this scathing indictment against Cruikshank was presumably Carlton de Castro, who lent his support to the mass demonstration that erupted later in that same month.
79. *Daily News*, 10 November 1949, 3.
80. While the 25 November 1949 issue of the *Daily News* reported 1,000 persons marched in protest of the Commissioner; Lettsome, in "The Demonstration of 1949", 244; and Pickering, 227, reported over 1,500 persons were involved in the demonstration.
81. Ralph T. O'Neal, "Seeds of Discontent", 242; When Faulkner began his series of meetings protesting Cruikshank he sought the support of Fonseca and de Castro. Fonseca, because he had previously represented the colony at the West Indies Closer Association Conference in Jamaica in 1947, and de Castro was a well-known and respected seaman. Fonseca and de Castro initially declined to get involved with Faulkner for fear of arrest, however, as Faulkner garnered more support, and the possibility of arrest seemed unlikely, they threw their lots in with Faulkner and became the "United Three".
82. *Daily News*, 25 November 1949, 1.
83. Ibid.
84. *Daily News*, 3 December 1949, 1.
85. National Archives at Kew, UK, FO 371/114382, "Relationship between the United States and British Virgin Islands; Note by the Governor of the Leeward Islands", December 1954.
86. CO 152/546/4, Forwarded copy of letter from G. Fonseca to the Governor of the Leeward Islands, 15 January 1950.

87. Earl Baldwin of Bewdley, Governor of the Leeward Islands, in a 21 February 1950 letter to A. Creech Jones, Secretary of State for the Colonies, indicates that the 1,100 signatures of the petitioners comprising 23 pages were not being copied for transmission. CO 152/546/4. At the close of 1949 the British Virgin Islands' population was estimated to be 5,547. Population figures from CO 537/6121B; Enclosure A "Number of Medical Certificates issued by the Medical Officer, British Virgin Islands, to Intending Passengers to St. Thomas", 5 July 1950 Memorandum, Commissioner's Office, British Virgin Islands.
88. CO 152/546/4, "A Petition from the people of the Presidency of the British Virgin Islands in the colony of the Leeward Islands, British West Indies to the Right Honourable the Secretary of State for the Colonies", 31 December 1949.
89. Ibid.
90. CO 152/546/4, Letter from the Governor of the Leeward Islands to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 21 February 1950.
91. National Archives at Kew, UK, FO 371/97639, Memorandum to Secretary of State (US) from British Embassy, Washington DC, 26 December 1951.
92. FO 371/ 97639, Memorandum, 26 December 1951.
93. Ibid.
94. Ibid.
95. FO 371/ 97639, Enclosures "Statement by Sir Kenneth Blackburne" and "Notes of a meeting held at 10:30am on 16th September in the State Department to discuss Inter-Virgin Islands problems", 19 September 1952. British Embassy to Foreign Office, 3 October 1952.
96. National Archives at Kew, UK, FO 371/109165, Letter from Blackburne to Campbell, British Embassy, 8 December 1953.
97. Stockdale, 217.
98. Harrigan, *Inter-Virgin Islands Conference* (1980), 21.
99. Harrigan, *Inter-Virgin Islands Conference* (1980), 13.
100. CO 1031/602, "Public Notice, Inter-Virgin Islands Conference", Commissioner's Office, 22 September 1951; Harrigan, *The Inter-Virgin Islands Conference* (1971), 22; CO 1031/602, "Inter-Virgin Islands Conference", 1951; CO 537/6121B, Enclosure A "Number of Medical Certificates issued by the Medical Officer, British Virgin Islands, to Intending Passengers to St. Thomas"; CO 1031/2707, Public Notice No. 38/59, 10 October 1959.
101. Howell, 77.
102. Ibid.
103. Vanterpool, 259.
104. Ibid.
105. Ibid.
106. Ibid.
107. Ibid.
108. Ibid., 261.

WORKS CITED

Archives Consulted

- National Archives at Kew, UK. Colonial Office (hereafter CO) 152/433/7. Letter from E. Baynes, Government House, Antigua to the Right Honourable Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister, 7 September 1932.
- National Archives at Kew, UK. CO 1042/343. Enclosure "Memorandum on the Needed Improvements in the British Virgin Islands" by H.R. Penn, February 28, 1946. Cruikshank to Blackburne, 4 March 1946.
- National Archives at Kew, UK. CO 152/546/4. Memorandum to Thomas Lloyd, 29 March 1950.
- CO 152/433/7. "Memorandum of the newly-imposed taxes" by J. Levo, 1932.
- CO 1042/345. Letter to Comptroller for Development and Welfare from Governor of the Leeward Islands, G. Letham, 7 December 1940.
- CO 537/6121A. Memorandum, 2 October 1948.
- CO 152/546/4. "A Petition from the people of the Presidency of the British Virgin Islands in the colony of the Leeward Islands, British West Indies to the Right Honourable the Secretary of State for the Colonies", 31 December 1949.
- CO 537/4887. Memorandum from D. Smith to Galsworthy and Beckett, 12 September 1949.
- CO 537/4887. Memorandum, 12 September 1949.
- CO 537/4887. Memorandum by Galsworthy, 19 September 1949.
- CO 537/4887. Memorandum, 19 September 1949.
- CO 537/4887. Memorandum, 27 September 1949.
- CO 537/4887. Memorandum to Seel, 27 September 1949.
- CO 537/6121A. Memorandum, 2 October 1948.
- CO 537/6121A. Memorandum, 19 October 1948.
- CO 537/6121A. "United States Export Restrictions". Letter to the Secretary of State of the Colonies from the BVI Commissioner, 4 January 1949; forwarded to the Colonial Attache', 29 January 1949.
- CO 537/6121B. Enclosure A "Number of Medical Certificates issued by the Medical Officer, British Virgin Islands, to Intending Passengers to St. Thomas".
- CO 152/546/4. Forwarded copy of letter from G. Fonseca to the Governor of the Leeward Islands, 15 January 1950.
- CO 152/546/4. Letter from the Governor of the Leeward Islands to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 21 February 1950.
- CO 1031/602. "Public Notice, Inter-Virgin Islands Conference". Commissioner's Office, 22 September 1951.
- CO 1031/602. "Inter-Virgin Islands Conference", 1951.
- CO 1031/2707. Public Notice No. 38/59, 10 October 1959.
- National Archives at Kew, UK. Colonial Office. Foreign Office (hereafter FO)

- 371/74244. Letter from Commissioner to the Governor of the Leeward Islands, 5 July 1948.
- FO 371/74244. Letter from Commissioner JAC Cruikshank to the Governor of the Leeward Islands, Baldwin of Bewdley, 5 July 1948.
- FO 371/ 97639. Memorandum from US State Department, 21 June 1950.
- FO 371/97639. Memorandum to Secretary of State (US) from British Embassy. Washington DC, December 26, 1951.
- FO 371/ 97639. Memorandum, 26 December 1951.
- FO 371/ 97639. Enclosures "Statement by Sir Kenneth Blackburne" and Notes of a meeting held at 10:30am on 16th September in the State Department to discuss Inter-Virgin Islands problems", 19 September 1952. British Embassy to Foreign Office, 3 October 1952.
- FO 371/97639. Letter from Governor of the Leeward Islands, Blackburne to Wallace of the Colonial Office, 24 September 1952.
- FO 371/103567. Enclosure "Relationship between the American and British Virgin Islands". Governor of the Leeward Islands to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 20 January 1953.
- FO/109165. Letter from Blackburne to Campbell, British Embassy, 8 December 1953.
- FO 371/97639. Excerpt from the U.S. 83rd Congress, 2nd Session Senate Committee on Interior and Insular affairs. In *Virgin Islands Report*, 56. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1954.
- National Archives at Kew, UK. FO 371/114382. "Relationship between the United States and British Virgin Islands; Note by the Governor of the Leeward Islands", December 1954.
- Annual Report of the Governor of the Virgin Islands for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1938*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1938.
- Annual Report of the Governor of the Virgin Islands to the Secretary of the Interior. Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1945*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1945.
- US National Archives, College Park, MD. Office of the Territories Central Files 1907-1951, RG126, Box 1225- 5.

Newspapers Consulted

- Daily News*, 3 August 1936.
- Daily News*, 16 July 1940.
- Daily News*, 25 March 1941.
- Daily News*, 29 November 1941.
- Augelli, John P. "The British Virgin Islands: A West Indian Anomaly". *Geographical Review* 46, no. 1 (January 1956): 43-58.
- Blanshard, Paul. *Democracy and Empire in the Caribbean: A Contemporary Review*. Macmillan Company, 1947.

- Boyer, William W. *America's Virgin Islands: A History of Human Rights and Wrongs*. Carolina Academic Press, 1983.
- College of the Virgin Islands. *The Alien Worker and his Family*. St Thomas, USVI: College of the Virgin Islands, 1967.
- Committee on the Judiciary. *Nonimmigrant Alien Labor Program on the Virgin Islands of the United States*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1975.
- Creque, Darwin D. *The U.S. Virgins and the Eastern Caribbean*. Whitmore Publishing, 1968.
- De Booy, Theodoor, and John T. Farris. *The Virgin Islands: Our New Possessions and the British Islands*. J.B. Lippincott Company, 1918.
- Dookhan, Isaac. *A History of the British Virgin Islands: 1672 to 1970*. Caribbean Universities Press in association with Bowker Publishing Company, 1975.
- . *A History of the Virgin Islands of the United States*. Jamaica: Canoe Press, 1994.
- Goveia, Elsa V. *Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century*. 1965. Caribbean Series 8, ed. Sidney W. Mintz. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1980.
- Harrigan, Norwell. *The Inter-Virgin Islands Conference: A Study of a Micro-State International Organization*. St Thomas, USVI: Caribbean Research Institute, College of the Virgin Islands, 1971.
- . *The Inter-Virgin Islands Conference: A Study of a Microstate International Organization. A College of the Virgin Islands Monograph*. University Presses of Florida, 1980.
- Harrigan, Norwell, and Pearl Varlack. "Social Change in the British Virgin Islands". St Thomas, USVI: Caribbean Research Institute, College of the Virgin Islands, 1984.
- Harrigan, Ronald E. "The transfer of an 'effective poor-house': From the Danish West Indies to the U.S. Virgin Islands". (US Virgin Islands) *Daily News*. 30 March 2019.
- https://www.virginislandsdailynews.com/news/the-transfer-of-an-effective-poor-house-from-the-danish-west-indies-to-the-u/article_216afec6-7439-587e-89ab-1c0a9b0ebc7d.html.
- Howell, Christopher David Broom. "Tourism in Tortola, British Virgin Islands: Perceptions Towards Land Carrying Capacity". PhD diss., University of Florida, 1978.
- Jarvis, J. Antonio. *The Virgin Islands and their People*. Dorrance and Company, 1944.
- Krigger, Marilyn F. "Attitudes and References to Immigrants in the St. Thomas Press, 1936–1942". St Thomas, USVI, Tenth Conference of Caribbean Historians, College of the Virgin Islands, 1978.
- Legislative Council Commemorative Committee. *Empowerment through Representation: 50th Anniversary of the Restoration of the Sitting of the Legislative Council in the Virgin Islands, 1950–2000*. British Virgin Islands, Government of the British Virgin Islands, 2000.

- Lettsome, Quincy F. "The Demonstration of 1949: It's Beginnings, Golden Jubilee and Implications". *Empowerment through Representation: 50th Anniversary of the Restoration of the Sitting of the Legislative Council in the Virgin Islands, 1950–2000*, edited by The Legislative Council Commemorative Committee, 243–45. British Virgin Islands: Government of the British Virgin Islands, 2000.
- Mulich, Jeppe. *In a Sea of Empires: Networks and Crossings in the Revolutionary Caribbean*. Cambridge, UK: University Press, 2020.
- O'Neal, Joseph Reynold. *Life Notes: Reflections of a British Virgin Islander*. United States: self-published, 2004.
- O'Neal, Ralph T. "Seeds of Discontent: Key Figures in the Quest for Greater Representation". In *Empowerment through Representation: 50th Anniversary of the Restoration of the Sitting of the Legislative Council in the Virgin Islands, 1950–2000*, edited by The Legislative Council Commemorative Committee, 239–42. British Virgin Islands: Government of the British Virgin Islands, 2000.
- . "Profile of Commissioners, Administrators and Governors who Served During the Fifty Years of the Legislative Council". In *Empowerment through Representation: 50th Anniversary of the Restoration of the Sitting of the Legislative Council in the Virgin Islands, 1950–2000*, edited by The Legislative Council Commemorative Committee, 205–12. British Virgin Islands: Government of the British Virgin Islands, 2000.
- Pickering, Vernon. "A Brief History of the Virgin Islands: From Amerindians to the Restoration of Constitutional Rule". In *Empowerment through Representation: 50th Anniversary of the Restoration of the Sitting of the Legislative Council in the Virgin Islands, 1950–2000*, edited by The Legislative Council Commemorative Committee. British Virgin Islands: Government of the British Virgin Islands, 2000.
- Putnam, Lara. "Borderlands and Border Crossers: Migrants and Boundaries in the Greater Caribbean, 1840–1940". *Small Axe* 18, no. 1, Issue 43 (March 2014): 7–21.
- Stockdale, Frank. "The Work of the Caribbean Commission". *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944–)* 23, no. 2 (April 1947): 213–20. Oxford University Press on behalf of the Royal Institute of International. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3018889>
- "The Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson-Reed Act)". US Department of State website, 22 March 2024. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936>.
- Vanterpool, Hugo. "Representation at Last". In *Empowerment through Representation: 50th Anniversary of the Restoration of the Sitting of the Legislative Council in the Virgin Islands, 1950–2000*, edited by The Legislative Council Commemorative Committee, 259–61. British Virgin Islands: Government of the British Virgin Islands, 2000.
- Varlack, Pearl, and Norwell Harrigan. *American Paradise: A Profile of the Virgin Islands of the United States*. Tortola: Research and Constituting Services, 1992.
- Walters-Faulkner, Shirley. "Theodolph Halburn Faulkner". In *Empowerment*

through Representation: 50th Anniversary of the Restoration of the Sitting of the Legislative Council in the Virgin Islands, 1950–2000, edited by The Legislative Council Commemorative Committee. British Virgin Islands: Government of the British Virgin Islands, 2000.

Zabriskie, Luther K. *The Virgin Islands of the United States of America: Historical and Descriptive Commercial and Industrial Facts, Figures, and Resources*. Mainespring Press, 1985.

Critical Reflection: Smallness, Proximity and Connection as Caribbean Themes

CUSH CUTHBERTSON-SEWER

During a workshop for this special issue, which took place in Copenhagen, Denmark, in August 2024, there was the opportunity to participate in rich conversations with the contributing scholars. As these conversations stretched outside into hotel lobbies and to nearby restaurants and cafés, what was striking was the personal connections that tied authors to their text and island of study. Recent discussions within decolonial island studies have called for centring the voices of scholars who are tied to the region of study themselves, since historically, their stories have been told through the dominant imperial perspective.¹ The background of several of the authors of this issue suggests that, for Caribbean microhistories that are often marginalised, historians and scholars with personal connections to the region are able to offer fresh perspectives and questions, for example, about the people behind informal economies and trade. These are areas that Mark Hauser and Kenneth Kelly have described as "poorly documented but, in practice, fairly ubiquitous".²

By examining the human face of trade, social networks, and geopolitical border crossings across various small islands of the Lesser Antilles, contributors to this special issue on *Small Islands, Proximity and Connection* draw attention to the diverse demographics of inter-island travellers and their movements. Looking at periods spanning the fifteenth through mid-twentieth centuries, there is a clearer understanding of the reasons why various Caribbean social groups moved, and the role that the Caribbean Sea offered in opening new opportunities for movement between small neighbouring islands. The contributors utilise official records, government memoranda, fugitive adverts, muster rolls, immigration policies, literature and other events within the historical

record and often show how influential figures wielded their power to orchestrate the social control and movement of Caribbean social actors from the top down. Despite these narratives, which help provide context on the *how* and *why* of movement, these colonial voices do not dominate. Building on existing scholarship on migration, interaction and trade in the Caribbean, contributors show how the themes of smallness, proximity and connection address the movement patterns of social networks from a bottom-up perspective.³

The Caribbean Sea as a physical and cultural phenomenon also flows throughout this special issue, showing how connections between small islands in close proximity aided alternative futures, survival and opportunities for Caribbean social actors. The waters between islands facilitated the diverse movement of tangible and intangible things. The sea was a channel for material and ideological power, and movement. It held the ability to propel empire, sustain colonialism, and maintain day-to-day survival and community. In this special issue, a recurring theme is movement within the Caribbean Sea, where water served as a conduit for the diffusion of people, culture, ideas, goods, empire, power and privilege. Thus, this article reflects on how this special issue adds to our understandings of mobility and cultural transformation. Personal connections to these concepts and potential future lines of inquiry are also shared.

Social Identities and Caribbean Mobility

The themes of smallness, connection and proximity offer a useful framework for insight into the interactions between social identity (race, gender and class) and movement on Caribbean waters, and they underline the critical impact of movement for the survival of different social groups. By tracing patterns of movement across various small islands, the authors reveal how a vibrant tapestry of social identities and conditions intersected to push and pull actors around. Indeed, this volume extends conversations about movement beyond plantations and across the borders of empires. Although movement was regulated on both land and sea, the authors show how poor social conditions, economic opportunity, and natural resources, coupled with a yearning to survive, often influenced the needs of common people to reimagine their social position despite the boundaries of the Caribbean colonial environment. Caribbean waterways offered physical mobility between islands and were an avenue for escape, freedom, and possibly prosperity elsewhere.

However, these concrete and symbolic dreams were not equally available to all. Social constraints coloured the circumstances groups faced when moving between islands. For example, in some cases, free people of colour's proximity to whiteness proved to be advantageous, while the social status of poor whites or Indian indentured labourers could present a hindrance and an opportunity.⁴

This special issue shows how islanders took advantage of the landscapes or "resource commons" of the Eastern Caribbean, by Indigenous inhabitants and later by Africans, Europeans and their descendants, despite imperial contestation and surveillance.⁵ Access to information, news, resources, goods and provisions was critical to survival within this uncertain environment. This led those living within the region to create opportunities to adapt, innovate, and reinvent themselves, often circumventing the established boundaries of colonial society. Enslaved young men Henry, Quamy and Smart faced unique threats as they travelled across the region.⁶ Within narratives of maritime networks, the stories that are silenced are often those of enslaved people. In the colonial era, movement between maritime spaces looked quite different for enslaved or Indigenous groups. Specifically, with the growing inter-island slave trade that was increasing during the eighteenth century, the prospect of travel on the sea could have been an arena of further uncertainty for those in servitude or on lower rungs of colonial society.⁷ Due to the close inter-island connections that developed, enslaved people may have been pushed and pulled around to satisfy population growth in neighbouring plantation colonies.⁸ Within this movement, enslaved people were facing vastly different prospects from those faced by well-connected maritime families. For example, involuntary movement via the sea may entail the loss of family ties and connections, reduction of rights, and changes in familiar work routines on the plantation. Here, social identity shaped both the constraints and opportunities for movement, influencing relationships and travel between islands. Maritime flight and escape for enslaved fugitives in the Grenadines, as Patrick Barker shows, meant overcoming political, demographic and geographic barriers.⁹

Thus, sea power looked very different for those with increased access to wealth and connections. Movement of ideas across the water facilitated the development of Caribbean legal systems governing slavery, as Fredrik Thomasson shows for Swedish St Barthélemy.¹⁰ Mobility on the sea was an extension of empire for those with family ties, more fluid for those in privileged positions, and an adaptive response for less privileged persons. Growing populations of free people of colour, who occupied spaces of

both black and white, leveraged their power and interconnectedness. The Bigards of St Barthélemy, for example, developed a close-knit maritime family. Their story shows how power, privilege and social identity created mobility. They were able to navigate multiple islands due to their racial identity and gain access to a variety of social spaces.¹¹

The discussions of maritime mobility, family ties, and connection at the workshop were a reminder of my own matrilineal family history. In a similar inter-island movement to that of French patriarch Balthazar Bigard Sr, the free islanders Phillip and Peter Sewer travelled from Virgin Gorda along with Charles George to East End, St John (former Danish West Indies, now the US Virgin Islands) around the year 1757.¹² This movement would root the Sewer family and their descendants in the island of St John from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. Douglas Armstrong, in his historical and archaeological study, has found that the Sewer family, and other East End families, used their maritime connections and local craft production to build an interconnected Creole community of free people of colour in East End before emancipation in 1848.¹³ The following generations of Sewer men continued this maritime way of life. Stories of my grandfather's maritime travels, bringing barges to the US Virgin Islands from the mainland US exemplify these maritime networks. Captain Victor Sewer, my great-grandfather, owned the motor vessel *Jolly Roger*, which doubled as a floating classroom for children and offered the first regular boat service between St John and Tortola.¹⁴

Caribbean Cultural Fluidity and Transfer

In this volume, amidst the whirlwind of maritime activity and movement, the people who made these aqueous border-crossings are of primary concern. The movement of social actors produced the spread of physical goods (food, timber, clothing, crafts) and intangible products such as language, culture and ideas. By centring on small islands and connections, this special issue brings attention to what Mimi Sheller describes as the "material and symbolic travels of both people and things".¹⁵ The studies in this volume prompt further questions into the impact of the symbolic and material movement of people and their material culture, foodways, and ideas, on the creolisation or "restructuring", in the words of anthropologist Charles Stewart, in the formation of modern Caribbean environments.¹⁶ As an Afro-Caribbean descendant, understanding how Caribbean culture developed is of great significance. Beyond the impacts of European colonialism and imperialism, the Caribbean's cultural

landscape today has been shaped by the political, economic, and cultural contributions — as well as the voluntary and forced migrations — of Indigenous people, enslaved Africans, and later indentured labourers from East Asia, India and the Middle East. This volume offers a historical viewpoint that examines how social and physical mobility intersected, providing insights that contribute to existing theories on creolisation and cultural transformation in the Caribbean.¹⁷

Initially developed in the Asian and Pacific Island context, terms like *aquapelago*, *aquatic*, and *aqueous* have recently been adopted by scholars to describe the intricate relationships between islands and their communities within the Caribbean archipelago.¹⁸ The geographical proximity of small islands, like those in the Pacific and Caribbean regions, undergirds the profound interconnectedness of people and cultures within archipelagic systems. Pulling from a variety of historical sources, the authors in this special issue add to our perspective on the fluidity of island borders, alongside a fluid, "sinuous" Caribbean culture and identity that ebbed and flowed depending on overarching imperial legislation, governmental mandates, and economic circumstances.¹⁹ Movement on the sea propelled the fluidity and movement of culture, identity and race. The sea was at once a physical vessel for the movement of people and an ideological channel for the transfer of ideas and culture. This lends to a deeper understanding of how interconnected island environments allowed for the development of trade and for the transfer of culture through language, food, goods and identity.

A key ingredient of creolisation is contact between cultures.²⁰ An approach to studying the Caribbean that takes account of inter-island connections and proximity offers a greater understanding of how maritime networks, free ports, and trade facilitated movement that would allow different dichotomies of people (free/enslaved, poor/wealthy, white/black) to interact, cross paths, and exchange goods at island ports and at sea. The mere existence of this level of interaction and engagement was a representation of the fragility of the systems of colonialism and slavery, and of the potential for islanders to defy racial and social boundaries in an undoing and uprooting of colonial systems that valued separation and racial superiority in the building of empire, wealth and inequality.²¹ An aspect that would be interesting to explore in future studies is that, considering the amoeba-like flexibility of identity and fluidity of cultural transfer in the Caribbean, what does the historical archive reveal about how islanders experienced their own identities and retained sovereignty over culture, space and material goods in their islands of origin, set within

these vast mobile networks of trade and interconnection?²² While the contributors here offer glimpses into transport within what historian Jeppe Mulich terms an "inter-imperial microregion",²³ further study might more clearly reveal how these transfers transformed and influenced culture over time within the small islands of the Eastern Caribbean. For example, given the high frequency of trade and dependency between the US and British Virgin Islanders, how did this change or influence cultures on both sides?²⁴ How did the culture and people of the US and British Virgin Islands develop despite their different attachments to empire? Furthermore, in contexts such as that of nineteenth-century St Barths, what did the diversity of arriving vessels and goods mean for the development of island identity and culture?²⁵

Caribbean Connections

Overall, this special issue contributes to a larger conversation around inter-island mobility and connection in the Eastern Caribbean, and the different vantage points from which Caribbean people acted and were acted upon. In the process, they were shaped by their environment, specifically the expansive body of water that connected islands across varying geographies and cultures. Together, the authors in this special issue paint a broad picture of the everyday details, considerations and challenges that had an impact on networks of mobility for a diverse set of Caribbean actors, including free people of colour, poor whites, Indigenous people, indentured labourers, elites and enslaved people. A diverse and creative reliance on family ties and relationships to overcome challenges and create networks of movement and fluidity within a creolised socio-cultural archipelago can be seen.²⁶ Seas, waterways, bays, and harbours opened routes of fluidity and movement, shaping Caribbean creativity and identity on both sea and land. The themes of small islands, proximity and connection provide a structure of analysis for histories of adaptation and engagement, as employed both with and against formal imperial networks, revealing an active image of Caribbean movement, culture and imagined futures. However, undergirding these networks of mobility was access, opportunity and knowledge that was not equally dispersed across social strata. Freedom was carved out within the interstitial spaces. The various social interaction zones presented allow windows into the lived experiences of these Caribbean actors and how their worlds were transformed. In the future, what more can we learn about the role of women, the experiences of the enslaved, identity, and cultural change in

the development and perpetuation of these nodes of interaction? As our approach to studying the Caribbean continues to diversify and include often marginalised voices, how do we expand our approach to the re-telling of history? Furthermore, as we move towards an understanding that views the region not as discrete island units completely moulded by empire, but instead as multifaceted networks of living and breathing people, what does this mean for the future of the Caribbean?²⁷

As an Afro-Caribbean descendant with inter-island roots across the Lesser Antilles, this special issue allows for consideration of the ways that colonial borders have historically divided and connected the Caribbean, and the barriers that still exist today. The sea, which historically connected neighbouring islands and people, materialises today as a social barrier, privileging those with resources and opportunity. Inter-island movement is now facilitated by airplanes, cruise ships, and other large watercraft. Meanwhile, local maritime traditions fall to the wayside in memory, technology and practice. Thus, this volume speaks to the present moment, opening a wider conversation on how contemporary islanders strive to retain historical connection, sovereignty, culture, and a sense of place in their small island homelands, despite the persistence of imperial borders and paradigms.

After participating in this special issue workshop, a return visit to family in St John was accompanied by a new perspective. The present-day development of the Lesser Antilles is built on historical interactions, inter-island connections, and survival responses. During the visit, there were interactions with various islanders whose connections extended across small islands such as St Lucia, Jost Van Dyke, Puerto Rico, Tortola and Antigua. Whether through family connections, migration for economic opportunity, or for provision trading, there exists a collective memory and history of inter-island connections. My grandmother, born in Soufrière, St Lucia, in 1948 navigated imperial waters moving away from the British dominated island to build a new life in the United States Virgin Islands in 1968. Part of that survival was access to fresh foods and goods that reminded her of home. As she spoke to me, she nostalgically recalled receiving fresh fruits and vegetables including cabbage, peppers and ground provisions from a close family friend who operated a small inter-island trade network that allowed them to bring these items through Puerto Rico, Tortola and finally to St John throughout the early 1970s. Such ordinary, everyday examples represent the larger connections between small islands rooted in a historiography that links islands together across time, culture, space and borders.

NOTES

1. Nimführ and Meloni; Rivera-Collazo.
2. Hauser and Kelly, 47.
3. Bassi; Hauser and Kelly, 45; Mulich; Murphy.
4. Fricke, "An Eastern Caribbean Maritime Network"; Joseph, "Beyond Indenture: Indian Immigrant Mobility in St Lucia, 1859–1903"; and Martin, "The 'Mount Moritz Bajans'" in this volume.
5. Christensen, "The Best of All the Virgins"; and Dator, "Islanders, 'Hospitality', the Islander Commons, c. 1492–1624" in this volume.
6. Barker, "Plausible Itineraries" in this volume.
7. Gøbel, 31; Green-Pedersen.
8. Murphy, 66.
9. Barker, "Plausible Itineraries" in this volume.
10. Thomasson, "Archipelagic Law-Making: Borrowing and Implementing Caribbean Slave Law in Swedish St Barthélemy" in this volume.
11. Fricke, "An Eastern Caribbean Maritime Network" in this volume.
12. Ibid; Knight.
13. Armstrong.
14. Bethany Moravian Church, "Funeral Booklet for Victor William Sewer", 4.
15. Sheller, 6.
16. Stewart.
17. Khan; Stewart.
18. Benítez-Rojo; Bassi; Hayward; Sullivan, 10.
19. Benetíz-Rojo.
20. Khan.
21. Bassi; Murphy.
22. Khan.
23. Mulich, 2–26.
24. Lewis, "Amelioration, Amalgamation and Protest" in this volume.
25. Fricke, "An Eastern Caribbean Maritime Network" in this volume.
26. Murphy; the concept of the Caribbean being a socio-cultural archipelago was inspired by Benetíz-Rojo, *Repeating Islands*.
27. Mulich; Murphy, 14.

WORKS CITED

- Armstrong, Douglas V. *Creole Transformation from Slavery to Freedom: Historical Archaeology of the East End Community, St. John, Virgin Islands*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003.

- Bassi, Ernesto. *An Aqueous Territory: Sailor Geographies and New Granada's Transimperial Greater Caribbean World*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Benítez-Rojo, Antonio. *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective, Second Edition*, translated by James E. Maraniss, 2nd edition. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Bethany Moravian Church (Cruz Bay, St John). "Funeral Booklet for Victor William Sewer". University of Florida Digital Collections, Gainesville, Florida, 1995.
- Gøbel, Erik. *The Danish Slave Trade and Its Abolition*, edited by Damian Alan Pargas and Jeff Fynn-Paul. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2016.
- Green-Pedersen, Svend Erik. "The Scope and Structure of the Danish Negro Slave Trade". *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 19, no. 2 (1971): 149–97.
- Hauser, Mark W., and Kenneth G. Kelly. "Colonies without Frontiers: Inter-Island Trade in the Eighteenth-and Nineteenth-Century Caribbean". In *Islands at the Crossroads: Migration, Seafaring, and Interaction in the Caribbean*, edited by L. Antonio Curet and Mark W Hauser, 1st edition, 45. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011.
- Hayward, Philip. "Aquapelagos and Aquapelagic Assemblages: Towards an Integrated Study of Island Societies and Marine Environments". *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures* 6, no. 1 (2012): 1–11.
- Khan, Aisha. "Good to Think? Creolization, Optimism, and Agency". *Current Anthropology* 48, no. 5 (2007): 653–73.
- Knight, David W. "The Establishment of the East End Community on St. John". In *St. John Life in Five Quarters: Selected Readings from the Archives of the St. John Historical Society*. St John Historical Society: St John, Virgin Islands, 2010.
- Mulich, Jeppe. *In a Sea of Empires: Networks and Crossings in the Revolutionary Caribbean*. Cambridge Oceanic Histories. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- Murphy, Tessa. *The Creole Archipelago: Race and Borders in the Colonial Caribbean*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021.
- Nimführ, Sarah, and Greca N. Meloni. "Decolonial Thinking: A Critical Perspective on Positionality and Representations in Island Studies". *Island Studies Journal* 16, no. 2 (2021): 3–17.
- Rivera-Collazo, Isabel C. "The Ghost of Caliban: Island Archaeology, Insular Archaeologists, and the Caribbean". In *Islands at the Crossroads: Migration, Seafaring, and Interaction in the Caribbean*, edited by Antonio L Curet and Mark W Hauser, 22–40. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011.
- Sheller, Mimi. *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Stewart, Charles. "Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory". In *Creolization. History, Ethnography, Theory*, edited by Charles Stewart, 1–26. California: Left Coast Press, 2007.
- Sullivan, Edward J. *From San Juan to Paris and Back: Francisco Oller and Caribbean Art in the Era of Impressionism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.