

Entangled Empires: Anglo-Spanish Competition in the Seventeenth-Century Caribbean

By

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For Tyrion, who is a good dog.

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In the immortal words of Yoda, “takes a village to write a dissertation, it does.” That was certainly true in this case – it also took 1.9 *A Song of Ice and Fire* publishing cycles (based on the current average of 3 2/3 years between books), seven pairs of basketball shoes, and more than 2,000 cups of chai. The village in question was a large one, so apologies to the villagers omitted from the list below due to limited space, faulty memory, or personal vendetta. My interest in the history of colonial Latin America was sparked by Jürgen Buchenau, Jerry Dávila, and Lyman Johnson during my M.A. training at UNC Charlotte. At Vanderbilt, I was introduced to the wider world of the early modern Atlantic and the ways and means of being a professional historian by Bill Caferro, Celso Castilho, Marshall Eakin, Catherine Molineux, and Dan Usner. Through it all and most of all, Jane Landers has continually expanded my bibliographic knowledge, archival expertise, and academic network.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Archives

| | |
|-----|--|
| AGI | Archivo General de Indias (Seville, Spain) |
| CC | Casa de la Contratación |
| ES | Escribanía |
| GU | Gobierno: Audiencia de Guatemala |
| SF | Gobierno: Audiencia de Santa Fé |
| SD | Gobierno: Audiencia de Santo Domingo |
| IG | Indiferente General |
| MP | Mapas y planos |
| PR | Patronato Real |

BL British Library (London, England)

TNA The National Archives (Kew, England)

Citations

| | |
|------|--------|
| leg. | legajo |
| n. | número |
| r. | ramo |

Journals

AHR The American Historical Review

WMQ The William and Mary Quarterly

Published Collections

ADB Lovera, José Rafael, ed. *Antonio de Berrío: La Obsesión por El Dorado*. Caracas, Venezuela: Petróleos de Venezuela, 1991.

PIC Kupperman, Karen Ordahl and W. E. Minchinton, eds. *Papers Relating to the Providence Island Company, 1630 – 1641*. Microform Academic Publishers, 1987.

NOTE ON DATES

Since England did not adopt the Gregorian calendar until 1752, English dates lagged behind those used in Catholic Europe by approximately ten days during the period that this dissertation analyzes. To add to the confusion, from 1155 until 1752 the English year began on March 25 rather than January 1. To avoid ambiguity when English dates appear in conjunction with Iberian ones, I have done my best to transform all dates to their Gregorian equivalent and all years to the continental standard.

INTRODUCTION

In a seminal article published a decade ago in *The American Historical Review*, Eliga H. Gould argued that “the history of the Spanish and English-speaking Atlantic worlds is often best approached not from a comparative standpoint, but as a form of interconnected or ‘entangled’ history.” The key difference between traditional comparative studies and Gould’s entangled alternative is a move away from the rote acceptance of historical geographic, political, or social boundaries as fixed or static. This shift lends itself to the creation of histories “concerned with ‘mutual influencing,’ ‘reciprocal or asymmetric perceptions,’ and the intertwined ‘processes of constituting one another.’”¹

Gould applies this conceptual framework most directly to his area of expertise, the eighteenth-century English Atlantic. To his credit, he emphasizes that the balance of power between the Atlantic empires of Britain and Spanish tilted strongly to the south into the early years of the Age of Revolution.² But if the dissolution of Spanish America marks the end of this entangled history, what of its initial stages? This dissertation will examine an earlier chapter in the interconnected colonial endeavors of England and Spain in the New World.³ Between the final decades of the sixteenth century, when the first attempts to establish a permanent English presence in the Americas were made, and 1670, when the Treaty of Madrid signaled Spain’s formal acceptance of this presence, the foundations were laid for a new imperial order in the Atlantic.

¹ Eliga H. Gould, “Entangled Histories, Entangled Worlds: The English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Periphery,” *AHR* 112.3 (2007): 764.

² *Ibid.*, 767 – 772.

³ This is only one dimension of imperial entanglement in the early modern Atlantic. See, for example, Jane Landers, “Franco/Spanish Entanglements in Florida and the Circumatlantic,” *Journal of Transnational Studies* 8.1 (2017): 1 – 18.

“Entangled” histories as formulated by Gould and others quickly generated a robust discussion. An early corrective was offered by Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, who asked whether Gould’s notion was simply “borderlands historiography in new clothes.” Cañizares-Esguerra argued that regardless of the framework used to analyze events on the imperial periphery, the core retained causal primacy.⁴ Gould offered a measured response, arguing that since empires often “most fully enact their histories and identities” on the contested margins “it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate the entangled (and entangling) histories of colonial peripheries from the metropolitan histories of which they are an integral part.”⁵ This dissertation will take Gould’s contention one step further as it traces a series of Anglo-Spanish encounters on the Caribbean maritime periphery during the seventeenth century. It will argue that these distinctly entangled, unmistakably peripheral interactions were critical in determining the subsequent trajectories of the Atlantic empires of England and Spain, and that the impact that metropolitan policy had on this “process of constituting one another” was less significant than is usually claimed.

• Frameworks and Interventions •

The formulation of this project and the organization of my analysis have been informed by two principal theoretical frameworks. It is first and foremost an entangled history, considering the seventeenth-century Caribbean as a single, coherent space in which individuals with a variety of allegiances navigated a shifting patchwork of permeable imperial boundaries. This is not the product of a decision to approach this historical context in a certain way but an attempt to reflect

⁴ Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, “Entangled Histories: Borderland Historiographies in New Clothes?,” *AHR* 112.3 (2007): 787 – 799. The core/periphery dichotomy descends from world-systems theory as articulated in Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, 4 vols. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974 – 2011).

⁵ Eliga H. Gould, “Entangled Atlantic Histories: A Response from the Anglo-American Periphery,” *AHR* 112.5 (2007): 1416.

lived experience in a dynamic early modern Atlantic world where movement and exchange (of people, of goods, of ideas) was the rule rather than the exception.

Scholars of the Atlantic have responded enthusiastically to Gould's call to craft interconnected narratives in the years since the publication of his original article. Many recent monographs explicitly invoke entanglement, and it features as an implicit presence in others.⁶ My dissertation seeks to contribute to this growing body of literature by demonstrating that not only were early English efforts in the Caribbean guided by the preexisting Spanish model, but the Iberian response with which they were met shaped future iterations of both empires' colonial enterprises. The most vocal participants in the mutually constitutive dialogue that resulted were not metropolitan economic or political elites – they were the sailors, soldiers, and settlers who staked their claim on the imperial periphery.

The second major guiding force for this dissertation arises from the fact that these men and women did not inhabit a vaguely-defined, undifferentiated liminal space. They made their home on islands, mainland coasts, and the open ocean between them. Their periphery was a *maritime* periphery, defined not just by its peripheral-ness but the pattern of connections and dislocations dictated by a geography that extended beyond the terrestrial. Amy Turner Bushnell employed this concept to analyze the colonization of Spanish Florida, anticipating Cañizares-Esguerra's critique of entangled Atlantic history by figuring the maritime periphery to be a

⁶ See, for example, Christian J. Koot's *Empire at the Periphery*, which argues that "between 1624 and 1713 colonists chose to live in an entangled Atlantic in which pursuing Dutch trade was a regular and important part of their commercial system" or Kristen Block's *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean*, which aims "to show what one historian has recently termed the "entangled" histories of European empires in the Caribbean. Even Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra is now a convert: his newly-published edited volume explores "how Spain, Britain, and Portugal shaped one another [. . .] from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries." Koot, *Empire at the Periphery: British Colonies, Anglo-Dutch Trade, and the Development of the British Atlantic, 1621 – 1713* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Block, *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean: Religion, Colonial Competition, and the Politics of Profit* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2012); Cañizares-Esguerra, ed., *Entangled Empires: The Anglo-Iberian Atlantic, 1500 – 1830* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

response to, rather than an elaboration upon, the borderlands paradigm. Her definition extends beyond the physicality of the space to describe a region “of strategic rather than economic importance” maintained to afford protection to more critical corners of the Spanish empire.⁷

This dissertation builds on Bushnell’s maritime periphery by counterposing it with a European core that repeatedly sought, but largely failed, to project policy across the Atlantic. Although metropolitan authorities employed a variety of means in an attempt to control the course of events in the seventeenth-century Caribbean, the dictates of the powerful often had very little influence on outcomes on the ground.⁸ Distance and the limited knowledge base and logistical expertise of developing imperial powers gave their American representatives leeway to think and act independently. As a result, the maritime periphery that appears in this project was a place defined by the exertion of individual agency in creative and causally powerful ways.

I also had a pair of simpler, but no less important, interventions in mind in framing this dissertation. Although the field of early modern Atlantic history has grown by leaps and bounds during the previous two decades, its temporal focus remains polarized. One body of literature focuses on the wonder of the New World’s discovery and the brutality of its conquest. Another follows the eighteenth century through to the Age of Revolution, analyzing an Atlantic where a permanent Northern European presence is a preexisting condition. But the more than a dozen decades separating these two intervals are, if not missing, at least sorely underrepresented. This

⁷ Amy Turner Bushnell, *Situado and Sabana: Spain’s Support System for the Presidio and Mission Provinces of Florida* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1994), 27, 221.

⁸ Among the many tools that agents of the metropole used to shape colonial policy and discourse surrounding imperial expansion were maps. For a detailed discussion of this phenomenon, see Ken MacMillan, “Centers and Peripheries in English Maps of America, 1590 – 1685,” in *Early American Cartographies*, ed. Martin Brückner (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 67 – 92. The maps that appear in this dissertation were created on the periphery, demonstrating that cartographic narratives flowed in the other direction as well.

project contributes to a third historiography that is beginning to shed light on the “forgotten centuries” in between.⁹

The cases examined in this dissertation are also distinct from those that appear most frequently in even a Caribbean context. My project explores what I conceive of as unified, coherent southern Caribbean roughly bounded by the Lesser Antilles to the east, the South American coast and the isthmus of Panama to the south, the Mosquito Coast of Central America to the west, and Jamaica plus the southern coasts of Cuba, Hispaniola, and Puerto Rico to the north. This is more than an arbitrary geographic unit assembled to include the majority of the dissertation’s narrative – during the seventeenth century it was a self-contained piece of the maritime periphery, a theater in which a comparatively small contingent of actors circulated and set into motion processes with ramifications that spread far beyond the marginal mainland ports and underdeveloped islands where they took place.

• Historical Narrative •

My project tracks eighty years of Anglo-Spanish competition beyond the line, starting with the efforts of the Elizabethan privateers during the decades surrounding the turn of the seventeenth century and concluding with the signing of the Treaty of Madrid in 1670.¹⁰ The intervening eight decades saw the geographical focus of the struggle shift several times. First, a handful of Englishmen harbored fever dreams of an Amazonian empire, then the establishment of a Puritan colony on Providence Island, off the coast of modern Nicaragua, made it impossible

⁹ This formulation comes from Charles Hudson and Carmen Chaves Tesser, eds., *The Forgotten Centuries: Indians and Europeans in the American South, 1521 – 1704* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1994), but is as applicable to the Caribbean as the contiguous sector of North America.

¹⁰ The “line” in this conventional phrasing actually refers to two lines: the Tropic of Cancer, 23°26’ north, and a meridian to the west of either the Canaries or Azores. Beyond these “lines of amity,” established by the treaties that ended the Habsburg-Valois Wars in 1559, any diplomatic considerations that governed imperial relations in Europe were null and void. Carl and Roberta Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line: The English in the Caribbean 1624 – 1690* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 3.

for Spanish authorities to continue to ignore the Anglo threat. And even after the English were forcibly removed from Providence, the ominous possibilities inherent in their fleeting presence there were realized with the fall of Spanish Jamaica.

Francis Drake was the most successful of the English mariners who sought to prey on Caribbean shipping during the final decades of the sixteenth century. Walter Raleigh began by aspiring to Drake's example, then shifted gears and tried to establish a permanent settlement in the New World. In 1595 he sailed for Guiana in a futile quest for El Dorado, the fabled third indigenous empire. The next generation of English adventurers set their sights on the Amazon basin, the conviction that the jungle hid unimaginable wealth having proven difficult to dispel. Instead of gold they found an inhospitable climate and more than a few Iberians who were loath to suffer the presence of foreign competitors.¹¹ The Englishmen who survived the Amazonian wilds undaunted retreated to safer harbors in the Caribbean.

Some eventually found their way to Providence, a defensible speck of land with no permanent residents located within striking distance of the Spanish Main. A coterie of Puritan grandees established a colony there in 1630, but their dreams of an ideal religious community were dashed by colonists' pursuit of quicker routes to profit. After several failed attempts, Spanish forces succeeded in evicting the English from the island in 1641, leaving the dispersed interlopers still searching for a permanent Caribbean home. A lucky remnant would find one in 1655 via the unintended consequences of Oliver Cromwell's Western Design. That expedition settled on the forlorn Spanish colony of Jamaica as a consolation prize following a miserable failure on Hispaniola. A bitter war of attrition gripped the island for the rest of the decade before

¹¹ This is the only chapter of the narrative that is not addressed in detail in the dissertation. Many of the surviving English records pertinent to the abortive adventures to Brazil are ably synthesized in Joyce Lorimer, *English and Irish Settlement on the River Amazon, 1550 – 1646* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1989).

the invaders could claim victory. The worst fears of Iberian observers were realized as the island evolved into a commercial entrepôt during the decades to come, catalyzing English ascendancy in the Atlantic.¹²

• Historiographical Review •

By design, this dissertation intersects a number of different historiographies of the early modern Atlantic. Despite my concern with illustrating the entanglement of competing empires in the seventeenth-century Caribbean, the project owes much to the magisterial imperial histories of the mid- to late twentieth century. The earlier work of C. R. Boxer and J.H. Parry as well as more recent studies produced by J. H. Elliott and A. J. R. Russell-Wood are truly sweeping in scope, and were among the first to consider the British, Dutch, and Iberian empires in an Atlantic, or in some cases global, context.¹³ Regarding Anglo-Spanish competition specifically, I owe a special debt to the pioneering archival and interpretive work of Irene A. Wright – almost everywhere that the dissertation goes she was first, and I have relished the opportunity to piece together the story that she so meticulously documented.¹⁴

¹² At least one other scholar has identified several related threads of this narrative: “the establishment of colonies on St. Kitts, Barbados, and Nevis during the 1620s, followed by Antigua and Montserrat in the 1630s, formed part of an unfolding sequence of trade, plunder, and settlement that culminated in the seizure of Jamaica in 1665.” John C. Appleby, “English Settlement in the Lesser Antilles during War and Peace, 1603 – 1660, in *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion*, ed. Robert L. Paquette and Stanley L. Engerman (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1996), 86. To date, though, no monograph-length work has considered the broad sweep of seventeenth-century Anglo-Spanish competition in the Caribbean as part of a single cloth.

¹³ C. R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600 – 1800* (New York: Knopf, 1965); Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415 – 1815* (New York: Knopf, 1969); J. H. Parry, *The Spanish Seaborne Empire* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990); J. H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New, 1492 – 1650* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492 – 1830* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); A. J. R. Russell-Wood, *The Portuguese Empire, 1414 – 1808* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

¹⁴ Wright compiled three volumes of documents from the Archivo General de Indias describing English attempts to infiltrate Spanish America, beginning with *Spanish Documents Concerning English Voyages to the Caribbean, 1527 – 1568* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1929). She also published a number of pertinent journal articles, including “The Spanish Resistance to the English Occupation of Jamaica, 1655 – 1660,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 13 (1930): 117 – 147.

Kenneth R. Andrews led a contingent of scholars who built on Wright's work regarding the origins of the English Atlantic.¹⁵ Although unapologetically Anglocentric, their accounts nonetheless offer the most comprehensive secondary rendering of events in the seventeenth-century Caribbean. The economic aspects of the growing empire were explored in greater detail during the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁶ Most recently, the arrival of the cultural turn brought attention to the qualitative dimensions of the British imperial project.¹⁷ The study of the Spanish Atlantic unfolded along a parallel track, built on the foundation of the pathbreaking economic analysis of Pierre and Huguette Chaunu.¹⁸ Their field-defining research generated a discussion that persisted into the twenty-first century.¹⁹ Religion and race have taken center stage during the last two decades in an effort to recover the lives and voices of marginalized and/or subjugated peoples.²⁰

With the emergence and popularization of consciously Atlantic history, another body of literature has explicitly considered these empires within a comparative framework. These works

¹⁵ Andrews's most important contributions are *The Spanish Caribbean: Trade and Plunder, 1530 – 1630* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978) and *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire, 1480 – 1630* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

¹⁶ John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607 – 1789* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Kenneth Morgan, *Bristol and the Atlantic Trade in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993); David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735 – 1785* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹⁷ For one interpretation of the intersection between commerce and culture, see Alison Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). For the political theory of empire, see David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000). And for the cultural implications of the Atlantic slave trade, see Catherine Molineux, *Faces of Perfect Ebony: Encountering Atlantic Slavery in Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

¹⁸ *Séville et l'Atlantique, 1504 – 1650*, 11 vols. (Paris: Colin, 1955 – 1959).

¹⁹ Carla Rahn Phillips, *Six Galleons for the King of Spain: Imperial Defense in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) employs a microhistorical account of the construction and fitting out of the six titular galleons to explore the finances of the seventeenth-century Spanish empire. John R. Fisher, *The Economic Aspects of Spanish Imperialism in America, 1492 – 1810* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997) is a synthetic quantitative account of Spanish America. Stanley J. and Barbara H. Stein, *Silver, Trade, and War: Spain and America in the Making of Early Modern Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) is the first of a trilogy that takes a more holistic approach to the same end as Fisher's work.

²⁰ Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999); David J. Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005); Stuart B. Schwartz, *All Can Be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).

employ a variety of thematic approaches to place competing imperial regimes into conversation with one another, although they do continue to imagine them as distinct entities.²¹ A related constellation of scholarship that is frequently comparative focuses on the Caribbean.²² Many of these works take as a point of departure or special emphasis the arrival of Northern Europeans during the seventeenth century.²³ This slant is related to the contemporaneous development of sugar cultivation and the slave trade.²⁴ Barbados has received the most attention of any of the early English Caribbean colonies in the associated discussion regarding systems of labor.²⁵

This dissertation rests at the center of these extensive and varied historiographies, which frequently still exist at some remove from each other despite the dense network of entanglements that connects them. Secondary accounts of the project's central narrative are (by design) rarer. There are a handful of popular works concerning Raleigh's search for El Dorado, but none have much to say regarding the Spanish side of the story.²⁶ The definitive study of Providence Island

²¹ For surprising similarities in the religious underpinning of empire in the North and South Atlantic, see Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550 – 1700* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006). For a collection of economically-inflected descriptions of the infrastructure of the maritime periphery, see Franklin W. Knight and Peggy K. Liss, eds., *Atlantic Port Cities: Economy, Culture, and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650 – 1850* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991). For the mobility and cultural literacy of African and Afro-descended peoples during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Jane Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010). And for some of the cultural implications of different imperial traditions, see Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492 – 1640* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²² See Franklin W. Knight, *The Caribbean: The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) for a general historical overview.

²³ See, for example, Paquette and Engerman, eds., *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion* or Natalie A. Zacek, *Settler Society in the English Leeward Islands, 1670 – 1776* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

²⁴ Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking, 1985); Stuart B. Schwartz, ed., *Tropical Babels: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450 – 1680* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

²⁵ Hilary McD. Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627 – 1715* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989); Larry Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted: The English Colonization of Barbados 1627 – 1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Simon P. Newman, *A New World of Labor: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

²⁶ Charles Nicholl, *The Creature in the Map: A Journey to El Dorado* (London: J. Cape, 1995); Paul R. Sellin, *Treasure, Treason, and the Tower: El Dorado and the Murder of Sir Walter Raleigh* (London: Ashgate, 2011).

is Karen Ordahl Kupperman's *Providence Island, 1630 – 1641: The Other Puritan Colony*.²⁷

Spanish Jamaica has received very little attention from historians writing in English, although Carla Gardina Pestana's recent account of the island's conquest promises to encourage more research on its Iberian origins.²⁸ My dissertation will build on these works by putting them into conversation with each other as well as the larger historical and historiographical narratives of which they are an important and heretofore underappreciated part.

• Chapter Outline •

The first chapter of the dissertation chronicles Sir Walter Raleigh's 1595 search for El Dorado in the Orinoco River basin of modern Venezuela. He began that search in earnest on Trinidad, where he encountered and took prisoner Antonio de Berrío, that island's governor. The Spaniard was among the last of the sixteenth-century conquistadors, and had himself dedicated much time and energy to locating the mythical golden city. This chapter argues that the ways that Raleigh and Berrío conceived of the respective colonial projects of the imperial powers that they represented had much in common. Although the Atlantic empires of England and Spain were at very different stages of development during the decades surrounding the turn of the seventeenth century, they were at a similar crossroads regarding the colonization of the Americas. Could an extractive model centered on bullion export be perpetuated indifferently, or were settlement and planting the order of the day? Raleigh and Berrío met at a moment when the debate surrounding this question was beginning to be hashed out, and their shared pursuit of El Dorado marked the

²⁷ Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993. One of the few other monographs in which Providence appears prominently is Arthur Percival Newton, *The Colonising Activities of the English Puritans: The Last Phase of the Elizabethan Struggle with Spain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1914).

²⁸ Pestana, *The English Conquest of Jamaica: Oliver Cromwell's Bid for Empire* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017). The best study of Spanish Jamaica remains Francisco Morales Padrón, *Jamaica Española* (Seville, Spain: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos de Sevilla, 1952), which has since appeared in English translation.

opening act in an entangled conversation that would play out in the Caribbean over the course of the next three generations.

Chapter 2 follows some of the Englishmen who participated in the Amazonian adventures that succeeded Raleigh's second Guiana voyage to Providence Island, a hundred miles east of the Central American coast. They founded a colony there on Christmas Eve 1629 under the auspices of the Providence Island Company, underwritten by a group of Puritan nobles already involved in colonial ventures elsewhere in the Atlantic. This chapter tracks the colony's first half decade, and demonstrates that it was repeatedly hamstrung by muddled metropolitan directives and the absence of a practical vision for its economic solvency and administration. English ascendancy in the Caribbean was in no sense a given, a point that Providence's protracted struggles make extremely evident. The early history of the colony also accentuates the divide between European policymakers and the colonists on the maritime periphery who they sought to control. Time and again people on Providence acted in ways that subversively challenged or explicitly contravened orders sent from England by the Company. When word of the colony was finally acknowledged by authorities in Spain in 1636, the stakes were raised and the threat posed by the misbehavior of rogue actors made that much greater.

The dissertation's third chapter tracks the Spanish response to Providence, culminating with the destruction of the colony in 1641, as well as the island's tumultuous subsequent history through 1670. Cartagena's governor launched a failed assault on Providence in 1636. This attack cleared the way for the colonists to respond in kind, and the colony soon became England's first logistical base for privateering in the Caribbean. Spain could not suffer this aggression for long, and was forced to deal decisively with the English presence on the island. This chapter analyzes the telling reciprocal perceptions that colored thought and action at each juncture in this process.

Neither Englishman nor Spaniard was able to see his rival as he truly was; each projected the values and cultural and economic dogma of his own empire in perceiving the other, confusing assessments of strength and plans of action. After the fall of Providence this pattern continued, as uncertainty regarding English designs in the Caribbean and broader Atlantic impelled indecision as to the island's place on the margins of Spain's American empire. The opportunities that both imperial powers wasted on Providence would be cast in stark relief after 1655, when England returned to the maritime periphery in force.

This episode's backstory is examined in the fourth chapter of the dissertation, which examines the course of events on Spanish Jamaica during the opening half of the seventeenth century. The island was initially settled during the first blush of Iberian colonization, but had rapidly decreased in importance thereafter as focus shifted to the mainland. By the turn of the seventeenth century Jamaica's inhabitants struggled to plant a viable agricultural base while living in constant fear of Northern European interlopers. This threat intermittently attracted metropolitan attention to their plight, but plans for improvement were repeatedly thwarted by half-hearted execution and local interference. Chapter 4 argues that Spain's inability to mold Jamaica into a colonial success alludes to the fact that a century of experience in the New World had yet to unlock a one-size-fits-all solution to the challenges posed by a contested Caribbean. In combination with the contemporaneous English failure on Providence, this chapter demonstrates that as late as the 1650s neither Spain nor England had a long-term plan for the region, nor even the tools to construct one had the occasion to do so presented itself. When the situation changed during the decade and a half between 1655 and 1670, it was as the ultimate product of a series of contingencies rather than any such concerted scheme.

Chapter 5 opens with the arrival of Oliver Cromwell's Western Design on Jamaica. The Design was formulated with the goal of establishing an English presence on one of the Greater Antilles to use as a springboard for the conquest of the Spanish Main. In practice, it began with a disastrous assault on Hispaniola prior to a face-saving attempt on Jamaica. The island's Iberian populace mounted a dogged guerrilla resistance that dragged on for close to five years before they conceded defeat. This chapter follows that campaign in an effort to explicate the strategic considerations that shaped its course as well as the factors that prevented Spain from effectively opposing comparatively feeble English efforts to secure a foothold so close to the vulnerable mainland. It does not find evidence of Anglo innovation so much as bureaucratic stagnation and logistical inefficiency on the Iberian end. Nonetheless Jamaica's capture, and the formal cession of the island to England in the 1670 Treaty of Madrid, catalyzed the rise of the English Atlantic. Jamaican sugar helped to pave the way for a global empire, retroactively vindicating the efforts of Walter Raleigh and his spiritual descendants even as they offered the harshest of judgments on Spain's inability to consolidate its early advantage in the Caribbean.

• Primary Sources •

In order to best capture the entanglement of these encounters in the seventeenth-century Caribbean, I was particularly concerned with finding sources from either side of the imperial divide for each section of the dissertation. The genesis for this approach came during research for what would (much) later become the first chapter when, already familiar with Raleigh's search for El Dorado, I came across a volume entitled *Antonio de Berrío: La Obsesión por El Dorado*.²⁹ This work contains a collection of documents from Spain's colonial archive, the Archivo General de Indias in Seville, pertaining to Berrío's career generally as well as his unwilling participation

²⁹ José Rafael Lovera, ed., *Antonio de Berrío* (Caracas, Venezuela: Petróleos de Venezuela, 1991).

in the 1595 expedition specifically. These documents are the basis for my analysis of the Spanish perspective in Chapter 1, where they are juxtaposed with Raleigh's account of the same events as articulated in his *Discovery of Guiana*.³⁰ This narrative, which the Englishman penned in the immediate aftermath of his failed first attempt to locate El Dorado, is a curious mix of fact and fantasy that reveals as much in what it does not say as in what it does. Previous scholars of Raleigh's life and times have typically tried to analyze this peculiar document in a strictly English context, but its presences and absences are even more insightful when considered in combination with the competing viewpoint produced by Berrío and his compatriots.

The Iberian side of the story that emerges from the remainder of the dissertation is based on my own research at the Archivo General de Indias (AGI). AGI records are sorted into *legajos*, the equivalent of files or bundles. My Spanish sources for Providence were drawn primarily from *legajo 223* from the Audiencia of Santa Fe (modern Bogotá, Colombia), which contains material that frames the island in a geographic context that includes the Caribbean coast of Colombia and Panama. Supporting records are drawn from a handful of other *legajos*, some from Santa Fe as well and others from the Audiencia of Panama or the archive's "Indiferente General" collection, which contains a grab bag of documents that do not fit anywhere else. As far as I can tell no one had previously researched Providence at the AGI in this degree of detail, although documents from Santa Fe 223 appear in Karen Kupperman's *Providence Island*. For the English experience on Providence, I owe a major debt of gratitude to Dr. Kupperman, who made a wonderful selection of documents detailing her own research into the colony's history available to all via microfilm.³¹ When these two bodies of source materials are placed in conversation with each

³⁰ First published as *Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Bewtiful Empire of Guiana* (London: Robert Robinson, 1596).

³¹ Karen Ordahl Kupperman, ed., *Papers Relating to the Providence Island Company and Colony, 1630 – 1641*, part of the series *British Records Relating to America in Microform*, edited by W. E. Minchinton (Microform Academic

other, Providence's brief existence is shown to have been more than the offbeat, incidental venture that it is sometimes dismissed as.

Chapters 4 and 5 are built on *legajos* 177, 178A, and 178B from the Audiencia of Santo Domingo. *Legajo* 177 contains most of the extant documentation describing Spanish Jamaica's first century. A handful of specific economic and administrative topics from this period are filed in 178B along with discussion of the Northern European incursions leading up to the English invasion, and 178A focuses on the invasion directly.³² I drew additional material from *legajos* cataloged under the heading of "Escribanía de Cámara de Justicia." These are legal documents, primarily records of courts cases related to alleged contraband trade on Jamaica. Additional Spanish sources were drawn from two transcriptions published by Irene Wright.³³ English accounts referenced in these chapters come from sources published by British historical societies during the early twentieth century.³⁴ This diverse documentary base for the study of Jamaica has not previously been considered together and doing so allows me to make connections and trace relationships overlooked by earlier scholars.

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I agree with Carla Pestana when she writes that "no one has appreciated how radically the Western Design altered English engagement in expansion, European geopolitics, and the map of

Publishers, 1987). I quite simply could not have completed the dissertation as it currently exists without this volume, and am extremely grateful for Dr. Kupperman's generosity.

³² Each of these *legajos* were consulted to some extent in Morales Padrón's *Jamaica Española*, but the earlier temporal focus of the Spanish historian's work means that the specific documents that he used generally do not overlap with those that I did.

³³ Julian de Castilla, "The English Conquest of Jamaica 1655 – 1656," ed. Irene A. Wright, in *Camden Miscellany Vol. XIII* (London: Offices of the Society, 1924) and *Spanish Narratives of the English Attack on Santo Domingo 1655*, ed. Irene A. Wright (London: Offices of the Society, 1926).

³⁴ The most frequently cited are William Jackson, "The Voyages of Captain William Jackson, 1642 – 1645," ed. Vincent T. Harlow, in *Camden Miscellany Vol. XIII* (London: Offices of the Society, 1924) and Robert Venables, *The Narrative of General Venables: With an Appendix of Papers Relating to the Expedition to the West Indies and the Conquest of Jamaica, 1654 – 1655*, ed. C. H. Firth (London: Camden Society Publications, 1900).

the Caribbean.”³⁵ But it was more than the Design alone that effected these changes – it was the six decades of English attempts to elbow into the Caribbean, and the Spanish response that these attempts met, that preceded and precipitated Cromwell’s scheme. Entangled encounters in the jungles of Guiana and on the shores of Providence and Jamaica established patterns of colonial policy and laid the physical foundation for the evolution of the Atlantic during the decades that followed.

³⁵ Pestana, *The English Conquest of Jamaica*, 14.

I. “TO SEEK NEW WORLDS, FOR GOLD, FOR PRAISE, FOR GLORY”: EL DORADO AND EMPIRE IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY GUIANA

“This Berrío is a gentleman, well descended, and had long served the Spanish king in Milan, Naples, the Low Countries and elsewhere, very valiant and liberal, and a gentleman of great assuredness, and of a great heart.¹ I used him according to his estate and worth in all things I could, according to the small means that I had.”² So wrote Sir Walter Raleigh of Antonio de Berrío, the Spanish governor of Trinidad, in his 1596 *Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Bewtiful Empire of Guiana*, which recounted the Englishman’s expedition to South America during the previous year. For his part, Berrío had a rather less favorable impression of Raleigh, writing that the latter had committed “one of the greatest treasons and cruelties that has ever been seen in the world” in ordering the murder of eight soldiers, including Berrío’s nephew, sent as emissaries and promised safe conduct.³

Where Berrío could not help but have been persuaded of Raleigh’s villainy by the events surrounding their initial encounter, his English counterpart was perceptive in recognizing a man shaped by the same forces and guided by the same values as was he – a kindred spirit, as it were. Both were consummate men of their times, soldiers and explorers, their fates jointly governed by a shared *enfermedad doradista*.⁴ This illness was one that had plagued many men, predominately

¹ A portion of this chapter was previously published as “‘To Seek New Worlds, for Gold, for Praise, for Glory’: El Dorado and Empire in Sixteenth-Century Guiana,” *The Latin Americanist* 58.1 (2014): 89 – 104. I am grateful to Wiley for permitting the content of that article to be reproduced here.

² Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, 8. I have modernized capitalization and spelling when quoting early modern texts. The original edition of this work can be accessed in digitized form via Early English Books Online, but a handful of excellent edited print editions also exist including Neil L. Whitehead, ed., *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); Joyce Lorimer, ed., *Sir Walter Raleigh’s Discoverie of Guiana* (London: Ashgate, 2006); and Benjamin Schmidt, ed., *The Discovery of Guiana by Sir Walter Raleigh: With Related Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2008).

³ Antonio de Berrío, “Informe al Rey sobre el intercambio de cartas entre Berrío y Raleigh,” transcribed in *ADB*, 357. All translations from this collection, as well as other Spanish sources that appear later in the dissertation, are my own.

⁴ *ADB*, 16. Their similarities are also commented upon in Mark Nicholls and Penry Williams, *Sir Walter Raleigh: In Life and Legend* (London: Continuum, 2011), 103.

Spaniards, for the better part of the sixteenth century: an insatiable urge to search for the fabled third great empire of the Americas, El Dorado. Though the rumored location of this unattainable object was perpetually on the move, and the very signification of “El Dorado” similarly in flux, the myth of its existence functioned as a powerful catalyst for exploration.⁵

Berrío and Raleigh met at a historical moment “between the unseeing brutality of the discovery and conquest and the later brutality of colonization.”⁶ Their conjunction came at an inflection point in the trajectory of the European enterprise in the New World. During the years surrounding the turn of the seventeenth century mutually exclusive frameworks for the future of colonization existed in a delicate balance. This chapter will show that Berrío and Raleigh were more alike than different in their words and actions. Their interwoven narratives offer a vantage point onto the similar ideological crossroads at which the Atlantic projects of Spain and England had arrived as a new century dawned. The pair’s shared pursuit of El Dorado epitomized a wasteful and wanton approach to the colonization of the Americas that was on its last legs. Berrío, who died in 1597, would not live to see the end of this moment, but Raleigh would – his second expedition to Guiana in 1617, which would ultimately cost him his head, was already an anachronism.⁷

The early trajectories of the lives of Raleigh and Berrío were no less similar than their unfulfilling conclusions. Raleigh was born into the petty nobility around 1554, and served as a volunteer with the Huguenot armies in France from 1569.⁸ Berrío was born of common parents in 1527. He also joined the military at a young age, figuring prominently in the Spanish assault

⁵ John Hemming, *The Search for El Dorado* (London: Phoenix Press, 1978), 214.

⁶ V. S. Naipaul, *The Loss of El Dorado: A Colonial History* (New York: Knopf, 2003), 91.

⁷ Joyce Lorimer, “The Failure of the English Guiana Ventures of 1595 – 1667 and James I’s Foreign Policy,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 21.1 (1993): 6.

⁸ Nicholls and Williams, *Sir Walter Raleigh*, 8.

on Siena in 1552 and later fighting in Africa, Germany, and Flanders.⁹ Both men were strongly influenced by their participation in the sixteenth-century European wars of religion, shaped by formative years spent enrolled in what John Pory later termed “the university of war.”¹⁰ Even once he became a sophisticated courtier, Raleigh retained a martial core, and Berrío was very much the old soldier to his dying day.

The Spaniard’s military career lasted for a much larger proportion of his life, and he was already on the cusp of old age by the time that he ventured to the New World in 1580. Here Berrío acquired the vocation that would drive him during his final two decades through marriage to the niece of Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada, famed conquistador of the Muisca Confederation.¹¹ Berrío inherited the task of locating and conquering El Dorado from his uncle by marriage after Jiménez’s death in 1579.¹² The younger conquistador made three increasingly grandiose but equally futile expeditions in search of El Dorado between 1583 and 1591.¹³ Nearing the age of 70 by the mid-1590s, Berrío was nonetheless establishing a base of operations on the island of Trinidad from which he planned to launch further ventures into the nearby Orinoco River basin.

In contrast to his Iberian foil’s grinding ascent through the Spanish imperial hierarchy, Raleigh’s path to the search for El Dorado was the product of a meteoric rise followed by a precipitous descent. After returning from the continent during the early 1570s, the Englishman

⁹ *ADB*, 29.

¹⁰ Quoted in Karen Ordahl Kupperman, “Raleigh’s Dream of Empire and Its Seventeenth-Century Career,” in *Raleigh and Quinn: The Explorer and His Boswell*, ed. H. G. Jones (Chapel Hill, NC: North Caroliniana Society, 1987), 129.

¹¹ The most recent secondary account of the conquest of the Muisca is José Ignacio Avellaneda Navas, *The Conquerors of the New Kingdom of Granada* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1995). Many primary sources related to Jiménez’s endeavors have also been published in J. Michael Francis, ed., *Invading Colombia: Spanish Accounts of the Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada Expedition of Conquest* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

¹² *ADB*, 33 – 34. Raleigh wrote that “Jiménez de Quesada gave his daughter to Berrío taking his oath and honor, to follow the enterprise to the last of his substance and life.” *Discoverie of Guiana*, 20.

¹³ See Hemming, *The Search for El Dorado*, Chapter 9 for a concise account of these expeditions.

shifted his focus to maritime entrepreneurship, and was taken to task for engaging in unlicensed piracy against Spanish shipping as early as 1579.¹⁴ But this setback did not hinder Raleigh's upward mobility, and by the mid-1580s he had become Queen Elizabeth's favorite by exercising the conventional courtly virtues of wit, charm, and good looks. For the next few years, Raleigh expended much time and energy consolidating and improving a vast Irish estate granted him by the Queen.¹⁵ He argued against his compatriots' advocacy for the use of repressive violence against the recalcitrant Irish and sought instead a more pacific approach.¹⁶ This tendency to favor conciliation with truculent native populations would surface again in Guiana.¹⁷

A final formative experience shaped the Englishman's approach to the Orinoco. In 1585 Raleigh launched the first Roanoke colony, conceived of as a military settlement facilitating attacks on Spain's American empire by land and sea.¹⁸ The colony failed in just over a year, as a shortage of supplies impelled the colonists to return to England with Sir Francis Drake when he happened to stop by after sacking Cartagena.¹⁹ Raleigh helped to finance a second expedition to Roanoke in 1587. Due to building hostilities with Spain and the privileging of privateering over resupply, it was almost three years before relief arrived at Roanoke. By this time the inhabitants of the colony had disappeared to a still-uncertain fate.²⁰ The failure of Raleigh's Roanoke ventures underscored the fact that self-sufficiency was a necessary condition for settlement

¹⁴ Nicholls and Williams, *Sir Walter Raleigh*, 13.

¹⁵ In many ways, England's external imperialism was the offspring of "internal colonialism" in Ireland. Armitage, *Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, 6.

¹⁶ Nicholls and Williams, *Sir Walter Raleigh*, 20.

¹⁷ Guiana owes its name to an indigenous word meaning "land of water." In the context of this chapter, the label refers to a geographic region roughly congruent to the southeastern half of modern-day Venezuela. Schmidt, *The Discovery of Guiana*, 20.

¹⁸ Nicholls and Williams, 52.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 54 – 55.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 61, 63. It is telling that even the ship that eventually "relieved" the colony had spent five months casting about for prizes, but only four days looking for the lost colonists. For more on the "lost colony," see Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Roanoke: The Abandoned Colony* (New York: Rowman & Allanheld, 1984) and Andrew Lawler, *The Secret Token: Myth, Obsession, and the Search for the Lost Colony of Roanoke* (New York: Doubleday, 2018).

during the late sixteenth century, as economics, geopolitics, and the practical difficulties of transatlantic shipping rendered the lifeline to Europe a tenuous one indeed.²¹

Raleigh's financial reverses were compounded by a scandal at Court. In 1591, he married one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting in secret without the monarch's blessing.²² The fall from grace that came on the heels of this gauche misstep was no less steep than the climb that had preceded it, and both Raleigh and his wife were imprisoned in the Tower for several months. He spent the next several years searching for some means by which to recover his previous station. Just such an opportunity presented itself in 1594 when Raleigh first heard whisperings of El Dorado, likely from the Spanish polymath Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa, who had been taken prisoner by privateers in his employ.²³ The story quickly captured the imagination of the English explorer, who saw in its golden promise a chance to simultaneously salvage his esteem in the eyes of the Queen, enrich the commonwealth, and severely damage the prospects of its Iberian adversary. For a man who had once exhorted his contemporaries "to seek new worlds, for gold, for praise, for glory," this was an opportunity to accomplish all three ends.²⁴ By early spring of the following year, Raleigh and his men lay at anchor off the coast of Trinidad, treating with Berrío and preparing to start their search for El Dorado in earnest.

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Raleigh was merely the latest dreamer to look for the golden city. The quest was nearly as old as the European presence in South America. Classical tradition dictated that gold was much more commonly found in warmer latitudes. Similar sentiments were perpetuated in early

²¹ Kupperman, "Raleigh's Dream of Empire," 124. Although this lesson is rather unambiguous in hindsight, Raleigh and his contemporaries refused to take the hint. As this chapter will show, the nature of the experience that he shared with Berrío in Guiana alludes to ongoing tension between competing impulses toward conquest and settlement.

²² Nicholls and Williams, 77.

²³ Sarmiento de Gamboa is argued to have been Raleigh's informant in Lorimer, *Sir Walter Raleigh's Discoverie of Guiana*, xli, among other works.

²⁴ Walter Raleigh, "The Ocean to Cynthia," verse XX, line 82.

modern Europe, motivated in part by African gold brought back by the Portuguese.²⁵ As one conquistador put it, “*la grandeza del oro está debajo de la equinoccial*” – the magnificence of gold is below the Equator.²⁶ In fact, it was to the lowest latitudes on either side of the Equator that the conquistadors flocked after Pizarro’s conquest, initially hewing to the west side of the Andes. Speculation centered on the region surrounding the Meta River, perhaps owing to an anecdote in Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo’s *Historia General y Natural de las Indias* or the deliberate misdirection of a group of Caribs encountered by “gullible Spaniards” under the command of Diego de Ordaz, one of the first to hunt for El Dorado.²⁷ The abstract idea that the region surrounding the Meta was the source of the Inca’s gold persisted into the 1530s.²⁸

The legend of El Dorado began to take shape in 1534. In that year reports emerged of the existence of an *indio nombrado dorado*, likely a chieftain from the gold-rich tribes of southern Colombia who had allied themselves with the renegade Inca general Rumiñahui.²⁹ He may have been referred to as such because his real name was not known, and perhaps his typical garb was particularly resplendent, but this turn of phrase seems to have inspired the El Dorado myth.³⁰ When conflated with authentic lore deriving from the practices of a pre-Columbian society whose leader was covered in gold dust during an annual ritual, the *indio nombrado dorado*

²⁵ Neil L. Whitehead, “The Historical Anthropology of Text: The Interpretations of Raleigh’s *Discoverie of Guiana*,” *Current Anthropology* 36.1 (1995): 60.

²⁶ Jerónimo Dortal, quoted in Demetrio Ramos Pérez, *El mito del Dorado: Su génesis y proceso* (Caracas, Venezuela: Fuentes para la Historia Colonial de Venezuela, 1973), 63. There was also a religious dimension to this argument: “‘God placed the greatest abundance of mines [in such remote places] so that this would invite men to seek those lands and [. . .] communicate their religion of the true God to those who did not know them.’” José de Acosta, quoted in Hemming, *The Search for El Dorado*, 9. These ideas dated from the earliest European exploration of the New World. See Ramos Pérez, *El mito del Dorado*, 6 – 8, with respect to the beliefs propounded by Columbus.

²⁷ Hugh Thomas, *The Golden Empire: Spain, Charles V, and the Creation of America* (New York: Random House, 2010), 169.

²⁸ Ramos Pérez, *El mito del Dorado*, 32, 58.

²⁹ Hemming, *The Search for El Dorado*, 53.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 216.

became a concrete basis for a previously conjectural pursuit.³¹ Initially a single individual, El Dorado soon became a city, the seat of an empire possessing unprecedented mineral wealth. From there the search for the shimmering metropolis became a “contagious enterprise,” as each successive expedition seemed to come closer to the golden grail, only to be turned away at the last minute by some cruel mischance or another.³²

The only major success of this period was spearheaded by Berrío’s uncle-in-law Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada between 1537 and 1538. Jiménez led his men on a torturous trek through what are today the Colombian Andes near Bogotá, where they stumbled into the territory of the Muisca Confederation in the central highlands. The Muisca produced exceptionally sophisticated goldwork, a fact that did not escape the notice of the Spaniards, who promptly conquered the Confederation by force of arms.³³ They came away with some 200,000 pesos of fine gold and almost 2,000 emeralds for their troubles, a haul that rivaled even Francisco Pizarro’s Peruvian plunder.³⁴ What Jiménez de Quesada did not find, however, were mines – the Muisca depended on their trading partners for gold. His conquest, then, could not have been El Dorado. And so the legend persisted.

Little progress was made in the search during the next decade, and the ardor of El Dorado’s would-be conquerors cooled as a result. The period also saw the myth cease to be attached to any specific unexplored region of the backcountry.³⁵ Renewed interest arose in 1549

³¹ Naipaul, *The Loss of El Dorado*, 4.

³² Ramos Pérez, *El mito del Dorado*, 121. Hemming, *The Search for El Dorado*, 141.

³³ Some of the techniques employed in Muisca goldwork are still difficult to duplicate. Ibid., 92. To Berrío, the complexity of indigenous idols was such that “it could only be that the Devil is the patron of this work.” Antonio Berrío, “Solicitud al Rey para que le asista en la difícil tarea de mantenerla poblada y defenderla de corsarios y caribes,” transcribed in *ADB*, 159.

³⁴ Hemming, *The Search for El Dorado*. Pizarro’s younger brother, Francisco, also crossed the northern Andes, but was searching for cinnamon rather than gold. Thomas, *The Golden Empire*, 290. Even in the midst of those afflicted by the *enfermedad doradista*, cross-cutting attempts to establish a viable agricultural base already existed.

³⁵ Ramos Pérez, *El mito del Dorado*, 361.

when a group of strange Indians appeared in the Peruvian province of Chachapoyas and began to speak of wonders encountered during a long voyage through the Amazon.³⁶ These itinerant indigenous were soon identified as members of a lost tribe of Inca. Speculation figured others like them to be the true rulers of El Dorado, and the search shifted east of the Andes.

A decade later, the demands imposed upon seekers of El Dorado proved too much for one conquistador. Although Lope de Aguirre was certainly insane, he was correct in recognizing the futility of the quest, writing of the Amazon that “there is nothing on that river but despair.”³⁷ By the 1570s, skepticism was on the rise – perhaps the land of the Muisca had been El Dorado after all!³⁸ For his part, Jiménez remained convinced that the richest mines of the Americas were yet to be discovered, and Berrío inherited his conviction. Raleigh was subsequently drawn in by this timeless fantasy of untold wealth, but when he departed England on February 6, 1595, he was not yet fully aware of its lengthy backstory.³⁹

After stopping in the Canary Islands and waiting in vain for further additions to the fleet, Raleigh sailed on to the Caribbean.⁴⁰ The expedition reached Trinidad sometime in late March or early April, then spent several days coasting the island. Raleigh was struck by its fecundity, writing that “the soil is very excellent and will bear sugar, ginger, or any other commodity that the Indies yield,” as well as an abundant supply of natural pitch, invaluable for the caulking of

³⁶ Ibid., 451.

³⁷ Quoted in Hemming, *The Search for El Dorado*, 160.

³⁸ Ibid, 114.

³⁹ This is the date that Raleigh reports in *Discoverie of Guiana*, 1. The precise chronology of the expedition remains a matter of some doubt, since the explorer frequently chose not to ascribe dates to the events that he chronicled to make it harder for potential competitors to chart his travels. Paul R. Sellin recently made a convincing attempt to produce an accurate timeline for the endeavor in *Treasure, Treason and the Tower*. All dates pertaining to the expedition from this point forward will be drawn from Sellin’s calculations.

⁴⁰ Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, 1. Raleigh had once swindled the captain of the anticipated auxiliaries out of privateering profits, and as a result they went raiding on their own rather than joining with an untrustworthy patron. Raleigh’s penchant for making powerful friends was nearly matched by his capacity to engender ill will. Naipaul, *The Loss of El Dorado*, 42.

ships.⁴¹ Though he sailed under the thrall of El Dorado, Raleigh maintained a keen eye for commercial and agricultural potentialities. The Englishman steered his ships to Trinidad's principal port, where he would soon have his initial encounter with Berrío.

The Iberians were quick to mark Raleigh's arrival. Transatlantic correspondence was not known for its efficiency during the late sixteenth century, but reports began to make their way to Spain within weeks.⁴² Soon negotiations began, conducted under flag of peace until the English broke this confidence by striking Berrío's envoys down "with halberds and knives, killing them without heed to their value."⁴³ For his part, Raleigh conceived of this seeming treachery rather differently, citing previous instances of Spanish duplicity as well as the fact that "to enter Guiana by small boat [. . .] and to leave a garrison in my back interested in the same enterprise [. . .] I should have savored very much of the ass" as justification for his decision. After shooting the messengers, he sent sixty soldiers to pillage Berrío's settlement at San José de Oruña. The governor was one of the few Spaniards to be spared and taken prisoner.⁴⁴ A handful of Berrío's men succeeded in escaping into the forest, fled west by canoe, and brought word of the events on Trinidad to Isla Margarita. In the meantime, Raleigh "took the supplies that they had in [San José de Oruña], and burned all of the houses and churches without sparing a one" before departing to

⁴¹ Ibid., 3. This language is extremely similar to that which Englishman and Spaniard alike would later use to describe, and motivate interest in the colonization of, various Caribbean islands during the century that followed.

⁴² A Spanish colonist of this era quipped that "if death came from Madrid, we should all live to a very old age." Quoted in J. H. Elliot, *Spain and its World 1500 – 1770* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 14. Without the ability to seek orders from the metropole at short notice, inhabitants of the maritime periphery were free to exert agency however they saw fit.

⁴³ *ADB*, 337 – 338.

⁴⁴ Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, 6 – 7.

the southwestern cape of the island with Berrío in tow.⁴⁵ From there he was poised to descend to the many mouths of the Orinoco, collectively known to the Spanish as *las bocas de los Dragos*.⁴⁶

Raleigh sought to interrogate his Spanish prisoners, who he knew to be better versed in *doradista* lore as well as the practical knowledge required to reach the golden city.⁴⁷ When the Englishman vouchsafed to Berrío that his mission was not one of plunder alone, but that he intended to claim the empire of Guiana for the Queen, the governor was “stricken into a great melancholy and sadness, and used all the arguments he could to dissuade [him].” The task was impossible: the rivers too shallow to be navigated, the indigenous unhelpful, the winter rains close at hand, and the rulers of Guiana entirely unwilling to trade with Christians.⁴⁸ When pressed for geographic detail, Berrío pleaded ignorance, such that Raleigh was almost persuaded that he was “utterly unlearned, and [incapable of] knowing east from west.” But the Englishman still managed to extract enough knowledge via conference with Berrío and dialogue with the local Indians that he ventured south to the Orinoco Delta with one hundred men in four small ships before the end of April.⁴⁹

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Raleigh had procured an Arawak pilot to direct him to the main channel of the river, but the youth was familiar only with coastal trade in the region and was of next to no help. Entirely

⁴⁵ Pedro de Liaño, “Relación de lo realizado por Antonio de Berrío en el poblamiento de la isla de Trinidad,” transcribed in *ADB*, 380.

⁴⁶ See Felipe de Santiago, “Descripción de la navegación en cada una de las bocas del río Orinoco,” transcribed in *ADB*, 371.

⁴⁷ In Raleigh’s interpretation, Guiana was the bountiful empire conquered by a younger brother of the Inca princes Atahualpa and Huáscar, and El Dorado its golden capital. See Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, 10, for a more complete articulation of his thinking in this respect.

⁴⁸ Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, 35 – 37. Raleigh’s invocation of conquest and settlement here was novel in the context of the early modern Caribbean. The efforts of his privateering predecessors had revolved around the pursuit of profit, never the establishment of a permanent colony. But Raleigh’s vision for the future of English America remained confused, in large part because he did not have access to the massive territorial acquisitions available to the Spanish during the sixteenth century.

⁴⁹ Raleigh had been training Indian interpreters in England for some time prior to the expedition. Naipaul, *The Loss of El Dorado*, 41. Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, 28, 38.

by chance, the English captured a more experienced Indian who proved capable of navigating the riverine labyrinth of the Orinoco Basin.⁵⁰ Reliance upon the indigenous, not merely for direction but also for sustenance, was a theme of Raleigh's 1595 endeavor and the search for El Dorado more generally. The Elizabethan explorer was eager to point out that all of the "people [who] dwell upon the branches of Orinoco" hold "the Spaniards for a common enemy" because of previous ill treatment.⁵¹ Raleigh chose to take the opposite tack and befriend the enemy of his enemy.⁵²

About ten days after entering the delta, one of the few events on the Orinoco recorded by Raleigh and corroborated in Spanish sources occurred. One of Raleigh's officers "espied four canoes coming down the river" and the English took great pains to catch the vessels since they were running short of supplies.⁵³ The canoes were commanded by one of Berrío's captains, who had been shadowing Raleigh's fleet. Two of the canoes evaded the English, but the occupants of the other pair abandoned them and fled into the jungle. Thus far, all is confirmed by the Spanish accounts.⁵⁴ From here, Raleigh adds further detail, writing that one of the occupants of the beached canoes had been a refiner. Investigating his prize, Raleigh found this man's assaying tools and a small amount of refined gold. Not only that, but "in those canoes which escaped there was a good quantity of ore."⁵⁵ This is one of the instances in his narrative where exaggeration, if not outright dissimulation, is in evidence. How could Raleigh have known of the contents of the

⁵⁰ Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, 39, 41.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 42 – 43.

⁵² It is a testament to his success in this regard that "Waterali" was subsequently used as an honorific title by local tribes, and that the "tradition of an English Chief, who many years since landed amongst them and encouraged them to persevere in enmity of the Spaniards, promising to return and settle amongst them, and afford them assistance" was perpetuated into the eighteenth century. Whitehead, "The Historical Anthropology of Text," 59.

⁵³ Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, 48.

⁵⁴ Salazar, "Informe al Rey," 339.

⁵⁵ Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, 49.

canoes that fled successfully? Moreover, if the Spaniards had been tracking the English, why would they also have been engaged in assaying or refining?⁵⁶

Within a week, the expedition entered the territory of the powerful *caciques* of the Orinoco interior, who Raleigh thought to be “Lords of the border” of Guiana.⁵⁷ He parleyed with several of these chiefs, generally succeeding in winning them to his cause because they too had been treated harshly by interloping Spaniards in the past. Most important of these was Topiawari, uncle of a *cacique* who had been executed by Berrío in retaliation for an Indian ambush several years previously.⁵⁸ Topiawari had himself been “put in chains and for seventeen days led like a dog from place to place, until he had paid a hundred plates of gold and diverse chains of spleen-stones for his ransom.”⁵⁹ This was a man with good reason to cast his lot with Raleigh, and so he did, becoming the explorer’s most valuable informant on the geopolitics and mineral wealth of the Orinoco.⁶⁰ The chief’s guidance may have proven a double-edged sword, though, as it is possible that Topiawari pointed the Englishman toward the hypothetical gold mine that would ultimately prove his undoing.⁶¹

Shortly thereafter, Berrío informed Raleigh of “a great silver mine” a ways up one of the Orinoco’s tributaries, but by this time all “of the rivers were risen four or five feet in height, so as it was not possible by the strength of any men, or with any boat whatsoever to row into the river against the stream.”⁶² Ill luck, near misses, and bad timing tellingly constitute perhaps the

⁵⁶ Sellin, *Treasure, Treason, and the Tower*, 95.

⁵⁷ Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, 54.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 33

⁵⁹ Naipaul, *The Loss of El Dorado*, 24. “Spleen-stone” refers to the green stone, most likely jade, traditionally used to treat disorders of the spleen.

⁶⁰ Raleigh relates Topiawari’s council at length in *Discoverie of Guiana*, 61 – 64.

⁶¹ Sellin, *Treasure, Treason, and the Tower*, 166. The precise moment at which Raleigh first gained intelligence of this mine is not mentioned in the *Discoverie of Guiana*, in keeping with the author’s unwillingness to divulge any information that might compromise his chances of returning to claim such a golden prize.

⁶² Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, 66.

single most pervasive trope of the *Discoverie of Guiana*. Around the same time, a group of indigenous promised to bring the English to a mountain that was literally made of diamonds.⁶³ Raleigh's willingness to believe in the existence of such obvious fantasies as this was ridiculed by his contemporaries.⁶⁴ The inclusion of dubious vignettes such as this called the credibility of his observations more generally into question.

After searching in vain for Carapana, the paramount chieftain of the Orinoco, Raleigh decided that it was time to return to Trinidad, reasoning that "if [Carapana] finds that we return strong, he will be ours, if not, he will excuse his departure to the Spaniards, and say it was for fear of our coming."⁶⁵ As much as the explorer was convinced that the local Indians would prove to be willing allies of the English, he was not blind to their ability to exert an agency all their own by playing representatives of the competing European powers against each other. Raleigh "thought it time lost to linger any longer [. . .] for the fury of the Orinoco began daily to threaten us with dangers" as the rainy season set in.⁶⁶ The narrative component of Raleigh's account offers little detail concerning the trip back downriver, and concludes with his return to Trinidad toward the end of May, an endpoint that obscures the expedition's calamitous final chapter.

Tantalizing hints of rich gold mines and the presence of a third great American empire just beyond his reach were well and good, but the explorer needed to bring back something more tangible in order to appease those who had invested in his endeavor. Raleigh sought material returns at the Spanish settlement of Cumaná, several hundred miles west from Trinidad on the South American coast. The English assault proved to be a complete disaster. Cumaná's governor,

⁶³ Ibid., 69.

⁶⁴ In fact, Raleigh's apparent credulity may have been justified optimism since "the Imataca range and the great mountains further south do in fact contain much crystal, especially diamond." Sellin, *Treasure, Treason, and the Tower*, 188. Although Sellin is a bit of a Raleigh apologist, he devotes a large proportion of this work to providing believable concrete evidence supporting many of the Elizabethan's more outlandish claims.

⁶⁵ Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, 96 – 97.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 73.

Francisco de Vides, described the encounter: “On Friday the 20th of June, 1595, four English ships arrived at the port, commanded by Governor *Guatarral* [. . .] these enemies settled themselves in the heights above the house of Juana Quintero and our men retired to the other fort above the city.”⁶⁷ A firefight that resulted in the death of several of Raleigh’s officers ensued. Then, seeing that the English were retiring, the Spaniards rallied and chased them to the sea, shooting their guns while their Indian allies contributed a hail of arrows. When the dust settled, fifty Englishmen were dead and many wounded. Miraculously, none of the Spaniards nor any of their indigenous supporters were injured after the initial salvo – in the reporter’s words, “God gave us much favor in having liberated us from such evil people.”⁶⁸ Raleigh was later compelled to free Berrío without ransom, hoping that Vides would reciprocate by freeing any English prisoners that had been taken during the battle.⁶⁹ Licking his wounds, Raleigh sailed for home.

The explorer was well aware that he would be returning to disgruntled investors and a distinctly displeased Queen. He began writing the *Discoverie of Guiana* almost immediately – the work was intended to safeguard his person as much as anything else.⁷⁰ While Raleigh’s star would never return to its previous apogee, he was somewhat successful in appeasing Elizabeth, and reentered her good graces within several years.⁷¹ The ascension of James I upon the Queen’s death in 1603, however, brought with it a new wave of English foreign policy that sought closer

⁶⁷ Francisco de Vides, “Informe al Rey sobre lo sucedido en la ciudad de Cumaná luego del saqueo de Walter Raleigh,” transcribed in *ADB*, 343 – 345.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ This line of thinking is corroborated by English documentation cited in Lorimer, *Sir Walter Raleigh’s Discoverie of Guiana*, xliii – xliv.

⁷⁰ Raleigh also knew that his narrative would meet a dubious reception, stating in the introduction to the *Discoverie* that he was writing “first for that it is reason, that wasteful factors, when they have consumed such stocks as they had in trust, do yield some color for the same in their account, secondly for that I am assured, that whatsoever shall be done, or written by me, shall need a double protection and defense.” Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, i – ii. The connection between patronage and the production of “texts that resulted in a conceptual willingness to undertake overseas projects” is elaborated upon in Shannon Miller, *Invested with Meaning: The Raleigh Circle in the New World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 11.

⁷¹ Nicholls and Williams, *Sir Walter Raleigh*, 123.

relations with Spain. Raleigh was soon imprisoned once again in the Tower, this time for more than a dozen years, on charges of having conspired to remove James from the throne.⁷²

He received one more chance for glory in 1616, when he was released to undertake a second voyage to South America. Raleigh pledged to claim the riches of Guiana for James without inflicting harm upon Spain or her possessions. This enterprise failed in both respects, returning without the promised gold and having culminated in an ill-advised assault on the Spanish fort of Santo Tomé in the Orinoco interior that cost Raleigh's son Wat, among others, his life.⁷³ Wat's father shortly followed him to the grave. Knowing the fate that awaited him, Raleigh returned to England to face the music. He was sentenced to death after a summary trial and publically executed on October 29, 1618. The hunt for El Dorado exacted the ultimate price from Raleigh, as it had from many before him.

Berrío's death can only be indirectly attributed to this pursuit. He was not able to marshal the energy or resources to venture into the wilderness in search of El Dorado for a fourth time, and died at Santo Tomé in 1597 at the age of 70 after exhausting the final two decades of his life in single-minded pursuit of the third Marquisate.⁷⁴ In eulogizing Berrío, his *maestro de campo* described noble ambitions thwarted by insufficient means due to the inattention of his superiors. Berrío had been "slandered by many, praised by few, and rewarded by none."⁷⁵ After Berrío's passing, the *enfermedad doradista* once again proved to be hereditary. The Spaniard's son Fernando mounted no fewer than eighteen expeditions in search of the elusive city during the

⁷² Ibid., 200. The immediate context for the so-called "Main Plot" is described in J. Pauline Croft, *King James* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 48 – 51. Given Raleigh's hispanophobic tendencies, it is ironic that the alleged scheme, which involved kidnapping James, was said to have been underwritten by Spain. Court politics likely had much more to do with the charge than any reflection of reality.

⁷³ See Naipaul, *The Loss of El Dorado*, 85 – 91, for an evocative account of the assault and its aftermath.

⁷⁴ This is Naipaul's formulation – the first two Marquisates were Mexico and Peru. Ibid., 9, 11.

⁷⁵ Vera Ibarгойen, "Hoja de servicio de Antonio de Berrío," 463.

decade following his father's death.⁷⁶ The younger Berrío fought tooth and nail to preserve his golden patrimony, and his career ended prematurely during a 1622 voyage to Spain to advocate for his claim in person. Barbary pirates captured the would-be conquistador and he died of the plague while languishing in an Algerian prison.⁷⁷ Fernando's was a particularly macabre end, but it was only qualitatively different from those suffered by most previous seekers of El Dorado. Why, in a day and age when this pattern was all too clear, did Antonio de Berrío and Sir Walter Raleigh expend vast amounts of money and risk life and limb to perpetuate their quixotic quest?

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On one level, Berrío's motivation was simple. He was literally obligated to do so, having "found that a clause in Quesada's will required him 'most insistently' to continue the search for El Dorado" upon his arrival in the New World.⁷⁸ This impetus jibes with the element of duty inherent to the Spanish colonial endeavor in the Americas writ large. Obedience to superiors was an integral component of Iberian imperialism. Most crucially, "a highly personal [. . .] vision of the relationship between the sovereign and his subject" persisted in sixteenth-century Spain.⁷⁹ Spaniards steadfastly believed in the monarchical conscience and the accessibility of the royal person; Berrío and his contemporaries addressed many of their letters to Philip II personally.⁸⁰ But this feudalistic paradigm had begun to break down by the 1590s, and the *doradista* would be repeatedly disappointed.

Berrío felt that he deserved aid from the crown by virtue of the great personal expense that he had incurred in pursuit of El Dorado. The governor felt he was entitled to be recompensed

⁷⁶ Fernando's greatest hindrance was opposition from hostile Caribs. Lorimer, *Sir Walter Raleigh's Discoverie of Guiana*, xciv.

⁷⁷ Hemming, *The Search for El Dorado*, 199, 201.

⁷⁸ Naipaul, *The Loss of El Dorado*, 12.

⁷⁹ Anthony Pagden, *Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France c. 1500 – c. 1800* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 141.

⁸⁰ *ADB*, 49.

for “that which had cost [him] so much,” some “100,000 pesos of good gold,” not to mention almost a third of his life.⁸¹ The cohesiveness of Spain’s transatlantic empire was founded upon an implicit sense of reciprocity. Berrío and his peers were willing to suffer extreme hardship in the New World with the understanding that their efforts would ultimately be rewarded by a grateful monarch.⁸² It soon became evident that this system could no longer be relied upon.

One of the most prominent themes in Berrío’s letters is his need for soldiers and armaments in order to fend off the two groups, warlike Caribs and piratical Englishman, which perpetually threatened Trinidad. Berrío begged in 1593 that “Your Majesty for the love of God order that the Puerto Rican authorities give me twenty hundredweights of gunpowder as well as some of lead and six culverins [. . .] with fifty muskets [. . .] by way of hindering the pirates and stopping the Caribs from doing such great damage to the detriment of mankind.”⁸³ Similar entreaties appear time and again in a variety of permutations throughout Berrío’s papers, but Philip never answered them materially. The supplies and personnel requested by Berrío were intended for the eminently practical, geopolitically-grounded purpose of defending the King’s American empire. While the search for El Dorado occupied a substantial proportion of Berrío’s time and energy, he saw it as one component of a more capacious imperial project. In his interactions with other members of the Spanish administrative hierarchy, his golden obsession does not come to the fore. Instead, Berrío evinces a keen attention to the military and economic exigencies of the nascent imperial conflict in the Caribbean. Informed by his first career as a

⁸¹ Berrío, “Solicitud al Rey para que la difícil tarea de manterla poblada y defenderla de corsarios y caribes,” 161. Domingo de Vera Ibargoen, “Testimonio acerca de como se pobló la isla de Trinidad,” transcribed in *ADB*, 158.

⁸² This reciprocity is also embodied in the notion of a “contractual relationship between the ruler and the ruled,” through which the latter were bound to live dutifully and honorably – as their circumstances dictated – with the understanding that the king would deliver them their just desserts when the time came. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World*, 131.

⁸³ Antonio de Berrío, “Solicitud al Rey para que le asista en la difícil tarea de mantenerla poblada y defenderla de corsarios y caribes,” transcribed in *ADB*, 162.

soldier, the *doradista* was guided by an intimate familiarity with the means and ends inherent to the maintenance and expansion of empire.⁸⁴

Practical considerations also figured prominently in the decision-making of Berrío's peers. The Spanish settlers of Trinidad turned to tobacco production and contraband trade as early as the first decade of the seventeenth century, when it became apparent that aid from the metropole would not be forthcoming. Rather than defending the island from Northern European interlopers, the Spaniards would soon be engaging in commerce with them.⁸⁵ El Dorado was a tantalizing prize, but when the costs of the hunt outweighed the benefits to be derived from its completion erstwhile conquistadors were prepared to abandon their dreams of conquest for the more reliable livelihood offered by plantation and trade. Hints of a shift in the character of the Spanish project in the New World had also begun to emanate from Madrid by Berrío's time. The English would persist in the futile and costly search for the Northwest Passage for centuries to come, but Philip enacted a law barring Spanish explorations north of forty-five degrees above the Equator.⁸⁶ This piece of legislature indicates an awareness of the finitude of people, supplies, and energy available to the colonial enterprise not often commented upon in an Iberian context.

Early attempts at rationalization aside, the simple fact was that the sprawling Spanish Empire had outgrown its comparatively narrow infrastructural base. This was especially evident on the imperial periphery – it was not for nothing that Raleigh conceived of Trinidad and Guiana as a back door to the richer districts of the empire.⁸⁷ Reputation alone protected many of Spain's

⁸⁴ Berrío and his contemporaries often referred to their previous military experience in characterizing their behavior in the New World. For example, in preparing to defend a settlement from the English, the Spaniard's "made all of the preparations that had been made in Flanders." Pedro de Salazar, "Informe al Rey acerca de las medidas adoptadas en la isla de Margarita para combater y defenderse de los corsarios," transcribed in *ADB*, 190.

⁸⁵ Lorimer, "Failure of English Guiana Ventures," 4, 9.

⁸⁶ Peter C. Mancall, *Hakluyt's Promise: An Elizabethan's Obsession for an English America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 96.

⁸⁷ Lorimer, "Failure of English Guiana Ventures," 9. Raleigh opined that "the port towns are few and poor in respect of the rest within the land, and are of little defense." Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, v.

Caribbean outposts.⁸⁸ Around the same time that Raleigh arrived at Trinidad, the governor of Isla Margarita complained that “Your Majesty has here fifty soldiers to guard the entire island” and every man had to “keep arms in hand night and day.” The undermanned outpost was also poor – salary payments from the metropole were unreliable at best.⁸⁹ Spain’s empire had overreached its administrative capacity, and expansion became a threat to metropolitan prosperity and stability. Interested observers on either side of the Atlantic opined that Spain was in the process of ruining its domestic base in pursuit of the maintenance of its overseas dominions.⁹⁰ Rather than see the truth of the dictum “conquered by you, the New World has conquered you in turn” vindicated, Iberian policymakers legislated a gradual contraction of material support from the margins of Spanish America between the 1590s and the 1620s.⁹¹ The royal formula of silence was *no ay que responder, no ay que proveer*: “there is nothing to reply, nothing to do.”⁹²

This process had major ramifications for Berrío and his ambitious compatriots in the Caribbean, as they competed for an ever-shrinking pool of resources within the rhetorical arena offered by institutionalized Iberian legalism. In the request for arms quoted above, Berrío did not ask for the materiel to be sent directly from the crown but rather indicated that it might come from Puerto Rico. Hope for aid from his fellow governors, even when mandated by the king, proved ill-founded. Berrío’s frustration with the fact that “none of the neighboring governors have given me any help by way of fulfilling Your Majesty’s decrees” is palpable throughout his

⁸⁸ Naipaul, *The Loss of El Dorado*, 27.

⁸⁹ This trend would continue into the seventeenth century and had major implications for the gradual erosion of Spain’s presence in the Caribbean. Pedro de Salazar, “Informe de las dificultades para proteger y custodiar los puertos y las costas ante los ataques corsarios y piratas,” transcribed in *ADB*, 187. Margarita was renowned for its pearl fisheries. This was at once an incentive for Spanish colonization and a rich prize targeted by Northern European interlopers. See, for example, Simón Hernández, “Una súplica en defense de los derechos de Antonio de Berrío sobre el poblamiento de la isla de Trinidad,” transcribed in *ADB*, 203.

⁹⁰ Pagden, *Lords of all the World*, 103, 107.

⁹¹ Justus Lipsius, quoted in Elliott, *Spain and its World*, 26. *Ibid.*, 24.

⁹² Naipaul, *The Loss of El Dorado*, 67.

correspondence.⁹³ Nonetheless, the secure code of law upon which the Spanish Empire was founded provided the discursive framework for conquest and settlement.⁹⁴ The legalism that pervaded the efforts of the conquistadors is epitomized by an episode from the first half of the sixteenth century. In the heart of the Amazon, with no Europeans other than the members of his detachment within a thousand miles, Francisco de Orellana still felt compelled to formally notarize his decision to continue down the river rather than wait indefinitely for the arrival of Francisco Pizarro, the commander of the expedition.⁹⁵ Preserving a veneer of legality had also been important to Berrío's uncle-in-law in his conquest of the Muisca.⁹⁶

The younger *doradista* too was inextricably imbricated within the juridical fabric of the New World. Specifically, his governorship of Trinidad was illegal – New Granada, not that island, had been the seat of Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada's power. Trinidad instead fell under the nominal purview of Francisco de Vides, the governor of Cumaná.⁹⁷ El Dorado had a way of inspiring rivalries in this vein dating from the 1530s.⁹⁸ Berrío and Vides fought a lengthy legal battle by way of adjudicating this dispute.⁹⁹ The former brought a variety of arguments to bear to motivate his claim, most centrally that he had experienced such “works, hungers, and illnesses as have been the greatest since the discovery of the Indies” in his efforts to populate the island and

⁹³ Berrío, “Solicitud al Rey para que le asista en la difícil tarea de mantenerla poblada y defenderla de corsarios y caribes,” 160. Internecine Spanish rivalries in the Caribbean would also prove pernicious during the decades that followed, repeatedly precluding decisive action against Northern European interlopers.

⁹⁴ Pagden, *Lords of all the World*, 138.

⁹⁵ Thomas, *The Golden Empire*, 296. This episode is cited by Lauren Benton as evidence for the legal trappings that Europeans maintained as they delved into the American interior, supporting her overarching argument regarding the complementarity of law and geography in the colonial enterprise. Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400 – 1900* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 26, 79 – 80.

⁹⁶ Hemming, *The Search for El Dorado*, 97.

⁹⁷ Naipaul, *The Loss of El Dorado*, 21.

⁹⁸ See Thomas, *The Golden Empire*, 168, with respect to the first such clash of ambitions, between Diego de Ordaz and an upwardly-mobile slaver named Antonio Sedeño.

⁹⁹ The case produced a wealth of documentation, including a lengthy series of *testimonios* and *documentos*. See *ADB*, 195 – 334.

search for El Dorado on the South American mainland.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, Vides figured prominently among those who had failed to obey the royal decrees mandating aid for Berrío.¹⁰¹ He had also engaged in illicit trade with the English.¹⁰² None of these lines of reasoning proved sufficient to cement Berrío's petition, forcing his son to continue a fight that would indirectly cost him his life. This protracted case is an excellent illustration of the ubiquitous legalism that played a foundational role in shaping the course of events in Spanish America during the decades surrounding the turn of the seventeenth century.

In asserting his right to govern Trinidad, Berrío cited his work not only to discover El Dorado but also to *poblar* – populate – his demesne.¹⁰³ Population emerges from Berrío's writing as a primary rather than secondary objective. It is no coincidence that one of his confederates observed that “the service most important to Your Majesty that [Berrío] has been able to perform is to people [Trinidad] by way of hindering the piratical corsairs that plague these Indies.”¹⁰⁴ The Spaniards had extremely explicit plans for the population of the Orinoco Basin as well. Sites for a first, second, and third settlement had been mapped out by 1595, before any sizable Spanish population existed in the region.¹⁰⁵ Plantation was also on Berrío's mind from an early date. He and his men were convinced that Trinidad's fertile soil and freshwater

¹⁰⁰ Hernandez, “Una súplica en defense de los derechos de Antonio de Berrío,” 195.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 222.

¹⁰² Pedro de Liaño, “Informe para que se investigue sobre navíos arribados y tratos con extranjeros en Margarita y en Cumaná,” transcribed in *ADB*, 377. Contraband trade with Northern Europeans would continue unimpeded in Cumaná and parts further west along the South American coast during the decades to come, especially after the Dutch seized Curaçao in 1634. Linda M. Rupert explores that island's later cultural and economic history in *Creolization and Contraband: Curaçao in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2012).

¹⁰³ “*Poblar*” defines the arrival of *people* rather than the construction of buildings or dwellings as the critical step in occupying a region.” Patricia Seed, “Taking Possession and Reading Texts: Establishing the Authority of Overseas Empires,” *WMQ* 49.2 (1992): 200.

¹⁰⁴ Hernandez, “Una súplica en defense de los derechos de Antonio de Berrío,” 247.

¹⁰⁵ Santiago, “Descripción de la navegación en cada una de las bocas del río Orinoco,” 372 – 373. Berrío would subsequently found Santo Tomé in 1596. This project was a specific response to the concrete threat manifested by Raleigh's depredations during the previous year. Sellin, *Treasure, Treason, and the Tower*, 133.

rivers would make it an excellent site for sugar cultivation.¹⁰⁶ In short, Berrío and his peers were far from myopic in their search for El Dorado. The “eldorado spirit” of the first two-thirds of the sixteenth century had dampened by its close.¹⁰⁷ As it became clear that Guiana would not surrender its wealth as easily as had Mexico and Peru, the final generation of conquistadors proved amenable to setting aside their swords in favor of plowshares.

For Berrío and those who had sought El Dorado before him, the object of their efforts was never a “magical territory [. . .] where all Spanish dreams would be fulfilled.”¹⁰⁸ The pursuit of gold on an imperial scale appeared logical, for as Raleigh averred in the *Discoverie of Guiana*, “it is [Philip’s] Indian gold that endangers and disturbs all the nations of Europe, it purchases intelligence, creeps into councils, and sets bound loyalty at liberty.”¹⁰⁹ The rewards accruing to individuals were equally concrete: wealth, power, and a lasting legacy. The means employed to seek El Dorado out were similarly reasonable when considered within their historical context.¹¹⁰ Spaniards perceived this quest to be merely one of a number of complementary components of the imperial project in the Americas assessed based on a reasoned calculation of associated costs and benefits. Without coherent geographic or ethnographic knowledge, conquistadors like Berrío relied on classical wisdom and scraps of information pieced together during their explorations.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Pedro de Liaño, “Relación de lo realizado por Antonio de Berrío en el poblamiento de la isla de Trinidad,” transcribed in *ADB*, 382. Caribbean sugar production was dwarfed by Brazil’s output in Berrío’s day. Cultivation began there during the middle decades of the 1500s, and Brazilian sugar dominated the European market after 1570. Berrío was correct in thinking that there was room for competition by the turn of the seventeenth century, as would be demonstrated within a generation on Barbados and even more powerfully on Jamaica. Stuart B. Schwartz, “A Commonwealth within Itself: The Early Brazilian Sugar Industry, 1550 – 1670,” in *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 158 – 200.

¹⁰⁷ Hemming, *The Search for El Dorado*, 50.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas, *The Golden Empire*, 379.

¹⁰⁹ Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, xii.

¹¹⁰ Ramos Pérez, *El mito del Dorado*, 106.

¹¹¹ See Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda, ed., *Fabulas y leyendas de El Dorado* (Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, 1987), 40, for a comprehensive treatment of the classical roots of the myth. And with respect to the intelligent use of minimal information, Jiménez de Quesada first suspected the existence of a complex society in the Colombian highlands after finding circumstantial evidence of a sophisticated trade network along the Magdalena River. Hemming, *The Search*

While the lucidity of the pursuit diminished during the middle decades of the sixteenth century as belief in El Dorado flagged, the rationalizing efforts of Berrío and Raleigh epitomize larger trends afoot contemporaneously in the ways and means of empire.¹¹²

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Raleigh's motivations for seeking the golden city were as superficially straightforward as those of his Iberian foil. Guiana was to be a "locus of [his] redemption" – success in the Orinoco would elevate the Englishman's standing at Court during a critical phase of his life.¹¹³ Raleigh's fear that the meager fruits of his labors in Guiana would be insufficient to improve his fortunes as dictated by the Queen and his other patrons impelled him to acquiesce to the rash assault on Cumaná. No less than Berrío, the explorer-courtier was entirely dependent upon the beneficence of his monarch.¹¹⁴ Even so, there was more to the logical underpinning of the Guiana project than a desperate grab at lost prestige.

Raleigh was every bit as concerned with the standing of Elizabeth's realm versus its imperial rivals as he was with his standing versus his competitors at court. He wrote of Guiana that his hope was "that these provinces, and that empire now by me discovered shall suffice to enable Her Majesty, and the whole kingdom, with no less quantities of treasure, than the king of Spain has in all the Indies."¹¹⁵ With such wealth would come military and political parity and the chance for the competing dynastic ambitions of England and Spain to be contested upon even

for *El Dorado*, 77. Raleigh would later base his hypothesis as to the location of El Dorado on a similar analysis of flows of trade. Miller, *Invested with Meaning*, 160.

¹¹² Ramos Pérez, *El mito del Dorado*, 158, 459.

¹¹³ Schmidt, *The Discovery of Guiana*, 23. Raleigh wrote in the dedicatory to the Discoverie that he aspired to "recover but the moderation of excess, and the least taste of the greatest plenty formerly possessed." *Discoverie of Guiana*, ii – iii.

¹¹⁴ Miller, *Invested with Meaning*, 183. In fact, insofar as he was never possessed of independent means to finance his endeavors, Raleigh was less of a self-made entrepreneur than his Spanish counterpart. See John W. Shirley, "Sir Walter Raleigh's Guiana Finances," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 13.1 (1949): 55 – 69, for a detailed account of the precarious finances of the 1595 expedition.

¹¹⁵ Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, xiii.

ground. In this sense Raleigh's undertaking in the Orinoco was part of a larger "geo-strategic effort" intended to loosen the Iberian stranglehold on the Americas.¹¹⁶ But this avant-garde "geo-strategic" awareness was simultaneously shaped by traditional tropes. For example, his assertion that two forts placed on opposite banks at an appropriately narrow point of the Orinoco would suffice to prevent access to all of Guiana "relied on familiar images of an interior empire with a singular river gateway."¹¹⁷ Conventional tactical reasoning was echoed by Raleigh's concern with economic imperatives in the most timeless sense. He hoped to make a profit in Guiana, but his "was common profit or the common good; it was not private profit or commercial profit."¹¹⁸ For a man as learned as he was attuned to the economic exigencies of the nascent Atlantic world, a certain ambivalence toward the naked pursuit of lucre, grounded in the writings of the classical philosophers, persisted.¹¹⁹ Indeed, Raleigh explicitly wished to be dissociated from "those that only respect present profit."¹²⁰ Be that as it may, on the scaffold in 1618 Raleigh reiterated for the last time that in voyaging to Guiana it had been his "full intent to go for gold, for the benefit of His Majesty and those that went with me, [as well as] the rest of my countrymen."¹²¹

Public benefit is well and good, but the quote above also makes mention of gold, that eternal bane of rationality. On many levels Raleigh retained the mindset that had characterized the earliest conquistadors, opining that "the desire of gold will answer many objections."¹²² This

¹¹⁶ Sellin, *Treasure, Treason, and the Tower*, 228.

¹¹⁷ Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, 97. Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*, 82.

¹¹⁸ Andrew Fitzmaurice, *Humanism and America: An Intellectual History of English Colonisation, 1500 – 1625* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 56.

¹¹⁹ Raleigh was an avid reader. Peter Mancall has argued that it was the body of knowledge that the explorer derived from his books rather than any innate ethnographic talents that allowed him to understand the geopolitics of Guiana. *Hakluyt's Promise*, 213. Fitzmaurice, *Humanism and America*, 189.

¹²⁰ Quoted in Mary C. Fuller, "Raleigh's Fugitive Gold: Reference and Deferral in *The Discoverie of Guiana*," *Representations* 33 (1991): 43.

¹²¹ In this case Raleigh was speaking specifically of his second expedition, as indicated by his reference to James, but the sentiment is equally pertinent to the 1595 endeavor. Quoted in Hemming, *The Search for El Dorado*, 213.

¹²² Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, 79.

might have been true a half century earlier, but it was no longer entirely accurate in 1595. The nebulosity of Raleigh's references to gold and gold mines in the *Discoverie* compromised his trustworthiness. The likely fabrication of his tale concerning the discovery of Spanish refiner's tools and ore seems trivial enough on the surface, but many of his peers cited the episode as merely the most benign instance of a pattern of calculated dissimulation centering on Guiana's chimerical gold. The existence of gold and, more specifically, gold mines in the Orinoco was important to Raleigh by way of making good on his promises to those who had underwritten the voyage and attracting future investors.¹²³ In that sense, he had obvious cause to exaggerate the mineral wealth of region.

There are few explicit mentions of gold mines in the text of the *Discoverie*. Instead, "Raleigh does not find El Dorado [. . .] at the moments when, on his own account, he comes close to a place where words might be tried against things, invariably both the narrator and the narrative turn away."¹²⁴ While near misses had been the rule rather than the exception in the Iberian search for El Dorado as well, the frequency with which Raleigh claimed that rising waters or insufficient means had prevented him from definitively assessing Guiana's wealth has led interested observers from the sixteenth century on the question whether he really intended to reach the golden city at all.¹²⁵ It was subsequently alleged that Raleigh had cast "abroad only this tale of the mine as a lure to get adventurers and followers; having in his eye the Mexico fleet, the sacking and spoil of towns planted with Spaniards, the depredation of ships, and such other purchase."¹²⁶

¹²³ Lorimer, *Discoverie of Guiana*, 1.

¹²⁴ Fuller, "Raleigh's Fugitive Gold," 51.

¹²⁵ See Hemming, *The Search for El Dorado*, 64, for instance. Sellin, *Treasure, Treason, and the Tower*, 51.

¹²⁶ *Declaration of the Demeanor and Cariage of Sir Walter Raleigh*, quoted in Fuller, "Raleigh's Fugitive Gold," 42. An expedition with the explicit intent of plundering Spanish America would not have been permissible in Jacobean England.

The distinction between gold possessed by other Europeans and as yet unclaimed beneath Guiana's soil loomed ever larger in Raleigh's life after the 1595 expedition. As reticent as he had been about mines in the *Discoverie*, he asserted that he had uncovered concrete proof of their existence with increasing vehemence during the two decades that followed. This ploy eventually achieved its intended end, winning Raleigh freedom from the Tower. It also sealed his fate and complicated his legacy, though, as the 1616 enterprise again found only Spanish settlements to attack in lieu of unexploited gold mines. The cruel irony of all of this is that whether he knew it or not, Raleigh was looking for gold in the right place. By the eighteenth century the Spanish knew of a handful of mines within the region in which he had concentrated his search.¹²⁷ Like Berrío and the other conquistadors before him, Raleigh had the right idea, but perhaps for the wrong reasons. Theirs was a confluence of abstract hope and concrete objectives enacted in an environment of which they were to a man all but ignorant.¹²⁸

The *doradistas* relied upon the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas to provide them with the geographic and ethnographic information that they lacked. Jiménez had cited the good treatment of Indians as a strategy to facilitate the extraction of intelligence and wealth as early as the 1530s.¹²⁹ Berrío and others had chosen a less conciliatory approach. Raleigh wrote that on Trinidad "every night there came some [Indians] with most lamentable complaints of his cruelty [. . .] that he made the ancient *caciques* which were lords of the country to be their slaves, that he kept them in chains, and dropped their naked bodies with burning bacon and other such torments."¹³⁰ While such sentiments certainly entail the propagation of the already-extant Black Legend to some extent, the good will with which Raleigh was received by the indigenous reflects

¹²⁷ Sellin, *Treasure, Treason, and the Tower*, 154.

¹²⁸ Ramos Pérez, *El mito del Dorado*, 323.

¹²⁹ Hemming, *The Search for El Dorado*, 73.

¹³⁰ Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, 6.

genuine dissatisfaction with their treatment at the hands of the Spanish. These Amerindians were also possessed of a “shrewd appreciation of the new political realities of their existence,” aware of their ability to exert agency by playing European rivals off of each other.¹³¹

The indigenous figured prominently in Raleigh’s grand colonial scheme. Based on his experiences with a recalcitrant “native” population in Ireland, as well as the recognition that the Roanoke colonies had depended upon the goodwill of local Indians for their survival, Raleigh was simultaneously cognizant of the costs imposed upon those whose first response to the indigenous was violence as well as the benefits accruing to those willing to coexist. The explorer adhered to a strict policy of good treatment of the indigenous, stating that “I neither know nor believe, that any of our company one or other, by violence or otherwise, ever knew any of their women.” And in the event that any bad behavior did take place, “I caused my Indian interpreter at every place when we departed, to know of the loss or wrong done, and if ought were stolen or taken by violence, either the same was restored, and the party punished in their sight, or else was paid for to their uttermost demand.”¹³² Raleigh’s purpose in pursuing this course is evidenced by his interactions with native guides and local chieftains such as Topiawari. The English and the Spanish both depended upon the indigenous not only to pinpoint El Dorado’s location, but for navigational direction and even basic subsistence.¹³³

¹³¹ Lorimer, “The Failure of the English Guiana Ventures,” 8. Similar negotiations between competing groups of Europeans and indigenous peoples occurred across time and space in the early modern Americas. See, for example, Kathleen DuVal’s study of interactions between Indians, French settlers, and Englishmen in the Arkansas Valley from the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries: DuVal, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

¹³² Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, 52. This policy of careful morality toward the indigenous would persist into the next generation of English colonization, when the Providence Island Company would lay out similar guidelines for interactions with the inhabitants of the Mosquito Coast of Central America. But it would eventually break down in the face of violence between settlers and natives in North America. See Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Indians and English: Facing Off in Early America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

¹³³ Lorimer, *Discoverie of Guiana*, lxxi. Hemming, *The Search for El Dorado*, 56.

Raleigh also intended to create the amicable relations necessary for the realization of a longer-term plan. A document entitled “Of the Voyage for Guiana” appeared shortly after the *Discoverie*, penned either by Raleigh or one of his close collaborators. The author attempts to show that the subordination of Guiana to the English crown would be honorable, profitable, necessary, and relatively easy: a friendly indigenous population could be armed for the express purpose of removing the Spanish from the region.¹³⁴ Raleigh planned to reconcile the inhabitants of Guiana to the English by apotheosizing Elizabeth so that he might “create a space in which native wonder facilitates the English enterprise.”¹³⁵ He often handed out coins stamped with the Queen’s countenance to the indigenous, and “they so admired and honored Elizabeth, as it had been easy to have brought them idolatrous thereof.”¹³⁶ The tactic served to ingratiate Raleigh to his monarch and forward his master plan of effecting the creation of an armed Indian insurgency.

Here again, Raleigh’s fertile imagination failed to account for the realities of England’s geopolitical situation. Elizabeth was not about to support so unlikely and expensive a scheme while fighting wars in France and the Netherlands, combatting persistent resistance in Ireland, and fearing another Spanish invasion.¹³⁷ Raleigh was very much a dreamer, and in this case his dreams remained beyond his reach. He existed in a world of what might be, not what was – for every instance in which his enterprises harbored within them a seed of what was to come, there is a counterexample such as “Of the Voyage for Guiana” that indicates that the Englishman had not yet entirely escaped the paradigm of magical thinking so often ascribed to the Spanish seekers of El Dorado. The quest undertaken by Raleigh and Berrío sought to make the imagined real.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Transcribed in *Ibid.*, 253, 263.

¹³⁵ William M. Hamlin, “Imagined Apotheoses: Drake, Harriot, and Raleigh in the Americas,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 57.3 (1996): 419.

¹³⁶ Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, 7.

¹³⁷ Nicholls and Williams, *Sir Walter Raleigh*, 115.

¹³⁸ Lorimer, *Discoverie of Guiana*, xxxix.

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While English and Spanish activities in the New World were not entirely different from each other, fundamental disjunctures in their ideological bases remained. The topic of respective attitudes toward the indigenous was part and parcel of one of these: different perspectives and practices in the North and South Atlantic with respect to the legitimation of the possession of overseas territories. When Berrío tasked his *maestro de campo* with formally taking possession of Trinidad in his name, a complex performance ensued. The *maestro* “had carved a cross and took it in his hands, having first taken off his hat and made the proper obeisance,” then “set the cross upright in the name of God Our Father and of Your Majesty and of Governor Berrío.” Next he “took a spade in hand and [. . .] cut the grasses and branches, tearing them out with this spade and his hands as a sign of possession.” The ritual concluded with a speech intended to stake Berrío’s unambiguous claim to the island in the face of indigenous and Iberian rivals alike.¹³⁹ Similar efforts were undertaken when the time came to claim Guiana.

The employment of ceremony as a means of legitimating possession did not signify anything meaningful to Raleigh. He observed in the *Discoverie* that Guiana “has never been entered by any army of strength, and never conquered or possessed by any Christian prince.”¹⁴⁰ For the Elizabethan legitimate claim to territory was grounded in concrete action rather than abstract performativity: “prescription without possession is worth little.”¹⁴¹ This divergence of belief and practice illuminates a basic difference distinguishing Iberian and English imperial paradigms. For Raleigh and his countrymen, ownership created a virtually unassailable right to

¹³⁹ Hernandez, “Una súplica en defense de los derechos de Antonio de Berrío,” 249.

¹⁴⁰ Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, 96.

¹⁴¹ William Camden, quoted in Seed, “Taking Possession and Reading Texts,” 197. A similar line of reasoning would be employed by Raleigh’s spiritual successors on Jamaica two generations later. Although the island was occupied by Spanish subjects, they could legitimately be displaced because they had not made productive use of Jamaica’s natural resources.

own as well.¹⁴² This maxim worked both ways, though, as political legitimacy was contingent upon a physical presence on the landscape.¹⁴³ That is to say, sovereignty required settlement. Conversely, Iberian intellectuals juxtaposed sovereignty and property rights – in no sense were they coincidental.¹⁴⁴ The right to rule that the Spaniards established by language and ceremonies or the reading of the *Requerimiento* did not depend on the subjugation of the land by settlement to be instantiated.¹⁴⁵ It hinged instead on the subjugation of the land’s inhabitants by persuasion, coercion, or force of arms – “it might be argued that the Spaniards came to rule over people, and the English over land.”¹⁴⁶ The indigenous, not gold, were often the first “natural resource” cited by Berrío and his contemporaries when advocating for the economic potential of Trinidad and Guiana.¹⁴⁷ Contrasting perspectives on the legitimate possession of territory were among the divergences that differentiated imperial intellectual traditions in the North and South Atlantic.

The humanist imaginary dominated colonizing projects in Spain as well as England.¹⁴⁸ The Iberian strain of humanism was distinct from that which Raleigh professed, as Spanish humanists “had no hesitation in praising the exploits of their compatriots and trumpeted an exuberant eulogy of their nation’s overseas conquests.”¹⁴⁹ Berrío was informed by the literary tradition engendered by the worldly success of previous conquistadors. With no such glorious track record to reference, English intellectuals were more cautious in their exhortations. Thomas

¹⁴² Ibid., 190.

¹⁴³ Mancall, *Hakluyt’s Promise*, 227.

¹⁴⁴ Anthony Pagden, *Spanish Imperialism and the Political Imagination: Studies in European and Spanish-American Social and Political Theory 1513 – 1830* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 15.

¹⁴⁵ Seed, “Taking Possession and Reading Texts,” 184, 204.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 206.

¹⁴⁷ See, for instance, Santiago, “Descripción de la navegación en cada una de las bocas del río Orinoco,” 372.

¹⁴⁸ Although this characteristic is frequently described as being unique to the English case. See, for example, Fitzmaurice, *Humanism and America*, 1.

¹⁴⁹ D. A. Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State 1492 – 1867* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 5, 1.

More espoused a model “of moral, or virtuous, imperialism” in the early sixteenth century.¹⁵⁰ It was this discourse to which Raleigh responded in characterizing Guiana as “a country that has yet her maidenhead, never sacked, turned, nor wrought,” and therefore available to be claimed by settlement and diplomacy rather than blood and iron.¹⁵¹ This objective coexisted uneasily with the lower regard in which he held the persons and property of the Iberians he encountered in the Orinoco and its environs. Raleigh’s philosophy was a study in contrasts. He remained a man caught between two ideological paradigms, embodying a moment of transition between two historical eras. English humanist thought, neither entirely coherent nor truly stable during the sixteenth century, was similarly dynamic.¹⁵²

Rather than speaking of the betterment of the realm or amity toward the indigenous, the paean that the renowned imperial proselytizer Richard Hakluyt penned to Raleigh read “leave to posterity an imperishable monument of your name and fame such as age will never obliterate, for to posterity no greater glory can be handed down than to conquer the barbarian.”¹⁵³ Ideology was changeable, and its purview restricted to the word of ideas. Comparing the lives of Berrío and Raleigh and the orientations toward the colonizing project manifested by the empires that they championed reveals that actions really do speak louder than words. The historical processes that shaped the decision-making of these men, linked by an irresistible attraction to the search for El Dorado, were much more similar than they were different. Berrío and Raleigh both looked to the future with one foot firmly in the past. For the Spaniard, this meant that he beseeched his king for the armaments required to prevent the English from securing a foothold in the Caribbean even as he invested vast amounts of personal wealth aspiring to the example of the earliest

¹⁵⁰ Schmidt, *The Discovery of Guiana*, 16.

¹⁵¹ Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, 95. See also Fuller, “Raleigh’s Fugitive Gold,” 56.

¹⁵² Fitzmaurice, *Humanism and America*, 11.

¹⁵³ Richard Hakluyt, quoted in Pagden, *Lords of all the World*, 64.

conquistadors. Raleigh inaugurated the English imperial project while still possessed of a pre-modern attraction to the mythical and fantastic.¹⁵⁴ Both were among the vanguard of a wave of expansion that was neo-classical in inspiration but grounded in the geopolitical exigencies of an emergent Atlantic order.¹⁵⁵

Historicized rationality undergirded even as retrospectively irrational an undertaking as the search for El Dorado. To Raleigh, this meant answering “every man’s longing,” to his mind “a better Indies for her Majesty than the King of Spain has” – success in Guiana would in time cause Spanish America to fall apart at the seams.¹⁵⁶ Of course, in his “heady prose, plunder and self-enrichment were justified by the patriotic advancement of national interest.”¹⁵⁷ There is no way to disentangle the veneration of commonwealth on Raleigh’s lips from the golden gleam in his eyes. Berrío’s rationality was similarly schizophrenic, as his assessments of the threat of interloping Northern Europeans in the New World were no more or less well-reasoned than his painstaking attempts to locate and plan a series of catastrophic missions to El Dorado.

The heart of Anglo-Iberian antagonism in the New World during the decades surrounding the turn of the seventeenth century glittered. Gold was at once a singular obsession and a means to an end. El Dorado was to be Berrío’s third Marquisate; finding it would mean the fulfillment of his promise to Jiménez de Quesada, comfortable retirement to wealth and status, and the perpetuation of a lasting legacy. Its discovery would have won Raleigh a permanent place near the top of the English hierarchy and enhanced his nation’s competitive chances in the Americas.

¹⁵⁴ Schmidt, *The Discovery of Guiana*, 8.

¹⁵⁵ Fitzmaurice, *Humanism and America*.

¹⁵⁶ Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, vii. The logical implication of his rhetoric is the expectation of a domino effect if the English began to be able to chip away at Spanish America. Raleigh’s personal failures meant that this vision was not realized in his lifetime, but the general thrust of his argument would be vindicated as his countrymen populated North America and the Caribbean during the decades to come and became the dominant force in the Atlantic during the eighteenth century as a result.

¹⁵⁷ Lorimer, “The Failure of English Guiana Ventures,” 16.

But both men suffered from the primal attraction to bullion. Raleigh opined that “where there is store of gold, it is in effect needless to remember other commodities for trade.”¹⁵⁸ This sentiment flew in the face of the entrepreneurial opportunism that usually guided the explorer’s commercial endeavors, but the pursuit of gold still had a way of causing a man to abandon his most closely held beliefs during the 1590s. And these stodgy conquistadorial holdouts were not entirely wrong – colonization had previously been a self-sustaining enterprise, as it was the gold won via the subjugation of the Americas that financed early New World expansion.

The crux of the historical moment during which Berrío and Raleigh lived was precisely this delicate balance between conquest and plantation. In 1595, both models still seemed to constitute viable frameworks for the continuation of the colonial project. Raleigh tried to have it both ways, gesturing at settling Roanoke before shifting his sights to Guiana, but the failure of these ventures made the relative merit of their respective bases unclear.¹⁵⁹ Berrío’s actions also bespoke a conflicted methodology, as he sought to people Trinidad and the Orinoco as a means of facilitating his discovery of El Dorado. Commercially-minded plantation was very faintly present in the Spaniard’s endeavors, just as it had tinged Raleigh’s American aspirations. In time trade would fill the space opened by the opposition between population and plunder, but this paradigm shift was the product of historical contingencies that still lay in the future during the final decade of the sixteenth century.¹⁶⁰

The El Dorado myth had “acted as a constant stimulus to further conquest and occupation of the continent [. . .] as much to political ambition as to greed.”¹⁶¹ This impetus was born shortly after the fall of Peru and scarcely flagged prior to the final decades of the century. By

¹⁵⁸ Raleigh, *Discoverie of Guiana*, 95.

¹⁵⁹ Kupperman, “Raleigh’s Dream of Empire,” 126.

¹⁶⁰ Miller, *Invested with Meaning*, 154.

¹⁶¹ Whitehead, “The Historical Anthropology of Text,” 61.

1595, it was on its last legs as belief in the existence of the golden city faded. This realization contributed to a larger shift, as Europeans began to regard their colonies as potential sources of agricultural and commercial rather than mineral or human wealth.¹⁶² Berrío and Raleigh met as transitional figures at an inflection point in the historical narrative of the European project in the Americas. Both had come to Guiana to seek a “new world” for gold, praise, and glory. They found instead only hardship and disappointment, but their failure was a necessary precondition for the ultimate success of early modern Atlantic colonization.

¹⁶² Pagden, *Lords of all the World*, 68.

II. “THE ISLAND WHICH CANNOT FAILE”: PROVIDENCE ISLAND AND THE ENGLISH CARIBBEAN, 1615 – 1636

Unwelcome news arrived on the Caribbean shores of New Spain in 1616. A Flemish pilot named Simon Zacharias brought word of English interlopers on an island called Santa Catalina located within forty or fifty leagues of Puertobelo.¹ Even without the wealth of maritime knowledge that the mariner likely possessed, it would not have been difficult to appreciate the threat posed by the appearance of foreign rivals so close to an important port. Sometime after his arrival on the mainland, Zacharias found himself in the fading silver entrepôt of San Miguel and passed his message on to a Zacatecan miner named Diego de Mercado. The connection between these two men is obscure; perhaps both simply saw an opportunity to profit from a piece of information that others in positions of power would appreciate being made known to them. If this was in fact the case, Zacharias and Mercado had to wait several years, and travel south to the Kingdom of Guatemala, before their investment was to pay dividends. They finally succeeded in conveying their alarming tidings across the Atlantic in a May 1620 letter subscribed to by the municipal authorities of Santiago.

The letter relates that some English merchants resident in London – the same who had participated in the 1609 settlement of Bermuda – were considering expanding their operation to

¹ This island was known historically as either Santa Catalina or Providence Island, depending on the imperial allegiance of the individual referring to it. To further complicate matters, from the late seventeenth century on what was originally one island became two, referred to in Spanish separately as Santa Catalina and Providencia and collectively in English as Old Providence, to differentiate them from the island of New Providence in the Bahamas. The narrative to follow will refer to the island(s) by the name that is most appropriate in context, defaulting to “Providence” in cases with no obvious bias one way or the other. Note also that Brazil’s Santa Catarina Island, first settled by the Spanish in 1542, commonly appears in early records as “Santa Catalina.” See, for example, AGI, IG, 1961, leg. 2, f168v – f169r or PR, leg. 265, r. 39. The combined effects of the various confusing dimensions of this nomenclature has contributed to the historiographical obscurity of the Caribbean Catalina. Depending on the specific measurement signified by a “league” in the context of Zacharias’s letter, it is roughly equivalent to four modern nautical miles. A nautical mile is in turn slightly longer than a terrestrial mile, such that an early modern Spanish league can be approximated to five modern terrestrial miles for the sake of plausibility assessments. This therefore equates to somewhere between 200 and 250 miles, and Santa Catalina is almost exactly 250 miles from modern Puertobelo.

include Santa Catalina.² One “capitan llamado Maestre Quin” had reportedly already brought plants and seeds including plantains, pineapples, yucca, and corn to the island, along with cattle, pigs, and hens. No human settlers had yet arrived, but the interlopers had laid the foundation for colonization. “Maestre Quin” had also dabbled in piracy, assaulting Spanish shipping between Cuba and the Yucatan Peninsula. This episode cast the potential hazards of a permanent enemy population on Santa Catalina in stark relief, and Zacharias and Mercado urged that the threat be dealt with before the Englishmen had the opportunity to erect fortifications.

To this end, they included a brief description of the island in their letter. Santa Catalina is said to be some six leagues in circumference, a speck of rocky, hilly land surrounded by shallows and reefs with a single port on its south side. While the topographical description is largely accurate, the island is in fact substantially smaller than this estimate indicates – less than five miles in length – and its principal port is in the northwest. The map that accompanied the letter portrays a piece of land vaguely recognizable as the future Providence Island, but oriented east-west rather than north-south. These errors notwithstanding, Zacharias and Mercado correctly allude to the existence of a second islet known as San Andrés some ten leagues distant, and note that it teems with birds and fish, ideal for the provisioning of not just one, but multiple, fleets.³

Zacharias and Mercado relate that Santa Catalina and San Andrés were brought to the attention of the English by a disgruntled native of that nation named “Ridert” who had taken a Spanish wife on Cuba only to have his property there seized without cause. After this reverse Ridert returned to England with information about the islands, eager to solicit the foundation of a

² AGI, IG, 1528, n. 19, Simon Zacharias y Diego Mercado a su magestad, 15 mayo 1620.

³ This distance is more accurate than the stated dimensions of the island. Providence and San Andrés are slightly more than sixty modern terrestrial miles apart. Both this discrepancy and that related to the island’s size could conceivably be explained by the context in which they appear: by exaggerating Providence’s size as well as its proximity to other ports of call, Zacharias and Mercado would emphasize the urgency of their news.

colony there to avenge the wrong done him. While this curious figure may very well have been entirely apocryphal, he could also have been a veteran of some earlier English misadventure in the Caribbean, which would explain how he came to know about the islands in the first place.

Regardless of the precise nature of its origins, the establishment of an English foothold so close to Tierra Firme was problematic in several respects. Most obviously, it would offer opportunistic northern Europeans like “Maestre Quin” a base of operations from which to prey on vulnerable Spanish shipping. Another immediate concern were the pearl beds that Zacharias and Mercado believed could be found in the shoals surrounding Santa Catalina. They concluded their letter by proposing that teams of African slaves be sent to the islands to commence fishing for the royal fifth.⁴ A third, unspoken fear would likely have occurred to Mercado given his familiarity with the mines of Zacatecas. The emergence of a permanent English presence on Santa Catalina or San Andrés would place hostile heretics much too close to the Spanish Main for comfort. The silver lifeblood of the Spanish empire flowed from the interior, and the troubles that would arise from any disruption to the complex logistical wranglings that transported precious metals from the depths of the earth across the sea to Madrid could not be overstated.

The response, if any, which the letter received does not survive. This may have been because Zacharias’s warning was slightly premature. In the spring of 1620 English efforts in the Americas were only beginning to find their feet. The Jamestown colonists were still fighting for their survival, Plymouth would not be founded until later in the year, and another decade would elapse before John Winthrop arrived in Massachusetts. Any protestations of the hypothetical Ridert notwithstanding, Bermuda remained the focus of England’s nascent colonization project in the Caribbean. Originally discovered by Portuguese mariner – and namesake – Juan Bermudez

⁴ See Molly Warsh, “Enslaved Pearl Divers in the Sixteenth Century Caribbean,” *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies*, 31.3 (2010): 345 – 362 with regard to the labor systems that supported pearl fisheries.

in 1505, that island soon faded from Iberian consciousness by virtue of its isolation and the hostility of the seas that surrounded it.⁵ A particularly violent storm delivered the *Sea Venture*, which had been bound to the fledgling English colony in Virginia, to Bermuda's shores in 1609. The castaways acquired a favorable impression of their refuge, which they named the Somers Isles in honor of the captain of the *Sea Venture*, and sung its praises once they were finally able to reach Jamestown nearly a year later.⁶ Formal plans to settle the islands soon followed, and the Virginia Company sent six hundred colonists on nine ships between 1612 and 1615. In 1615 a new joint-stock venture, the Somers Island Company, was founded to oversee the continued development of the colony.⁷ Among the "original adventurers for the plantation of the Somers Islands" was leading colonial promoter Robert Rich, son of the nobleman of the same name who would soon become the first Earl of Warwick.⁸

The early returns on the investments of Rich and his colleagues were mixed, leading to the appointment of a new governor, a no-nonsense privateer named Nathaniel Butler, shortly before Zacharias and Mercado's 1620 letter was written. Butler encountered a number of problems on Bermuda. Food was in short supply due to waste, over-population, and blasted crops. Butler's authority was repeatedly questioned, particularly because the right to try and punish criminals was held exclusively by company authorities in England. Since transport to and from Bermuda was restricted, homesick men rightfully reasoned that "the only way to get home

⁵ Michael J. Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680 – 1783* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 11 – 13.

⁶ The captain, Sir George Somers, had intentionally scuttled the *Sea Venture* on Bermuda's reef and saved the lives of all 150 human passengers as well as one dog. For more, see Kieran Doherty, *Sea Venture: Shipwreck, Survival, and the Salvation of the First English Colony in the New World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007).

⁷ Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 17 – 19.

⁸ J. Henry Lefroy, ed., *Memorials of the Discovery and Early Settlement of the Bermudas or Somers Islands, 1515 – 1687*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1877 – 79), 1: 99 – 100. The younger Rich was involved in the Virginia Company, Guinea Company, and Plymouth Company, as well as the settlement of Barbados, fishing off of Newfoundland, and the search for the Northwest Passage to China. Mark G. Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570 – 1740* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 69.

gratis is to steal a Hen here.”⁹ Butler responded by resolving minor infractions personally, but struggled to walk the fine line between controlling local circumstances and offending his masters in the metropole.

Infrequent shipments of supplies from England and the high prices of these cargos when they finally did arrive was also a point of contention. The Bermudan colonists depended on the Somers Islands Company, which strictly controlled the flow of goods and people to and from the island, for the many necessities that they could not grow or manufacture themselves. Matters came to a head when an English privateer named John Powell arrived seeking to trade. Powell did not have permission from the company, but he did possess a Dutch letter of marque that passed Butler’s muster. The governor voiced his support for Powell’s endeavors, recognizing the need for pragmatism in the face of the straits confronting his charges and at the expense of the shareholders’ bottom line.¹⁰ Similar collisions of the interests of colonists and company would crop up on Providence.¹¹ Butler also advocated for Powell on a personal level when the latter sought to establish himself and his family on Bermuda, downplaying his past “reaving” in the process.¹² He was fighting an uphill battle in this case as well, as a young mariner named Daniel Elfrith was angling for a similar position with the considerable advantage of a commission from Robert Rich.¹³

⁹ Vernon A. Ives, ed., *The Rich Papers: Letters from Bermuda, 1615 – 1646* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), Butler to Rich, 158, January 1620.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Butler to Rich, 178 – 79, March 1620.

¹¹ Episodes like this on Bermuda, Providence, and elsewhere in the seventeenth-century Caribbean “highlighted the divide between absentee company decisions made in England and the practical necessities of people living in the colonies,” imperiling the fragile accord shared by actors on either side of the Atlantic. Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 74.

¹² *The Rich Papers*, Butler to Rich, 183, March 1620.

¹³ Although Powell would lose this battle, he found another way to make himself of use. During a return voyage from Brazil in the spring of 1625, he anchored at Barbados and claimed it for England “by inscribing a tree.” Powell later drummed up support for the island’s settlement at home, ultimately playing a similar role in the early history of Barbados as Elfrith would on Providence. Jon Latimer, *Buccaneers of the Caribbean: How Piracy Forged an Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 66.

Elfrith had been every bit as much a freebooter as Powell the first time that he turned up in Bermuda. He was not operating at the company's behest when he arrived with a captured Spanish prize in mid-1613. Elfrith received command of the vessel after it was captured en route to the Amazon.¹⁴ Its cargo of grain proved a windfall for the struggling colony, endearing Elfrith to Warwick, who brought the mariner into his employ before the decade was out.¹⁵ The newly-minted privateer seized a Portuguese slave ship in partnership with John Jupe during the summer of 1619. The men sailed their vessels on to Jamestown.¹⁶ Jupe, who arrived first in a smaller prize, is commonly held to have been the first to import enslaved Africans into English North America.¹⁷

This prelude to the letter sent to Spain by Simon Zacharias and Diego Mercado came full circle when Elfrith set his sights on Santa Catalina during the middle years of the 1620s. By this point Butler's governorship of Bermuda had given way to that of Philip Bell, who also happened to be Elfrith's father-in-law. Optimistic at first blush, Bell eventually became disillusioned by many of the same ills that had plagued Butler. Indirectly corroborating the fears expressed by Zacharias and Mercado, Elfrith already had the perfect island in mind for him. In the spring of 1629, Bell penned a description of the recent voyage of the *Warwick* and the *Somers Islands*, two of Rich's ships. Elfrith had commanded the former, and Captain Sussex Camock the latter. The

¹⁴ “[Edward] Fisher’s Voyage to the Amazon, 1613,” from BL, Sloane MS 750, originally transcribed in J. H. Lefroy, ed., *The historye of the Bermudaes* (London, 1882), 33. Reprinted in Joyce Lorimer, ed., *English and Irish Settlement on the River Amazon 1550 – 1646* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1989), 163. Fisher had originally served under Robert Harcourt in an ill-conceived expedition to Guiana in between Raleigh’s two voyages there. It is likely that this endeavor also marked Elfrith’s first experience in the New World. Stanley Pargellis and Ruth Lapham Butler, eds., *Daniell Ellffryth’s Guide to the Caribbean, 1631* (Chicago: The Newberry Library, 1945), 1.

¹⁵ Doherty, *Sea Venture*, 209. Elfrith’s boon did not come without an associated pitfall, however, as he succeeded in introducing black rats to Bermuda along with the grain. They would plague the colony for some time, yet another unforeseen stumbling block preventing the establishment of a stable English settlement in the Caribbean.

¹⁶ For more on Jamestown’s early history during the years leading up to this episode, see Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

¹⁷ For an exploration of the possible African origins of these slaves, see John Thornton, “The African Experience of the ‘20. and Odd Negroes’ Arriving in Virginia in 1619,” *WMQ*, 55.3 (1998): 421 – 434.

vessels had touched at San Andrés, where they left Camock and his crew after the *Somers Islands* was lost in an unspecified mishap. It appears that they failed to reach Elfrith's "own Island, which was pointed & aimed at," but the mariner had referred to it as Catalina and assured Bell that it "lies not above some 20 or 30 leagues distant from the others where these men are left." Moreover, its soil was extremely rich and its shores no less defensible.¹⁸ Although it has previously been conjectured that Elfrith discovered Santa Catalina and San Andrés during this voyage, in conjunction with the earlier Spanish report the phrasing of Bell's letter indicates otherwise. Elfrith seems to have known of the islands' existence before his time aboard the *Warwick*, either through personal experience or secondhand reports passed on by the mysterious Ridert or someone like him.¹⁹

Elfrith was not only convinced of the virtues of Santa Catalina, but also fascinated by the prospects of an island that Bell referred to as "Fonseca." Said to be located somewhere in the open sea between the Greater Antilles and the northern coast of South America, Fonseca compared favorably to other Caribbean options because it was "out of all the Spaniards roads & ways", where others lay "in the heart of the Indies & the mouth of the Spaniards."²⁰ The choice of words in the former qualification is particularly instructive in light of early modern conceptions of a world ocean crisscrossed by jurisdictional corridors controlled by specific empires. Spanish navigators commonly referred to maritime routes as *derrotas* or *caminos*, a conceptualization of space at sea that the English mariner had adopted as well.²¹ His manifest enthusiasm for Fonseca notwithstanding, Bell remained realistic. If Elfrith failed to find it, Santa

¹⁸ *The Rich Papers*, Bell to Rich, 319 – 320, March 1629.

¹⁹ Neither scenario is terribly unlikely, particularly since Elfrith was an accomplished Caribbean navigator. His rutter, which survives today, is remarkably expansive and accurate, to the extent that some of his directions survived almost verbatim to be used by pilots in the eighteenth century and later. Pargellis and Butler, eds., *Elffryth's Guide to the Caribbean*, 5.

²⁰ *The Rich Papers*, Bell to Rich, 320, March 1629.

²¹ Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*, 106.

Catalina would be an excellent consolation prize – it was “the Island which cannot fail.”²² This flexibility was fortuitous. Fonseca certainly did lie clear of Spanish naval lanes, since there was no risk of any ships passing near an island that did not in fact exist. The only “landmasses” that might correlate with the location described by Elfrith are the Serranilla Bank and the Bajo Nuevo Bank, neither of which are much more than rocky spines of intermittently exposed reef. Despite this important qualification, much intellectual energy and material outlay would subsequently be expended to locate the illusory island. Sir Walter Raleigh’s search for the fantastic in the New World was not completely lost on the next generation of English adventurers in the Americas.

But for the time being, Santa Catalina would be the object of their attentions. Bell’s communication of Elfrith’s enthusiasm struck a nerve. By the end of the following year, 1630, a coterie of Puritan grandees, many of whom already held a stake in the Somers Islands Company, had diversified their portfolios by securing a royal patent for the formation of another joint-stock endeavor, this one for the express purpose of colonizing San Andrés and Santa Catalina.²³ After more than a decade, Simon Zacharias’s prescient warning had become a reality. The first order of business was to identify and lay claim to the islands, which had “for some years now past been discovered.”²⁴ English settlers had already established themselves on Santa Catalina and now “called it by the name of the Isle of Providence,” as was their right as “the first Planters

²² *The Rich Papers*, Bell to Rich, 320, March 1629.

²³ The letter patent was “the ancient instrument through which the monarch exercised royal prerogatives, both ordinary and absolute, and sovereignty, both internal and external.” For Warwick and his peers, this document achieved two purposes: 1) demonstrating that the king was in accord with their scheme and 2) giving them a legally enforceable claim to the islands. For a more detailed discussion of letters patent, see Ken MacMillan, *Sovereignty and Possession in the English New World: The Legal Foundations of Empire, 1576 – 1640* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 79 – 89.

²⁴ PIC, TNA, CO124/1, *Book of Entries of ye Governor & Company of Adventurers for ye Plantation of the Island of Providence*, “A true Transcript of his Ma[jes]tie’s Letters Patente [. . .],” 4 December 1630. Once again, this framing lends credence to the notion that Elfrith was not the first Englishman to discover the islands, or in any event that he did so earlier than 1629.

thereof.”²⁵ Its companion “is called by the name of Henrietta, and heretofore (as is thought) was commonly known by the name of Andrea.” The full name given to the new company was “The Governor and Company of Adventurers of the City of Westminster for the Plantation of the Island of Providence & Henrietta and the Adjacent Islands lying upon the Coast of America,” or the rather wieldier “Providence Island Company” for short.²⁶

The very deliberate act of renaming the islands, and the physical possession thereof that was prerequisite for doing so, was no casual gesture.²⁷ Not only could a name itself be a source of power by invoking the will of a higher – or in Providence’s case the highest – authority, but the act of possession customarily involved naming in most legal traditions.²⁸ Further enhancing the legality of the claim, the patent made explicitly clear that the islands were not at present in the possession of any English subjects, nor those of any other Christian monarch.²⁹ As such, they were free for the taking, despite the fact that they lay within the confines of the American empire of Spain, a power with whom Charles had only succeeded in reestablishing peace earlier in the year. This interpretation was drawn from the Roman Law principle of *res nullius*, which held that unoccupied territory remained the common property of all until being put to use.³⁰ Another

²⁵ This choice of name would soon cause the island to be confused with the most populous island in the Bahamas, also known as Providence, where a permanent English population was established during the 1660s. Eventually the latter would come to be known as New Providence to distinguish it, although the distinction gradually became less important as “Old” Providence faded from the English-speaking consciousness during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

²⁶ *Book of Entries*, “His Ma[jes]tie’s Letters Patente.”

²⁷ English notions of territorial position were fundamentally grounded in the construction of structures, fixation of boundaries, and plantation of the land. These contrasted with those of their Iberian rivals, which were more closely founded upon religious ritual and the potential conversion of heathen indigenous peoples. The lack of consensus amongst the colonial powers more generally further confused already murky notions of the projections of imperial borders and legal jurisdictions in the Americas. See Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession* for a monograph-length treatment of these issues.

²⁸ Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 82.

²⁹ *Book of Entries*, “His Ma[jes]tie’s Letters Patente.”

³⁰ The English stance in this regard was echoed in the *Siete Partidas*, which stated that newly discovered new lands became the possession of “him who first settles [them].” Quoted in Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World*, 30, from Francisco Morales Padrón, ‘Descubrimiento y toma de posesión,’ *Anuario de Estudios Americanos*, 12 (1955), 334. Elliott uses this parallel to argue that Seed overemphasizes the difference between competing imperial perceptions

important justification for asserting English ownership of Providence arose from the fact that Elfrith originally “set down” on the island on Christmas Eve 1629, before the truce between England and Spain went into effect.³¹ The issuance of a patent for the colonization of Providence was an act of tacit aggression that would destabilize the Caribbean status quo with ramifications that would continue to be felt long after the colony itself had ceased to exist.

The state of affairs in the Atlantic in early 1630 was the product of more than a century of geopolitical wrangling. Almost from the moment that Spain established a presence in the New World, its Caribbean hegemony was challenged. French privateers wreaked havoc between the 1520s and the 1550s, culminating in the sack of Havana by Jacques de Sores in 1555. England then seized the mantle of Spain’s chief Caribbean rival, beginning with John Hawkins’s slaving ventures. Francis Drake’s exploits on the Panamanian isthmus brought this budding rivalry to a fever pitch, driving home the threat that Northern European piracy posed to Iberian possessions on Tierra Firme.³² During the decades surrounding the turn of the seventeenth century, Sir Walter Raleigh’s star-crossed endeavors on both American continents fanned the flames beyond the line. The generation of English adventurers that came of age during these years, chief among them Robert Rich, were raised on tales recounting the exploits of Drake and Raleigh. Rich took the cause of his ambitious predecessors to heart, committing his influence and financial resources to ensure English ascendancy in the Atlantic.³³ This effort led Rich to support the efforts of men

of territorial possession in *Ceremonies of Possession*. Hewing closer to Seed’s stance, Anthony Pagden is less inclined to find likeness. He argues that unlike the English and French, the Spanish did not frequently use the *res nullius* to make claims for rights of property or sovereignty. *Lords of All the World*, 76 – 94.

³¹ *Book of Entries*, Providence Island Company (PIC) to Elfrith, February 1630; Kupperman, *Providence Island*, 25.

³² The first half century of imperial conflict in the Caribbean is detailed in Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement*, 116 – 134. For more on Drake’s efforts specifically, see Christopher Ward, *Imperial Panama: Commerce and Conflict in Isthmian America, 1550 – 1800* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 161 – 168.

³³ Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 70 – 76.

like Daniel Elfrith, and it did not take much for Elfrith to convince his single-minded patron that Providence could decisively solve the problem of securing a foothold in the Caribbean.

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Decades later, an anonymous Spaniard would describe the island simply and eloquently. Although surrounded by reefs and shoals, Providence could be circumnavigated by small boats. Its rocky, uneven terrain and mountainous interior often made this the most efficient way to get from one part of the island to the other. There was little indigenous plant life other than palm trees. Providence was irrigated by four streams, two of which dried out in the summer, as well as four small springs and several shallow basins where rain collected. Cassava, corn, sweet potatoes, and plantains grew in sufficient quantity to support a small population. Birds were the only native terrestrial fauna and livestock fared only indifferently, although pigs flourished.³⁴

King George III's geographer echoed this account during the following century. What was once one island had become two, as pirates had separated the northern promontory of its main harbor from the remainder by deepening a tidal channel to create an easily-defensible redoubt. Collectively, these islands were "perhaps the best in the *West-Indies*, (in proportion of their bigness) both as to their healthful air and richness of soil." The descendants of his Spanish predecessor's domesticated pigs had become an "abundance of wild hogs" that roamed idyllic, insect-free cedar woods in the absence of their former masters.³⁵

³⁴ AGI, MP – Panama, n. 77, "Plano de la Ysla de Santa Catalina."

³⁵ Thomas Jeffreys, *A description of the Spanish islands and settlements on the coast of the West Indies* (London: T. Jefferys, 1762), 50. Small initial populations of domesticated pigs on Caribbean islands frequently transformed into a superabundance of feral hogs between periods of human occupation. With respect to Barbados and St. Christopher, for example, see Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line*, 45. For more on the consequences of the exportation of domestic animals to the New World, see Elinor G. K. Melville, *A Plague of Sheep: Environmental Consequences of the Conquest of Mexico* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997) and Abraham H. Gibson, *Feral Animals in the American South: An Evolutionary History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

Modern accounts of the islands echo these descriptions. Providence and San Andrés are separated by less than 50 miles in the open Caribbean, more than 100 miles from the mainland of Central America, 250 southwest of Jamaica, and 300 from the north coast of Colombia. The larger of the two, San Andrés was “one continuous coconut garden eight miles long and from two to three miles wide” until a twentieth-century commercial boom. Providence’s hilly interior culminates in a nearly 1,200-foot peak, with small agricultural valleys nestled between gentler slopes below. The islands experience little seasonal change, with an average daily temperature near eighty degrees Fahrenheit year-round. The rainiest months, October and November, occur during hurricane season. Spring is significantly drier, and droughts long enough to affect plant growth sometimes occur during the first half of the year.³⁶

It is not difficult to see why both islands drew ambitious Englishmen like moths to a flame. The climate and environs were eminently preferable to those of frigid New England or the aptly-named, pestilential Mosquito Coast.³⁷ From a geostrategic perspective, their location was preferable to the vulnerable Tortuga and Lesser Antilles, which lay closer to enemy population centers – English and French settlers on St. Kitts and Nevis had been forcibly dispersed by the Spanish during the summer of 1629.³⁸ Providence’s barrier reef, rocky shores, and mountainous interior would be a sound foundation for an unassailable bastion, forestalling a similar fate.

³⁶ James J. Parsons, *San Andrés and Providencia: English-Speaking Islands in the Western Caribbean* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1956), 1 – 3.

³⁷ A 1632 Spanish survey of northern European populations in Virginia and elsewhere on the North American mainland was largely dismissive. While the beaver trade in New England and New France was notable, the English in Virginia were mired in internecine disputes. There were no good ports further south on the Atlantic coast, so the English that had settled there might be forced to push into Florida to find suitable anchorage. The Dutch operation in New Amsterdam was a bit more promising. It was a burgeoning trapping entrepôt, and produced timber for shipping and armaments as well. But the only North American colony with any real promise was the recently-deceased Lord Baltimore’s Catholic establishment in Maryland; particularly laudable was his son’s commitment to convert the heathens. Whether the nascent Caribbean colonies were too insignificant for comment or simply fell outside of the purview of this document is an open question. AGI, SF, leg. 223, “Relacion de las poblaciones de ingleses en la Virginia y tierra firme de las indias mas arriba de la florida,” 1632.

³⁸ Worse, the Iberian invaders seized nine ships and took several hundred captives, a substantial loss that represented a major blow to English efforts in the Caribbean. Appleby, “English Settlement in the Lesser Antilles,” 91 – 92.

Providence's major shortcoming, its proximity to the Spanish Main, could be answered by a judicious course of fortification.

But this plan of action required unanimity of thought and action on either side of the Atlantic. Try as they might, Providence Island Company shareholders could not control the behavior of subordinates an ocean away. This disconnect, which would plague the venture throughout the decade to come, was first made manifest less than two years after their letters patent were issued. Daniel Elfrith was unhappy with the compensation granted him given the pivotal role that he had played in the establishment of the colony. Despite a preference for specie, he had been paid exclusively in tobacco produced on the island during the early months of its settlement. The first harvest's poor quality made its saleability questionable, and to add insult to injury Elfrith was expected to reserve two-fifths of his twentieth part share for Captain Samuel Axe, who had assisted his efforts on Providence. Aware that this arrangement would likely leave the prickly Elfrith unsatisfied, the company also sent him six white indentured servants in February 1630 and promised him the fruits of an even half of their labors.³⁹

This gesture did not prove sufficient to satisfy the erstwhile privateer's aspirations. Exhibiting an obstinate distrust of authority and disregard for propriety that would become his calling card, Elfrith decided to pursue alternate sources of recompense. Writing by the next company ship to arrive at Providence, the shareholders could only marvel at his "violent taking of a Spanish frigate, and leaving your pinnace in its [place] whereby the Enemy may pretend just occasion to exercise some hostile Act upon the Island before its fortifications have put it into any good posture of defense."⁴⁰ This exceptional error in judgment was compounded when he

³⁹ *Book of Entries*, PIC to Elfrith, February 1630. The quantity and nature of compensation for company officers on the island in general, and the allocation of servants in particular, would grow increasingly contentious as optimism for the adventure's prospects waned.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, PIC to Elfrith, May 1632.

offered Providence as a base of operations for Diego el Mulato, a renegade Cuban slave turned Dutch-flagged privateer.⁴¹ Elfrith would later be compelled to make amends for these misdeeds by sending the company a copy of his logbook, which would have the unexpected consequence of allowing for its preservation. Elfrith's habitual use of Spanish place-names such as *médano*, *hato*, and *estancia* in the document speaks to a lifetime spent in an Iberian Caribbean.⁴²

The respective ethnicities and geographic origins of men like Elfrith and Diego were less important in determining the nature of the relationships between them than the ways in which they interacted with the social and economic forces at work in the seventeenth-century Atlantic World. They were accorded uncommon freedom by their position on the maritime periphery of competing empires. Distance diminished the power of metropolitan dictates that governed the lives of their contemporaries in Europe. Nonelites in the early modern Caribbean “used their everyday experiences to build collective identities and define their own ideas of belonging and separation.”⁴³ Quotidian requirements for survival combined with inescapable aspirations for prosperity to give men and women of all walks of life a degree of self-determination uncommon for the time in which they lived.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Kupperman, *Providence Island*, 39 – 40. This Diego was the first of three pirates to whom the name “Diego el Mulato” would be applied during the seventeenth century. He would participate in a successful assault on Campeche later in the decade. Matthew Restall, *The Black Middle: Africans, Mayas, and Spaniards in Colonial Yucatan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 141. After a decade of preying on Iberian shipping, Diego would turn around and offer his service to the Spanish in 1638. His offer was forwarded to Spain with “a recommendation of royal pardon and a salary equivalent to that of an admiral.” Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida*, 21. Tales of Diego's exploits lived on into the nineteenth century, when they provided the basis for a work of popular fiction. See Nina Gerassi-Navarro, *Pirate Novels: Fictions of Nation Building in Spanish America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 142 – 147.

⁴² Pargellis and Lapham, eds., “*Elfrith's Guide to the Caribbean*,” 29. Recall also Elfrith's adoption of Iberian navigation terminology.

⁴³ Jenny Shaw, *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean: Irish, Africans, and the Construction of Difference* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2013), 7. As the title indicates, Shaw is particularly concerned with Irishmen and Africans on Barbados and the Leeward Islands, but her analysis is applicable more generally across ethnicities and geographies alike.

⁴⁴ These competing drives are sometimes separated or framed as sequential, with immediate demands of subsistence necessarily satisfied before the pursuit of profit. See, for example, Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line*, 35. However the narrative to follow, not to mention an assessment of basic human nature, calls this line of

Freedom of thought and action was paired with genuine economic opportunity. This was particularly true during the early years of the middle third of the century, before the Caribbean plantation economy came into its own. On Barbados, permanently settled just two years before Providence, the 1630s held a brief window of opportunity that brought with it unprecedented potential for upward mobility.⁴⁵ Together with the permeability of imperial and racial divisions exemplified by Daniel Elfrith's friendship with Diego el Mulato, socioeconomic dynamism fostered a sense of boundless possibilities. But these possibilities could only be realized if a modicum of safety and stability were preserved, and Elfrith's actions posed a threat on both of these scores.

His irresponsible opportunism thrust the less nihilistic colonists into a panic for fear of Spanish retribution, and left his superiors in a difficult position. On the one hand they well understood the value of a man with his nautical knowledge and practical experience, but on the other the security of the colony was paramount. There could be no compromise on that point. They further chastised Elfrith for the quality of his initial assessment of the ways and means by which the island might be fortified. An engineer arrived from England to perform a survey of his own. Tellingly, he was to work most closely with Captain Axe. For his part, Elfrith was tasked with searching for viable commodities that could be purposed into sources of income. He was commended for his industry in procuring plants from the main and told to continue his efforts in this regard. The company thought especially highly of the prospects of a small sample of a red

reasoning into question. The initial hand to mouth struggle to survive on Providence and elsewhere in the Caribbean was made bearable only by the palpable chance for a prosperous future.

⁴⁵ Alison F. Games, "Opportunity and Mobility in Early Barbados," in Paquette and Engerman, eds., *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion*, 165 – 181.

dye sent by Elfrith, which he had acquired through trade with the native inhabitants of the adjacent Central American coast.⁴⁶

Although these indigenous would come to play an important supporting role in the early history of Providence, as well as subsequent English endeavors in the Caribbean, their exact identity remains somewhat ambiguous. By the second half of the seventeenth century, the ethnically diverse people who inhabited the Mosquito Coast were collectively known as the “Mosquitoes,” “Miskitos,” or some variant thereof. In Elfrith’s time, however, this toponym had yet to be applied to the people, who are typically referred to simply as the “Indians of the Cape.”⁴⁷ This population descended from several thousand Miskitu-speaking Amerindians who lived on and around the northern Mosquito Coast prior to the arrival of Europeans. Columbus encountered these Miskitus, but they were largely left alone until Franciscan missionaries made multiple attempts to establish a presence among them during the early years of the seventeenth century. At least one of these ventures was cut short by a shipwreck just off the Coast, which likely laid the foundation for the multiethnic community that would develop during the decades to follow when the survivors were absorbed into local tribes.⁴⁸ In short, the Miskitu that Elfrith interacted with were a people in transition. Africans, and possibly white Europeans as well, had recently come to be included in their number, and their way of life was about to change just as fundamentally with increasing exposure to the circum-Caribbean economy. The Miskitu were

⁴⁶ *Book of Entries*, PIC to Elfrith, September 1634. This dye may have been derived from the “red poppy commonly called Guinea poppy” referenced elsewhere in the letters.

⁴⁷ The “Cape” in question being Cabo Gracias a Dios, where the Rio Coco flows into the Caribbean. Karl H. Offen, “The Sambo and Tawira Miskitu: The Colonial Origins and Geography of Intra-Miskitu Differentiation in Eastern Nicaragua and Honduras,” *Ethnohistory*, 49.2 (2002): 333. The indigenous groups that came to inhabit this region in the modern era are conventionally known as the Miskitu, and that ethnonym will be adopted in this narrative as well for the sake of clarity and convenience.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 328 – 331.

able to turn this uncertainty to their advantage because they operated from a position of strength, possessed of knowledge of the local environment and a centuries-long tradition of subsistence.

The same could not be said for the settlers on Providence, whose struggle to survive was complicated by their superiors' search for a viable export commodity. Company shareholders required that the colonists continue to "give us notice how all the seeds plants drugs dyes and other commodities amongst you do thrive and send us such a quantity of every species that we may make trial of their worth."⁴⁹ Even shipments of goods remitted to England that proved to be of little or no value were received with an unusual amount of encouragement; for the time being it really was the thought alone that counted. Prospective commodities were also sent west in hopes of jumpstarting the process: early cargos sent to Providence by the company included indigo and madder seeds for experimental cultivation on the island.⁵⁰

The first half decade of Providence's existence was defined by the struggle to craft a viable economic foundation for the colony. Though the island's potential was evident to initial investors and the colonial vanguard alike, no explicit road map to financial solvency existed at the time of its settlement. This was not a unique problem – in fact, the English on Barbados were dealing with it almost simultaneously. And although that island would soon experience a sugar boom, when the crop was introduced during the mid-1630s it was used mainly to feed cattle and as a fuel source. Geopolitical circumstance and external investment transformed the erstwhile cow's cud into a cash cow in the following decade, but similarly fortuitous conjunctions could not be conjured out of thin air.⁵¹ St. Christopher's economic trajectory was more representative.

⁴⁹ For a detailed study of the "bioprospecting" initiatives of the Providence Island Company, see Offen, "Puritan Bioprospecting in Central America and the West Indies," *Itinerario*, 35.1 (2011): 15 – 47. For bioprospecting in the early modern Atlantic more generally, see Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁵⁰ *Book of Entries*, PIC to Governor and Council, July 1633.

⁵¹ Hilary McD. Beckles, *A History of Barbados: From Amerindian Settlement to Nation-State* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 20 – 21.

The settlers there produced their first marketable tobacco crop in 1625, two years after arriving.⁵² A second, substantially larger harvest arrived in London in 1627, at which point the colony's financiers initiated efforts to expand their operation to the nearby island of Nevis. But just when it looked as if the venture on St. Christopher's might have found a firm economic footing, the English there were dispersed by the Spanish assault of 1629.⁵³ There were no sure things in the English Caribbean during the early decades of the seventeenth century

This uncertainty led the shareholders to exhort Governor Bell to prioritize the discovery of "such ways of profit as may make seasonable retribution of our charge and [the colonists'] labor" so that the operation might achieve stability before adversity inevitably struck. Despite – or perhaps because of – contemporaneous success on St. Christopher's and in Virginia, tobacco was not an option. Given ongoing difficulties in transporting basic supplies to Providence from England, disproportionate planting of tobacco in lieu of staples could, and subsequently would, result in food shortages on the island. Providence's product was inferior to that grown elsewhere, and prices in Europe were extremely low during the 1630s. The market fluctuated unpredictably during the years to come, but the company's mandate on remained firm.⁵⁴

But the most promising commodity to arise from the venture was not originally grown on the island. Dating from the days of the Elizabethan privateers, English mariners had occasionally

⁵² Among the earliest Northern European inhabitants of St. Christopher were a group of refugees from Guiana who had thought to succeed where Walter Raleigh had previously failed. Latimer, *Buccaneers of the Caribbean*, 65.

⁵³ Koot, *Empire at the Periphery*, 28 – 29. Many of these Englishmen went on to lead very different, but still commodity-oriented, lives hunting feral cattle for hides, tallow, and cured meat on northern Hispaniola and Tortuga. C. H. Haring, *The Buccaneers in the West Indies in the XVII Century* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1910), 57 – 58.

⁵⁴ Cotton was lauded as a possible alternative, but the shareholders mandated that the reapings of Bell's first planting not be sent home aboard the independent ship that brought news of their approbation. They promised to send a cargo with which the crop could be duly exchanged shortly. *Book of Entries*, PIC to Bell, April 1633. Cotton's prospects were thought to be such that the company saw fit to send over "engines" to process the harvest on the island, but there is no indication that this scheme ever came to fruition. *Ibid.*, PIC to Governor and Council, July 1633. Years later, shareholders would chide Elfrith for failing to make any use whatsoever of the engine that they had sent him. *Ibid.*, PIC to Elfrith, March 1636.

touched at the Mosquito Coast of present-day Nicaragua and Honduras. Elfrith and the other old hands who played a role in the settlement of Providence and San Andres would certainly have been in touch with compatriots who had done so, assuming that they had not themselves. Several years after the foundation of the colony, the company officially gave Sussex Camock license to establish a trading post at what they referred to as “Cape Gratia de Dios,” the easternmost point of land on the Coast, which was some two hundred miles northwest of Providence.⁵⁵ Soon after commencing operations on the cape, Camock encountered a plant initially described as silkgrass but later dubbed “Camock’s flax” growing wild near several Miskito villages. Samples were sent home, and trials made. Less than two years later the shareholders were abuzz with the quality of this new crop, “a very excellent staple commodity, vendible in greater abundance then you shall be able to send it to us and at such a price as will exceed our former hopes.”⁵⁶

Predictably, the trade in Camock’s flax possessed its own peculiar difficulties, especially in that it necessitated the maintenance of good relations with the local indigenous.⁵⁷ This point

⁵⁵ Cabo Gracias a Dios is perhaps apocryphally said to have been named by Christopher Columbus as he literally thanked God after escaping a storm during his final voyage. *Book of Entries*, PIC to Camock, July 1633. The original patent granted to the adventurers specified that they should settle only on Providence and Henrietta, which “islands do lie between the degrees of ten and twenty from the equinoctial line in the northerly latitude and between the degrees of two hundred and ninety and three hundred and ten of longitude.” *Ibid.*, “A true Transcript of his Ma[jes]tie’s Letters Patente [. . .].” Note that this longitude was reckoned in an easterly direction from one of the Atlantic island groups, likely either the Azores or the Canaries; the Greenwich prime meridian would not be established until the nineteenth century. This patent was extended to include “all such islands within the said degrees as are not within the actual possession of any Christian Prince nor formerly granted to any other of our subjects” in 1631. PIC, BL, Sloane MS 973, “A Confirmation and Enlargement of his Ma[jes]ties letters Patents formerlie graunted to the right ho[nora]ble The Go. And Company of Adventurers etc. For the Plantation of Providence &c.” The dubious identification of the Cape as an “island” aside, this clause gave the Company a legal basis to expand their operation.

⁵⁶ *Book of Entries*, PIC to Governor and Council, September 1634.

⁵⁷ This interest in leveraging fiber crops undervalued by native populations recalls English activities in Guiana earlier in the century. A London merchant named Charles Leigh underwrote a voyage to the Amazon in 1604, between Walter Raleigh’s two expeditions. After failing to locate El Dorado, Leigh observed Dutch ships trading with the local indigenous for their flax and attempted to salvage his enterprise by cultivating the crop. This scheme also failed, and Leigh’s colony was obliterated by disease within a year. Carole Shammas, “English commercial development and American colonization 1560 – 1620,” in K. R. Andrews, N. P. Canny, and P. E. H. Hair, eds., *The Westward Enterprise: English activities in Ireland, the Atlantic, and America 1480 – 1650* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), 161 – 162.

had not been lost on the shareholders. In their initial letter to Camock, they emphasized that he and his men needed to be on their best behavior. They were to “restrain and prevent to [their] utmost power all sins and disorders as swearing drunkenness uncleanness [and] the like, which will render the name of Christians odious to the very heathen.” The company was also sensitive to cultural differences that had the potential to be problematic. Camock was to “prohibit and restrain wanton boisterous carriage toward the women that neither by mocking, pointing or laughing at their nakedness nor by sinful and indecent conversing with them, the men should be provoked to distaste or jealousy.”⁵⁸

Camock and his traders were to establish a relationship with the local Indians grounded in material reciprocity. This plan of action mirrored strategies that the imperial rivals of the English had previously used to deal with indigenous peoples from a position of weakness. When the first Spanish conquistadors ventured into the North American interior, they encountered complex tribal societies built on the principle of ritualized exchange.⁵⁹ Attention to ceremonial protocol, along with a sufficient supply of desirable goods, allowed these Iberians to forge valuable social and economic ties with the native inhabitants of the Southeast. The shareholders should have been at least notionally familiar with this example, as well as Raleigh’s positive interactions with the Orinoco indigenous. But separating uncoerced reciprocal gifting from formalized trade for the purpose of profit was more difficult for these Englishmen. Successful gifts were typically “prestige goods, objects whose rarity symbolized the power of giver and recipient.”⁶⁰ While exchanges along these lines may have fit into the worldview of a sixteenth-century Spaniard, to

⁵⁸ *Book of Entries*, PIC to Camock, July 1633.

⁵⁹ These interactions are explored in detail in Joseph M. Hall, Jr., *Zamumo’s Gifts: Indian-European Exchange in the Colonial Southeast* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). They also left material evidence. See, for example, Kathleen A. Deagan, *Artifacts of the Spanish Colonies of Florida and the Caribbean, 1500 – 1800* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987) and Jerald T. Milanich, *Laboring in the Fields of the Lord: Spanish Missions and Southeastern Indians* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999).

⁶⁰ Hall, *Zamumo’s Gifts*, 7.

the Puritan magnates of the 1630s they connoted idolatry and inefficiency. Material reciprocity was to be the hallmark only of a brief, initial stage in the settlers' dealings with the indigenous inhabitants of the Cape. Profitable commercial relations would follow without delay – the shareholders were sure enough of success in this regard that they were compelled to caution Camock and his men that all trade was to be on the company's account.⁶¹ Individual industry may have been prized in the search for lucrative commodities, but once these goods had been identified they were to be traded principally for the shareholders' benefit.

The high hopes for Camock's camp on the main and his eponymous crop persisted for several years. Even as tobacco prices recovered, the Providence colonists were encouraged to attempt to grow flax on the island. Its prospects were so sure that attention shifted toward finding a method to cure the fiber before shipment to England. But this success did not come without a price. Lost amid the outpouring of enthusiasm was the reality that company manpower and supplies, already stretched to the breaking point, were insufficient to support the colony and trading post simultaneously. The men who sailed to the cape with Camock had formerly served on Providence, and despite the assurances of the shareholders there was no easy method by which they might be replaced.⁶² This blow was compounded when the company requested that those who remained on the island provide for the sustenance of their brethren on the main, so that the latter group might focus exclusively on trading.⁶³ Priorities were confused to begin with, and the infrequency of communication only exacerbated matters. The logistics of coordinating efforts of actors on either side of the Atlantic complicated the establishment of a permanent English population in the southern Caribbean.

⁶¹ *Book of Entries*, PIC to Camock, July 1633.

⁶² *Ibid.*, PIC to Governor and Council, September 1634.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, PIC to Bell, March 1634.

During the early decades of the colonial enterprise, transmitting information across the ocean in a timely manner posed a major challenge. Official company correspondence passed between Providence and London roughly once per year, and the unpredictable timing of arrivals from year to year made meaningful coordination even more difficult. Several factors contributed to this infrequency. In the first place, the colony's perpetual financial impotence meant that the shareholders relied on the cost-efficient solution of sending letters to Providence on the same ships that carried supplies for the island. This compelled them to make use of larger, slower vessels with room for sufficient cargo, lengthening the transatlantic passage. At the end of the century, travel time between England and Barbados was two to three months for merchantmen as compared to slightly more than a month for mail packets.⁶⁴ Decades earlier, voyages to an island almost a thousand miles further to the west took weeks longer. A round trip to Providence in the 1630s could easily consume six months, irrespective of the additional interval required to load and unload vessels.

Economic and infrastructural constraints were compounded by the whims of the winds and waves. Seasonal currents and weather patterns dictated the rhythm of European expansion into the Atlantic World. This is most evident in the regimented schedule of the Spanish *Flota de Indias*, the system of fleets that supplied the Iberian Indies for more than two centuries beginning in the 1560s. The *Flota* consisted of a pair of sailings from Seville: the first, in April, bound for Veracruz, and the second, in August, for Nombre de Dios. After wintering on the main, the *Flota* in its entirety rendezvoused in Havana in the spring before returning to Spain ahead of hurricane

⁶⁴ Ian K. Steele, *The English Atlantic 1675 – 1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 283. The precise duration of the voyage was determined in part by a ship's point of departure, specifically either the west of England (longer) or the Channel ports along the southern coast (shorter). Vessels outfitted by the Providence Island Company typically sailed from the latter, but most also originated in London, where the shareholders met, substantially increasing communications lag time.

season in the early summer.⁶⁵ That this system, byzantine in its logistical complexity, remained in place for more than 200 years speaks to the persistent threat posed by the capricious seas that separated Europe and the Americas. Moreover, the *Flota* was only developed after decades of experience within the confines of a fairly ramified transatlantic empire. During the 1630s, the nascent English Atlantic was bound by only the most tenuous of connections. Mariners sailing to and from Providence were as much at the mercy of the elements as their Iberian competitors had been a century earlier, before the advent of the *Flota*, with profoundly pernicious consequences for the speed and safety of their shipping.⁶⁶

For these reasons among many others, simply getting from point A to point B was more than problematic enough without the threat of violent opposition. The latter was becoming a very real possibility for wary observers on Providence in the fall of 1634 – to those who had worried that the settlement of the island itself would incite the Spanish, Camock’s setting down on the cape must have seemed a deliberate provocation. That August, he was reminded that trade was the sole end of the venture. Camock and his men were to “take special order that none be employed to take anything from the Spaniard, or any other nation, by violence, or otherwise [than] by way of lawful commerce.”⁶⁷ This mandate was equally applicable to their treatment of the Miskitos. Already proximity was breeding friction, if not contempt. The Englishmen now resident on the Coast relied on turtles as an easy source of tasty protein, but over-hunting had

⁶⁵ Fisher, *Economic Aspects of Spanish Imperialism*, 49 – 51. See also Pierre and Huguette Chaunu, *Séville et L’Amérique aux XVI^e et XVII^e Siècles* (Paris: Flammarion, 1977), 172 – 181.

⁶⁶ Perhaps the most embarrassing illustration of this state of affairs as it impacted the fortunes of the Providence shareholders came in comparatively well-charted waters much closer to home. The *William and Anne* sailed from Tortuga – English efforts there were briefly financed by the company during the mid-1630s – with a cargo of brazilwood and tobacco. After successfully completing the transatlantic voyage, the vessel wrecked ignominiously on Belle Île, just off the west coast of Brittany. PIC, TNA CO124/2, *Journal of the Governor & Company of Adventurers for ye Plantation of the Island of Providence*, Court Proceedings, 9 March 1635. The shareholders subsequently engaged in a years-long legal battle to secure the proceeds of the sale of cargo salvaged from the *William and Anne*.

⁶⁷ *Book of Entries*, PIC to Camock, August 1634.

severely depleted the local population. Turtles were also a staple for the indigenous, and Bell and Camock were ordered to find alternative means of supplying their settlements and ships rather than risk alienating their new allies.

There were also more promising signs of some degree of correspondence. The same letter that cautioned against letting turtles become a point of conflict mentioned the notion of bringing Indian women to Providence. Regardless of the good that such a scheme might have done for morale, the shareholders were disinclined to accept it on moral grounds. Instead, they proposed that Miskito youths might – with “their parents good liking” – be brought over and given a Christian education.⁶⁸ The *Expectation* carried a shipment of Bibles for this endeavor, but discussion of the endeavor tailed off thereafter.⁶⁹ So too did communications to Camock and his traders, and the camp was abandoned no later than the spring of 1636. Samuel Axe is the likely culprit for the rapid demise of this promising initiative. His ongoing conflict with Elfrith drove him from the island to the cape by mid-decade. Sometime later, Axe ordered the unprovoked “slaughter of diverse Indians by the English under [his] command.” The shareholders demanded that Axe explain himself, although they acknowledged that the captain would not be held legally responsible for his actions. If his explanation was satisfactory, Axe would be welcomed back into the fold – his position restored, fines remitted, and additional servants granted him.⁷⁰ The consequences if he did not are less clear, but presumably he would have been out of a job.

The company employed a sort of carrot and stick approach in hopes of reining in their wayward and wanton underlings. Unsurprisingly, it failed time and again, since lords had no more leverage than laborers at an ocean’s remove. Axe and his peers were the principal authors

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, PIC to Bell, March 1634..

⁶⁹ PIC, BL, Add Mss 63854A, William Jessop to Mr. Key, 20 February 1634.

⁷⁰ *Book of Entries*, PIC to Axe, March 1636.

of their own fates, and palpably reveled in this freedom. They knew that their expertise was irreplaceable and acted accordingly. This indispensability would only increase during the final years of the colony's existence. The Spanish assaulted the island in July 1635, and although the settlers repulsed this attack it altered the trajectory of the colony and permanently disrupted the balance of power in the southern Caribbean.

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By 1635, any red flags that might have been raised in the Spanish Caribbean by the warning of Simon Zacharias and Diego de Mercado a decade before had faded from view. In April of that year, the presence of northern Europeans on Providence was news to officials as close at hand as Puertobelo, and only a Spanish subject's chance encounter with an unlikely group of fugitives tipped them off that anything was amiss.⁷¹ Shipmaster Francisco Fernández Fragosso had departed Granada on the shores of Lake Nicaragua earlier in the month, bound for the Caribbean and then to Panama.⁷² Stopping to take on fresh water somewhere along the San Juan River near the northern border of present-day Costa Rica, he came across a rather strange sight: a solitary, destitute European wandering the shoreline. The two struggled to communicate, with Fernández only able to understand the man's repeated cry of "negro, negro" as he pointed toward the nearby Caribbean coast. Undeterred, he brought the stranger back to his ship and fed

⁷¹ There is some evidence that authorities on the continent may already have been aware that something was afoot on Providence. The 1632 Spanish survey of the northern European presence in the Americas detailed in footnote 22 above was enclosed within a later letter sent from London. The author of that letter warns that "each day [the English] have greater experience and familiarity with the ports and islands of these parts" and mentions an account relating to the islands of Santa Catalina, San Andres, and Barbados that had been translated from English. He advises the king to "put a stop to this fire before it grows larger." AGI, SF, leg. 223, n. 13, London, 7 abril 1634. Nonetheless, a year later no action had been taken, nor (as will become obvious) had authorities in Puertobelo been apprised of the situation.

⁷² AGI, SF, leg. 223, n. 34, "Ynformacion fecha cerca de la poblacion que [torn] el enemigo Yngles en la Ysla Santa Catalina por el Capitan Juan de Ribas alcalde mayor," Puertobelo, 9 mayo 1635. For a transcription and English translation of this document, see David Wheat, "A Spanish Caribbean Captivity Narrative: African Sailors and Puritan Slavers, 1635," in Kathryn J. McKnight and Leo Garofalo, eds., *Afro-Latino Voices: Documentary Narratives from the Early Modern Iberian Worlds* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2009), 195 – 213.

him, but after an extended interaction was still only able to make out “negros” and “Catalina.” Eager to solve the mystery, Fernández ventured ashore again the next morning with several armed men and traveled in the direction indicated by the castaway, who he had identified as either Dutch or English. Just as promised, he found four Africans and a second European at the mouth of the river.⁷³ The Africans spoke fluent Spanish, introducing themselves as slaves who had lived in Cartagena before being captured at sea by pirates eight or nine months previously. From there they had been taken to what they referred to as the island of Santa Catalina, where they passed into the possession of a population of Englishmen primarily concerned with tobacco cultivation. Their new masters had occupied the island long enough to build several forts and emplaced artillery, and showed no intention of going anywhere anytime soon.⁷⁴ This must all have come as something of a shock to Fernández, who regularly plied the coasts surrounding Providence but seems to have been no better informed than his superiors as to the proximity of foreign interlopers. Like Zacharias and Mercado before him, he quickly recognized the value of this information and took the fugitives on to Puertobelo with him, where he brought them before local authorities.

The first to be interviewed, Francisco Biafara, was questioned in early May. Biafara described how he and ten other Africans were sold to Governor Bell for six pounds of tobacco and one pig each once they arrived on Providence. He thought them to have been the only slaves on Santa Catalina, where they lived among a population of some two hundred whites, including twenty women. There were nine forts, commanded by Elfrith – identified by name – and other

⁷³ The Europeans are referred to interchangeably as either English and Dutch in the record, but it seems most likely that they were English given that they proved to be escaped indentured servants from Providence.

⁷⁴ The Africans further made Fernández aware of the existence of San Andrés, as well as of two other islands some twelve leagues to the west of Providence fitting the description of the Corn Islands. They remarked that these were inhabited by a mixed population of English and indigenous.

officers including Captain William Rous. The islanders cultivated corn, potatoes, and a large quantity of tobacco. There were chickens and pigs – but no boars yet – as well as three cows and two bulls. During the three months that he had been on the island, Biafara had marked the arrival of one large supply ship, likely the *Long Robert*, as well as a smaller vessel laded with beer.

He and four other Africans had partnered with a half dozen Englishmen to make good their escape. They stole the boat that Bell used to travel around the island and lit out for the main. This unlikely partnership was forged by the comparable straits in which these men found themselves. During the formative years of the plantation economy on Barbados, European indentured servants and African slaves worked similarly long hours, were expected to complete similarly onerous tasks, and received similarly paltry maintenance in return for their efforts.⁷⁵ Such congruence gradually disappeared as Barbados achieved prosperity, but since Providence was far from prosperous in 1635 it would not have been difficult for Biafara and his fellow slaves to find common cause with the servants who worked alongside them. Still, theirs was an alliance of necessity forged under the direst of conditions, and it did not endure for long once the men had escaped the island. At some point during their voyage to land, tensions between the two groups resulted in the death of at least one of the Europeans. The three remaining servants who Fernández did not encounter either fled or were killed as well, while the fifth African died at sea of natural causes. Biafara's account was echoed by two of his companions, Damian Carabalí and Geronimo Angola, neither of whom were as fluent in Spanish as was he.⁷⁶ The final African,

⁷⁵ And due to the greater financial investment that they represented, enslaved laborers were sometimes allowed a marginally more lenient “seasoning period” denied their indentured counterparts. This aligned the mortality rates of slaves and servants in combination with the Africans’ stronger native immunity to tropical diseases. Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery*, 116 – 119.

⁷⁶ The ethnonym assigned to Francisco Biafara implied an African point of origin somewhere in the southeastern coastal region of modern Guinea-Bissau. Damian Carabalí likely came from Lower Guinea, to the immediate south but still several thousand miles north of Geronimo Angola’s homeland. The conjunction of these men from across the African continent speaks to the diversity of the enslaved population of the Caribbean from an early date. For the

Juan Biafara, added several notable details to his friends' stories. He mentioned that while on the island they had mostly eaten potatoes, almost always raw. Another intriguing novelty concerned San Andres, which Juan Biafara described as being populated by Indians. At one point a small boat returned from that island carrying two indigenous men and a woman. Juan remembered that the woman had been wearing a red blanket as a skirt, and that the men suggested that Francisco Biafara marry her.⁷⁷

Incapable of conversing in Spanish, the two Englishmen gave their declarations through an interpreter. The first was a native of London named "Herbatons" who dubiously identified himself as Catholic. He had only been on Providence for two months before fleeing, so most likely came to the island aboard the *Long Robert*. Herbatons thought that there were about three hundred people on Providence. There were probably more Africans on the island than Francisco and Juan Biafara indicated, which might account for the discrepancy between this number and their estimate, although the slaves' reasons for potentially obscuring this information are unclear. Herbatons mentioned the recent sale of a cargo of tobacco to a Dutchman out of Amsterdam, principally in exchange for alcohol.⁷⁸ Herbatons corroborated Juan Biafara's story about the three Indians, but was under the impression that they had returned with a turtling crew.⁷⁹ The only English colony in the Caribbean other than Providence that he was aware of was St. Christopher's. Herbatons's reasons for leaving the island were eloquent in their simplicity: life

authoritative account of the African ethnonyms employed by the Iberian empires, see David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 1570 – 1640* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

⁷⁷ "Ynformacion fecha çerca de la poblaçion que [torn] el enemigo Yngles en la Ysla Santa Catalina por el Capitan Juan de Ribas alcalde mayor."

⁷⁸ This episode also came up in the PIC letters. Almost the entire crop had been exchanged for sack, leading the exasperated shareholders to pronounce that the trade had not been for "the preservation of men's health so much as the increase of drunkenness disorder and poverty." Moreover, it rendered the colonists incapable of compensating the company in kind for goods sent from England. *Book of Entries*, PIC to Governor and Council, May 1636.

⁷⁹ I.e. likely from either the Corn Islands or the mainland. This may in fact have been the episode that inspired the company to warn Bell against allowing Indian women to be brought to the island; the timing is about right.

there was unpleasant and he didn't want to be there. Those of his Flemish companion, Juan Yons, were a bit more insightful. Yons complained that the servants were treated poorly, and specifically railed against the monotony of their potato-heavy diet. Both Europeans averred that the Africans had killed all four of the missing whites, but beyond that their accounts match those of Francisco and Juan Biafara.⁸⁰

Their stories must have been alarming indeed to authorities in Puertobelo. Unlike the speculative second- or third-hand warning of fifteen years earlier, this one was grounded in physical reality. Men who had spent time on Providence had quite literally washed ashore. The news traveled without delay through the channels of the Spanish colonial hierarchy. It soon reached Cartagena, where Governor Francisco de Murga y Ortiz de Orué took it upon himself to rectify the situation. He assigned Captain Gregorio de Castellar y Mantilla and military engineer Juan de Somovilla Tejada the task of scouting the island and eliminating the English threat. They assembled a small armada of three ships and a force including 250 infantrymen and a handful of sappers. The fleet sailed from Cartagena on July 29 and located Providence the following day, but waited until the morning of the 31st to draw close for fear of running aground. They sounded carefully as they went in, with Castellar and Somovilla leading the way in a rowboat.⁸¹

The Iberians sent an adjutant ashore to attempt to resolve the situation without violence. Their offer was rebuffed, as the English explained that although they had no especial love for the island, they had promised to hold it for their king and had a legitimate legal claim – their letters patent – to do so. Instead, they would send word of the Spaniards' counter-claim to England, and promised to resolve the situation inside of a year. But Castellar had no intention of waiting so

⁸⁰ “Ynformaçion fecha çerca de la poblaçion que [torn] el enemigo Yngles en la Ysla Santa Catalina por el Capitan Juan de Ribas alcalde mayor.”

⁸¹ AGI, SF, leg. 223. “Relacion que hazen el cappitan don gregorio de castella y mantilla y juan de somovilla texada yngeniero militar de su magd del viaje que hicieron a la ysla de santta catalina,” Cartagena, 22 August 1635.

long, and diplomacy reached an impasse. Somovilla used the occasion of the ultimately futile negotiations to reconnoiter Providence's defenses. The Spanish would land on the eastern coast of the island, on the far side of the narrow land bridge that guarded entry to its fortified northern tip. While the ships containing the infantry sailed into position, the largest vessel would hold its position in the mouth of the main harbor on the opposite side of the bridge to keep the attention of the English. This plan was carefully crafted to counter the strengths of Providence's defenses. Although the island's early years had been troubled in many respects, they were successful as far as fortifications were concerned. Sturdy bastions of wood and stone lined the western coast, transitioning to earthworks near the island's southwestern corner. Crossfire killing zones guarded each of the three principal bays; the main harbor was particularly heavily fortified and featured no less than six separate artillery emplacements.⁸² The English colonists had constructed all of these defenses with the salient fact that the east side of Providence was doubly protected by treacherous shoals and rocky shores very much in mind. No rational invader would conceive of taking that avenue of approach!

⁸² Military engineers had been forced to contend with the novel challenges posed by gunpowder artillery since the late fifteenth century. By the mid-1630s this had resulted in the invention and refinement of bastion ramparts, which differed from medieval walls in that they were thicker and lower, to make them more difficult to breach with shot, and constructed using pentagonal geometries designed to maximize the opportunity for deadly defensive crossfire. Rodolfo Segovia Salas, *The Fortifications of Cartagena de Indias: Strategy and History* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores, 1994), 14 – 15.

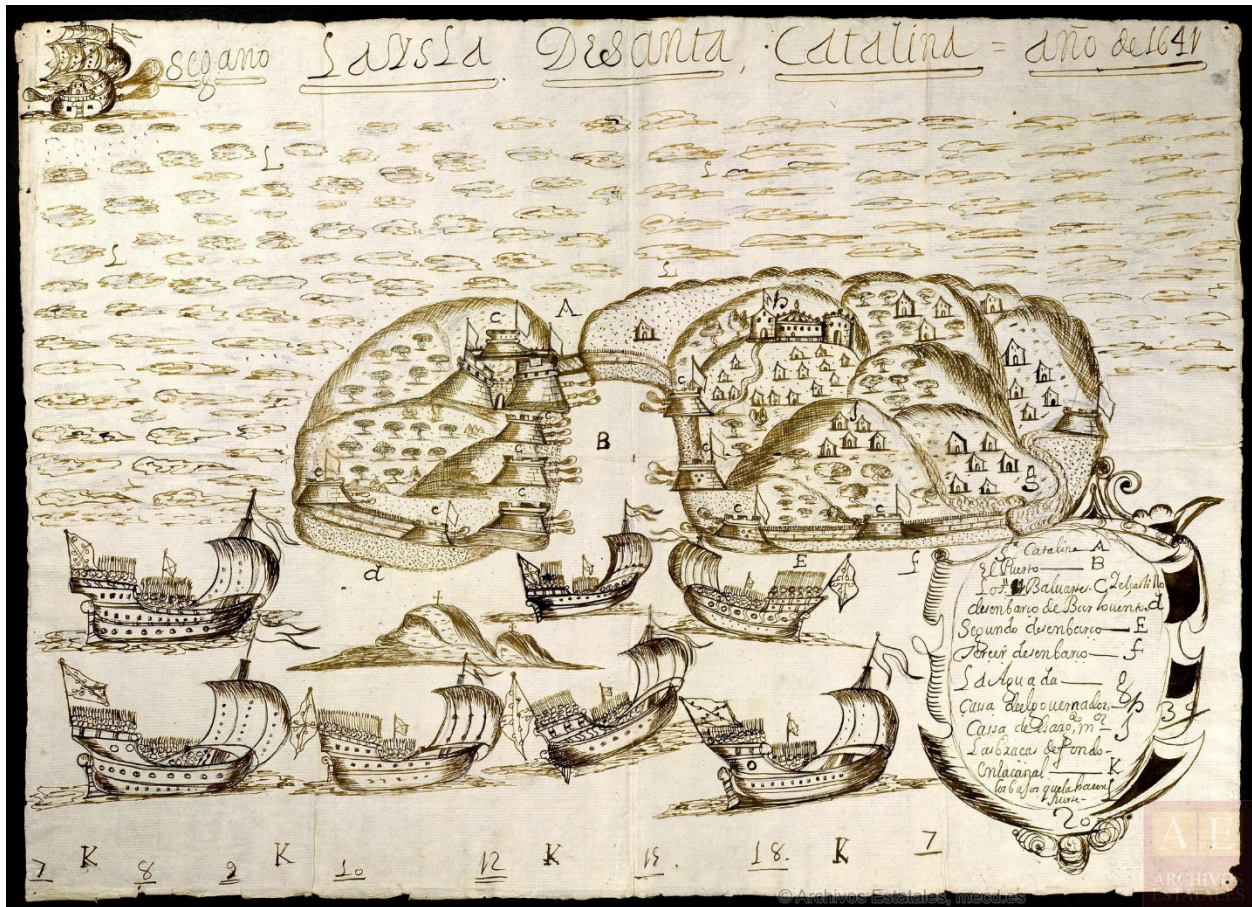


Figure 2.1: This 1641 map of Providence shows how well-defended the western side of the island was by that time. Note the intersecting lines of fire in the main harbor and the fortifications all along the coast. AGI, MP – Panamá, 66, "Mapa de la Ysla de Santa Catalina, situada 80 leguas de Cartagena y 40 de Portobelo," 1641.

That was exactly what the invaders intended to do. Sending the bulk of the Spanish force to the east would circumvent the vast majority of the island's defenses. The flagship would hold the attention of the English without actually coming under fire, distracting them from the full scope of his stratagem until it was too late. All of the Spanish officers signed off on his plan even though it forced their troops to sail more than a league against the wind and within reach of the guns on a smaller platform on the eastern side of the headland. Perhaps this flaw was evident only in hindsight, but it proved decisive in the outcome of what would be an abortive assault. The fire from the platform in question compelled the attackers retreat before landing a single soldier. Castellar and Somovilla maintained that the English were not fooled by their attempt at

misdirection, and had repositioned additional artillery to thwart their advance overnight. These guns commanded forbidding cliffs and could not be dislodged. Withdrawal had been the only prudent choice, and thankfully only two men had been killed and a handful more injured.⁸³

While they had been unable to repel the English incursion, Castellar and Somovilla were happy to report that they had at least taken the measure of the opposition on the island. Their description mirrors slightly later maps, and speaks to the quality of Providence's fortifications. The island's main port was defended by two forts and sufficient cannons to make a direct attack inadvisable. There were three additional forts along the west coast, placed at the sites that would otherwise be most appropriate to make a landing. The east side of Providence was impregnable for a different reason, protected by shoals at sea and ridges on land as well as the single fort that their plan had fallen victim to. In total, Castellar and Somovilla counted some three dozen pieces of artillery on the island. Even a much larger armada and at least a thousand infantrymen landed at multiple locations simultaneously might not be enough to dislodge the interlopers.⁸⁴

The disjuncture between this assessment and the Providence Island Company's reaction to the successful defense of their plantation is striking. They conceived of the colonists' salvation as a token of God's favor, a sign that they should redouble their efforts to support the scuffling enterprise. The first company letter to be sent to the island after news of the Spaniards' attempt had reached England stressed the need to conceal Providence's weakness. Letters containing sensitive information conveyed by ship were to be thrown overboard at the first sign of danger.

⁸³ AGI, SF, leg. 223. "Relacion que hazen el cappitan don gregorio de castella y mantilla y juan de somovilla texada yngeniero militar de su magd del viaje que hicieron a la yslla de santta catalina," Cartagena, 22 August 1635.

⁸⁴ The Spaniards also note that they were able to secure one small success at the tag end of the expedition. Having somehow received word of a small English force recently sent to San Andrés, they sailed southwest after weighing anchor from Providence. Light cannon fire greeted them at San Andrés, but the severely outnumbered colonists quickly dispersed to the mountainous interior. Once ashore the Iberians captured several Englishmen and one Indian. Under questioning it soon became clear that San Andrés did not pose an immediate threat, so the Iberians destroyed the island's rudimentary fortifications, took the interlopers' supplies and materiel, and departed for the main. Ibid. During the remainder of the decade, the English would not seriously consider expanding beyond Providence again.

Although the shareholders now had just cause to exact revenge on the Spanish, they cautioned Elfrith and his cohorts not to take matters into their own hands for fear of provoking additional attacks. Forbearance was so critical that they ordered the island's store of oars and sails to be locked up every night.⁸⁵

There are several possible explanations for this stark difference of opinion regarding the state of Providence's defenses. Given the meager returns to their efforts, Castellar and Somovilla certainly had reason to exaggerate the opposition that they had faced. They had sailed with an ostensibly overwhelming force, but had proved incapable of purging what was by all accounts a comparatively small population of Englishmen. Conversely, the shareholders had some incentive to underestimate the security of their investment – and place the blame for this deficit at the feet of the colonists – so that they might absolve themselves of blame if it were to be captured by the enemy. This had recently become a meaningful consideration when the king took “special notice of it as a place of great importance.”⁸⁶ Most likely both agendas colored these reports, along with any number of others. Providence was neither as vulnerable as the company portrayed it nor as impregnable as the Spaniards would have had it. This speaks at once to the incompleteness of information that characterized European activities in the southern Caribbean throughout the seventeenth century as well as the importance of representation in guiding the thinking and determining the actions of interested parties on either side of the Atlantic.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ *Book of Entries*, PIC to Governor and Council, May 1636. That this letter was not sent until almost a year after the events that it responded to also speaks to the logistical difficulties that plagued the colony on Providence throughout its existence.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ News of William of Orange's November 1688 invasion of England only arrived in the Leeward Islands during February of the following year, and did not reach Jamaica until May. Steele, *The English Atlantic 1675 – 1740*, 97 – 98. Consider that this was the most important English political development in a generation, and so would have been on the tip of the tongue of every sailor on every ship as soon as he learned of it. Uncertainty grounded in unforeseen change was a constant companion to the denizens of the early modern Caribbean, alternately enhancing the power of individual action and shattering the most carefully laid plans.

Asymmetrical supplies of information gave added weight to the words of those able to – or perceived to be able to – tap flows of knowledge unavailable to the layman. Persistent English reservations regarding the pernicious health impacts of life in the tropics powerfully illustrate this phenomenon. Throughout the early decades of the colonial enterprise, the debilitating effects of tropical heat on European constitutions were repeatedly trumpeted by medical doctors and returnees from the West Indies alike. This discourse, based on the Hippocratic theory of the four humors, had major implications for Atlantic expansion, most obviously guiding the bulk of early Protestant emigrants toward North America and away from the Caribbean.⁸⁸ Heterogeneous distributions of information and the authority that it arrogated acted against the interests of the Providence Island Company, but they also meant that the shareholders could subtly misrepresent the island's strength without fear of being called on it. Similarly, it gave Somovilla and Castellar a viable means of surviving the invasion debacle with their respective reputations intact.

The fundamental nature of the reality on the ground in the seventeenth-century Caribbean could be shaped by the writings and pronouncements of its inhabitants. This creative agency, and the partially or particularly informed decisions that it occasioned, had profound implications for Providence's future. Spain's ability to project power into the southern Caribbean was not nearly as well-developed as the colonists and shareholders conceived. Similarly, the company's affairs were substantially more precarious than panicked Iberians in Porto Belo, Cartagena, and Seville were willing to entertain. And so, a project that might otherwise have been a proverbial molehill

⁸⁸ Climatic health concerns competed with the countervailing notion, often invoked by Walter Raleigh and his peers, that the sun's heat generated the riches of the earth. For an article-length exploration of this topic more generally, see Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "Fear of Hot Climates in the Anglo-American Colonial Experience," *WMQ*, 41.2 (1984): 213 – 240.

became a rhetorical mountain. This mutual misunderstanding had significant ramifications for the competing imperial designs of England and Spain.⁸⁹

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While the shareholders may have continued to evince caution and pessimism, all must have recognized that an unsuccessful Spanish attack was the best cure for what ailed Providence. Five years on, their venture was incapable of turning a profit through either agriculture or trade. More aggressive forms of commerce might prove another matter entirely. As soon as news of the episode reached England, company members sought relief through their connections at court. Chief among these was the Earl of Holland, Henry Rich, younger brother of Robert Rich and a close confidant of the king. Holland had previously been given free membership in the company in exchange for the exercise of his considerable influence in just these sorts of circumstances.

The shareholders delivered a declaration of the state of affairs on Providence to Holland as soon as they received word of the attack. They reiterated that there had been “no sign at all that any man had ever set foot there, until we took possession of it for the Crowne of England.” Moreover, the attempt on the island was only the most recent of several instances of unprovoked Spanish hostility. But without royal support, the colony was doomed – the shareholders simply could not continue to invest their own funds, having “bestowed” almost £30,000 already.⁹⁰ Within days of receiving this report, Holland brought it before the king at Whitehall. Charles cautioned that “the treaty between his Majesty and the King of Spain should be duly weighed,”

⁸⁹ Richard White’s examination of productive misunderstanding between indigenous peoples and Europeans on and around the Great Lakes is instructive here. Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lake Region, 1650 – 1815* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Englishmen and Iberians in the seventeenth-century Caribbean also had fundamentally different ways of interpreting and interacting with the world, as well as distinct priorities to pursue. In this case, however, these discontinuities would be harnessed toward destructive rather than creative ends.

⁹⁰ PIC, TNA CO1/8, “A Declaration made the 21th of December 1635 To the right ho:^{ble} the Earle of Holland Governour of the Company for the plantaton of the Isle of Providence on the behalfe of that Company.”

but also gave leave for the colonists on Providence to “in parts there and beyond the Line to offend (by way of diversion for their defense) whatsoever people or nation shall endeavor to Attempt to hinder them in their quiet commerce or Trade.”⁹¹ His was a carefully-worded if not disingenuous sanction, but a sanction nonetheless.

And so, even as they urged their captains not to act unilaterally, the shareholders began to lay the groundwork for reprisal. Governor Bell was to be supplanted by Captain Robert Hunt, a career soldier. Hunt’s experience on the continent was far from incidental to this choice; the timing of Bell’s long-delayed replacement reflected a fundamental shift in the job description. No longer the chief administrator of an agrarian society, Providence’s new leader was tacitly cast as a military superior. Hunt’s commission granted him the title of “Captain General” as well as governor. He was also granted the authority to invoke martial law in times of unrest.⁹² Neither of these clauses had appeared in Bell’s commission. One of Hunt’s first duties was to repurpose the company’s shallops to interdict Spanish trade. They would be attached to two larger ships sailing from England and crewed with men from the island, further draining a dwindling population.⁹³ Daniel Elfrith was judged too unpredictable to be depended upon and denied a role in this new scheme, while Samuel Axe, who had yet to answer for his mistreatment of the indigenous at the cape, had secured a Dutch letter of marque independently. The shareholders were powerless to rein Axe in and could only hope that he acted with the best interests of Providence in mind. Command of the *Blessing* passed to William Rous as a reward for his good conduct during the Spanish assault. Rous had previously been a divisive figure and his elevation fanned the flames

⁹¹ Ibid., His Majesty to the Earl of Holland, Whitehall, 27 December 1635. This could have been, and was intended to be, the first step in a more concerted anti-Spanish campaign that fell by the wayside with the growing domestic instability in England. Kupperman, *Providence Island*, 198 – 200.

⁹² *Book of Entries*, Commission to Captain Robert Hunt, May 1636.

⁹³ Ibid., PIC general letter, May 1636.

of the personal rivalries that routinely complicated day-to-day affairs on the island. The company instructed Rous to focus his efforts on capturing smaller ships, and to avoid engaging with well-armed enemies at all costs. He was to minimize the information shared with prisoners that he captured to prevent the Spanish from receiving word of the *Blessing*'s mission or Providence's weakness for as long as possible.⁹⁴

The only exception were experienced pilots – all efforts up to and including transporting navigators to the island were to be employed.⁹⁵ Pilots had long been among the most valuable commodities in the early modern Caribbean. This fact had been acknowledged in Spain for the better part of a century, since the safety of the *Flota*'s treasures depended upon able navigation. Pilots were not eligible to apply for this duty until they had served in the Indies for fifteen years, and were carefully vetted even if they had. Failure was not tolerated – pilots responsible for the loss of an armada ship through deceit or negligence were executed. By the 1630s, a training system that revolved around apprenticeship rather than formal schooling was under fire. The combined effect of these factors caused the demand for qualified Iberian pilots to substantially outstrip their supply during the middle decades of the seventeenth century.⁹⁶

The esteem in which the English held capable navigators in the complete absence of intentional instruction or evaluation was even higher. Good pilots could not be produced out of thin air; theirs was a profession in which advancement required commitment and experience. In

⁹⁴ *Book of Entries*, PIC to William Rous, March 1636.

⁹⁵ A competent pilot needed to be well-versed in five principal skills: adjusting and reading a compass, setting a course and tacking the ship to follow it while charting its progress with astrolabe and forestaff, knowing the weather and the winds as well as the changes that occurred in them with the phases of the moon, deploying sails to respond to wind and course variations, and knowing the lay of the lands to which he sailed. Juan Escalante de Mendoza, *Itinerario de navegación de los mares y tierras occidentales* (Madrid, 1575) in Cesáreo Fernández Duro, ed., *Disquisiciones náuticas*, 6 vols. (Madrid: Sucesores de Rivandeneira, 1876 – 81), 5: 512 – 513, cited in Carla Rahn Phillips, *Six Galleons for the King of Spain: Imperial Defense in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 129 – 130.

⁹⁶ Phillips, *Six Galleons for the King of Spain*, 131 – 132.

contemporaneous Panama, one means of satisfying this shortage was a growing community of enslaved pilots.⁹⁷ But the colonists on Providence had neither the occasion nor the personnel to employ this expedient, or any other internal recourse. This further explains why the shareholders endured Daniel Elfrith's misbehavior for so long, as well as why they were willing to risk raising the Iberians' ire by encouraging William Rous to steal Spanish pilots. As great as the newfound prospects of privateering might be with a few good navigators in tow, the shareholders had not turned their back on other avenues of profit. Rous was encouraged to "make a strict inquiry" from any Spaniards he encountered where he might procure "indigo, cochineal of both sorts, sarsaparilla, ginger, rice or any other commodity that may be fit to grow in the island of Providence and be useful for food or merchandise."⁹⁸ This was still a formative moment for the English project in the southern Caribbean; no tried and true blueprint for success in these fraught waters yet existed.

The discourse in England regarding the economic ways and means of overseas growth had begun to turn during the years surrounding the turn of the seventeenth century. This shift was driven by the rise of a more speculative and aggressive merchant class and was evidenced during the 1610s by the publication of a number of pamphlets favoring commercially-minded expansion over colonization with a purely extractive bent.⁹⁹ Opposition to Spain, extending to the Iberian model of American conquest, partially explains this change, as does admiration for Dutch mercantile success. During the decades between 1620 and 1640, this admiration would be

⁹⁷ Ward, *Imperial Panama*, 36. English colonists on Bermuda would employ a similar solution several decades later. Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 109.

⁹⁸ *Book of Entries*, PIC to William Rous, March 1636.

⁹⁹ Shammass, "English commercial development and American colonization," 164 – 166.

reinforced in the Caribbean by the indispensable material and logistical support of Dutch merchants.¹⁰⁰

African slaves were among the commodities that the Dutch sought to move west across the Atlantic. On many Caribbean islands, the transition from indentured to enslaved labor occurred simultaneously with or followed closely on the transfer of technology allowing for large-scale sugar cultivation, also facilitated by the Dutch.¹⁰¹ On Providence, where financial liquidity rather than labor demand was the principal stumbling block to the development of a market for slaves, this transition coincided with the advent of royally-sanctioned privateering. Prior to 1635, the labor force on the island had consisted predominately of white indentured servants. Mostly men, these workers had signed on for two or three years of service in exchange for passage, maintenance, and land upon completion of their contracts.¹⁰²

Servants were both the instrument of Providence's prosperity and the currency by which its officers were rewarded. But this notion proved to be putting the cart before the horse, as without prosperity few wished to undertake the journey across the Atlantic, and without servants those who had taken the plunge were perpetually incensed by their lack of compensation for doing so. This vicious cycle reached a critical point after the Spanish attack, as even more men were drafted to crew the vessels that would secure wealth and plenty for all on the high seas. A new source of labor was required. If Rous were to "take any negroes, specially such as can dive for pearls" the shareholders would have him "carry them to Providence, where direction is given

¹⁰⁰ See Koot, *Empire at the Periphery*, 17 – 46 for an overview of the foundational years of Anglo-Dutch trade in the Caribbean. Note that this period also featured elevated levels of intra-imperial commodity exchange among circum-Caribbean Spanish islands and mainland ports, but legally the region remained dependent on the *Flota* for European manufactures. Fisher, *The Economic Aspects of Spanish Imperialism in America*, 68 – 71.

¹⁰¹ The idea behind Dutch "generosity" being that the extreme labor demands of plantation agriculture would rapidly create a market for slaves if one did not already exist. Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados*, 27 – 28.

¹⁰² For more on indentured servitude in England's American colonies, see Alison Games, *Migration and the Origins of the English Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

for the disposing of them for our use.”¹⁰³ This shift had been in the works for some time. As early as 1633, Captain Camock was encouraged to purchase enslaved Africans from the Dutch if they could be had at “reasonable rates.”¹⁰⁴ But within a year, grave doubts were raised as to the appropriateness of this recourse. Several slaves, perhaps even those brought to the island by Camock, had run away. To make matters worse, Samuel Rishworth, a clergyman hired by the company to preach on Providence, had declared his intention to negotiate for their freedom on moral grounds. From this point forward the shareholders stressed that any Africans brought to the island be separated and allocated to particularly wary masters so that the risk of further escapes would be minimized.¹⁰⁵

These precautions were largely ineffectual, and the colony would host a small population of fugitive Africans throughout its existence. Maroons and marronage had been part and parcel of life in the Caribbean since the earliest years of European colonization. Runaway slaves were a problem on Hispaniola as early as 1503, only a couple of years after the inception of the African trade. In 1545, The Spanish on Hispaniola were also the first to treat with *cimarrones* to mitigate the military and economic threat that they posed. Maroons cooperating with Northern European mariners on the isthmus of Panama preyed on Iberian commerce throughout the middle decades of the sixteenth century.¹⁰⁶ Chief among the factors that facilitated marronage were environment

¹⁰³ *Book of Entries*, PIC to William Rous, March 1636.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, Commission to Captain Sussex Camock, July 1633.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, PIC general letter, February/March 1634.

¹⁰⁶ Mavis C. Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica 1655 – 1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration & Betrayal* (Granby, MA: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc., 1988), 2 – 7. Traditions of treaty-making with maroons had a particularly complicated subsequent history in the Atlantic empires of England and France. See Kenneth Bilby, “Swearing by the Past, Swearing to the Future: Sacred Oaths, Alliances, and Treaties Among the Guianese and Jamaican Maroons,” in Laurent Dubois and Julius S. Scott, eds., *Origins of the Black Atlantic* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 236 – 265. For an overview of the role that *cimarrones* played in Elizabethan piracy in and around Panama, see Kris E. Lane, *Pillaging the Empire: Piracy in the Americas 1500 – 1750* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1998), 33 – 57. For more on maroon origins, culture, and persistence in the early modern Caribbean, see Jane Landers, “*Cimarrón* Ethnicity and Cultural Adaptation in the Spanish Domains of the Circum-Caribbean, 1503 – 1763,” in Paul E. Lovejoy, ed., *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery*, 2nd ed. (New York: Continuum, 2009), 30 – 54 and “The African Landscape of Seventeenth-Century Cartagena and Its Hinterlands,” in Matt Childs, Jorge

and geography. This was the case on Panama, where dense jungle, vertiginous topography, and access to the coasts of both the Caribbean and Pacific made it exceedingly difficult for the Spanish to pin down fugitive populations. It was also true, on a smaller scale, on Providence, where the heavy vegetation and jagged terrain of the island's interior made it all but impossible for the English to marshal their limited resources to recapture escaped slaves. Providence's isolation theoretically acted in the authorities' favor, but the successful escape of Juan and Francisco Biafara and their collaborators indicates that this was not an insurmountable barrier.¹⁰⁷

The new policy of separating Africans – and perhaps the escape of a substantial number of maroons into the interior – might have convinced Juan and Francisco Biafara that they and their cohorts were the only slaves on Providence in 1635, but it would not have been possible to deceive them in this way if their stay on the island had occurred a year or two later. By this time the shareholders were remarking that they were unhappy with the “receiving of so many negroes into the island knowing how dangerous they may be if you should be assaulted with an enemy or in case they should grow mutinous, whereof we have had experience in the island of Association [Tortuga], the desertion of it being occasioned by the great number of negroes.” They forbade the importation of further Africans until more Europeans arrived on Providence.¹⁰⁸ Their efforts were futile, and the island would soon be the first colony in the English Atlantic to harbor a slave

Cañizares-Esguerra, and James Sidbury, eds., *The Black Urban Atlantic in the Age of the Slave Trade* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2013), 147 – 162.

¹⁰⁷ The natural world was equally important in determining the ways and means of marronage elsewhere in the Caribbean. On the Dutch islands of the Lesser Antilles, which were similar to Providence geologically, the first maroons fled into forbidding forested and mountainous regions. But as ground cover was cleared and colonial authorities' ability to project power into the interior improved, escaped slaves became less likely to evade the Dutch for an extended period of time. This impelled the rise of *grand marronage*, which in the Danish West Indies referred to marronage by sea, as inadvertently previewed in the Providence case. Neville A. T. Hall, “Maritime Maroons: *Grand Marronage* from the Danish West Indies,” in Dubois and Scott, eds., *Origins of the Black Atlantic*, 51 – 52.

¹⁰⁸ Although they were willing to make exceptions for slaves skilled in pearl fishing or preparing indigo or cochineal for shipment. *Book of Entries*, PIC to Governor and Council, March 1637.

majority.¹⁰⁹ This unanticipated and worrying demographic boom had been made possible by the new commercial opportunities afforded the colonists after 1635. The expansion of privateering and the transition from an indentured workforce to an enslaved one proceeded hand in hand, mutually reinforcing each other and rapidly spiraling far beyond the control of the grandees in the metropole.

This marked inability to control the course of events in the Caribbean was not unique to the English. By early 1636, conclusive word of the incursion on Providence had also filtered back to Spain in the form of a letter summarizing the depositions of the refugees captured on the main. Even though this communication predated the *Blessing's* arrival at the island with formal permission to seek prizes, Spanish conceptions of the colony's purpose were unambiguous. The principal intent of the English there was to "infest" the adjacent coast and prey on vulnerable shipping. This was the only logical explanation for their presence on Providence, because the rewards that it might otherwise yield were summarily dismissed as "inconsiderable."¹¹⁰

The calculus used to arrive at this judgment is not at all unfair, and reflects a perception of the southern Caribbean fundamentally different from that which guided English decision-making. Providence had long since been charted by the Spanish and its colonization written off as not worth the effort. What was the point of attempting to make ends meet on a barren speck of upthrust rock when the riches of the Greater Antilles, not to mention the main, beckoned so close at hand? This line of thinking was expressed explicitly earlier in the century, when Pedro de Zúñiga, the Spanish ambassador to London, wrote to Philip III regarding the nascent English efforts in Virginia. Zúñiga opined that "the soil [there] is very sterile, and hence there can be no

¹⁰⁹ Alison Games, "'The Sanctuarye of our rebell negroes': The Atlantic Context of Local Resistance on Providence Island, 1630 – 41," *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies*, 19.3 (1998): 3.

¹¹⁰ AGI, SF, leg. 223, "Sobre las noticias que sean tenido de la poblacion que an hecho los ingleses en la isla de santa catalina y lo que conviene acudir a desalojar los de alli," Junta de Guerra de Indias, 15 febrero 1636.

other purpose connected with that place than that it appears to them good for piracy.”¹¹¹ Exactly the same mode of thought prevailed with regard to Providence, an even more marginal scrap of territory from an Iberian perspective. It was impossible to imagine that the intruders came in peace. This outlook assumed likeness in terms of knowledge, rationality, and economic clout where no such congruity in fact existed.

Weighing the prospects of exactly the same barren speck of upthrust rock, the shareholders and colonists of the Providence Island Company had seen a potential paradise. Some of the rhetoric along these lines was exaggerated, and there was some judicious squinting involved, but this sentiment was both genuine and justified. Beggars could not be choosers, and the island’s climate and location were marked attractions. But the latter qualification had been reckoned in terms of Providence’s distance from the strength of the Spanish fleet rather than its proximity to lightly-defended peripheral ports. The colony had been conceived of as a peaceful endeavor by all concerned, with the possible exception of Elfrith and his peers.

The outbreak of hostilities forced hands on either side of the imperial divide. The outlook of the Council of War became a self-fulfilling prophecy with Castellar’s ill-advised assault on the island. Apprised of this failure, they sought other expedients to solve the problem. Options included adding the destruction of Providence to the duties of Admiral Lope de Hoces, currently en route to Curaçao to do battle with the Dutch, or drawing some number of ships from the *Flota* to dispense with the business. In the meantime, the council of state was instructed to see whether the export of arms from England to the island stood in violation of the terms of the Treaty of

¹¹¹ Alexander Brown, ed., *The Genesis of the United States: A Narrative of the Movement in England, 1605 – 1616, Which Resulted in the Plantation of North America by Englishmen*, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1890), “Copy of a Deciphered Letter from Zuñiga to the King of Spain, Dated London, October 8, 1607,” 1: 120 – 121.

Madrid.¹¹² This gesture at a diplomatic resolution would likely not have been made had the Junta been aware that Charles had recently given Providence's would-be privateers the go-ahead!

The Spanish knew that the threat posed by Providence was not unique. As long as there was no permanent Iberian naval presence in the southern Caribbean, commercial shipping would be vulnerable. There were simply too many other "Providences" scattered along several thousand miles of coastline, not to mention the Lesser Antilles. The Council was frank in its assessment that until a more permanent solution could be engineered, Philip would continue to be presented with similarly unpleasant situations. But there was a method on offer by which this problem could be addressed. Admiral Francisco Díaz Pimienta, who had made a career out of promoting shipbuilding toward the dual ends of imperial defense and personal financial gain, proposed that the king issue him an *asiento* for the construction of a small fleet to patrol these lawless seas.¹¹³ Díaz's request would never receive satisfaction, but he would eventually figure prominently in Providence's fate nonetheless. No matter how diligently the Council worked to ascertain threats to the Caribbean periphery of the main or to apprise Philip of possible ways by which they might be mitigated, their ability to effect change from so far a remove was limited. While they may have had a vastly greater store of resources at their disposal than the officers of the Providence Island Company, there was also a vastly greater demand for those resources. However worrying the English presence on Providence might have been, it was not a priority in the metropole. The cost to deal with the situation was prohibitive in relation to its as-yet phantasmal menace.

¹¹² AGI, SF, leg. 223, "Sobre las noticias que sean tenido de la poblacion que an hecho los ingleses en la isla de santa catalina y lo que conviene acudir a desalojar los de alli," Junta de Guerra de Indias, 15 febrero 1636.

¹¹³ Ibid.

III. “OY POR MI, MAÑANA POR TI”: THE SPANISH RESPONSE TO PROVIDENCE ISLAND, 1636 – 1670

When next they heard from Cartagena, this threat had been realized. Francisco de Murga had died in the interim, perhaps terminally mortified by the shame of having been unable to dislodge the enemies of the crown. His successor as governor, Antonio Maldonado de Tejada, sent his first report toward the end of 1636. Maldonado wrote of the “continuous persecutions and invasions that have disturbed your majesty’s vassals in these coasts.” Although he had not previously been sure, Maldonado was now confident that Providence was “the refuge of all of the Dutch corsairs who cruise these seas and where they take their loot.” He was particularly indignant that the same Englishmen who claimed to be loyal vassals of the honorable “Henry Holland” had aligned themselves with these pirates.¹ This unholy alliance had become painfully apparent when a pair of sloops sailed from Providence to the harbor of Santa Marta, just up the coast from Cartagena. The vessels attempted to extort a ransom by blockading the port’s two main channels. Without any means of maritime defense, Maldonado had been unable to stop them. The English departed without exacting too heavy a cost, but the effects on trade had still been catastrophic.

Maldonado marshalled multiple arguments to advocate for assistance. Not only was Cartagena at risk, so too were Puertobelo and the *desaguadero* of Nicaragua.² Providence also threatened the *Flota*, which passed perilously close by the island, and the English would only grow stronger with time. The new governor had gone so far as to take matters into his own hand, outfitting four small ships – not at the king’s charge, he stressed – to chase after the pirates. The Spanish succeeded in locating one of the larger ships, which they closed with and boarded. Some

¹ AGI, SF, leg. 223, Antonio Maldonado de Tejada a Su Magestad, 24 noviembre 1636.

² The *desaguadero* was the riverine route that terminated at the mouth of the San Juan, where Francisco Fernández Fragooso had encountered the fugitives from Providence.

of the crew had been killed, but more than thirty had been taken prisoner. Among them was one who Maldonado gathered was a person of some importance on Providence. The Spaniard asked what should be done with his captives, cognizant that their treatment might set the tone for what was to come.

Maldonado's prisoner of note was William Rous. The *Blessing's* maiden privateering voyage proved rather less successful than the Providence Island Company had hoped. She had participated in the blockade of Santa Marta's harbor, but was the ship captured by the vindictive Spaniards. Rous and his surviving men surrendered at sea and were taken to Cartagena.³ Their stay there coincided with that of an itinerant English clergyman named Thomas Gage. The son of a crypto-Catholic baronet, Gage had become a Dominican friar after receiving an ecclesiastical education in Spain. He then spent a bit more than a decade preaching in Central America before deciding to return to Europe. Prior to Gage's arrival at Cartagena the ship that he was aboard had been captured by the same Diego el Mulato who had previously been entertained on Providence. The seventeenth-century Caribbean was a small world indeed! After this misadventure Gage had found passage as a chaplain for one of the merchants sailing from Puertobelo with the *Flota*.⁴ Their next stop was Cartagena, but even during this short voyage several ships were captured in the night. Gage remembered that "the greatest fear that I perceived possessed the *Spaniards* in this Voyage, was about the Island of *Providence* [. . .] They cursed the *English* in it, and called the Island, the den of thieves and Pirates, wishing that their King of *Spain* would take some course with it."⁵

³ Newton, *The Colonising Activities of the English Puritans*, 232.

⁴ This was the same fleet that the Council of War had suggested as a possible source of ships to reduce Providence. Gage later produced a travelogue detailing his adventures in the New World. In it he remarked that by dint of its hostile climate and general unhealthfulness, Puertobelo might better be referred to as "Puerto Malo." Thomas Gage, *A New Survey of the West-India's, or, The English American, his Travail by Sea and Land* [. . .] (London: E. Cotes, 1655), 198.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 199.

Once ashore in Cartagena, Gage was as surprised to come across the captive Englishmen as they must have been to see him, a countryman masquerading as a Dominican missionary. He recognized Rous, who had made a name for himself as a coastal raider.⁶ The clergyman was glad to have the opportunity to hear news of his homeland and “had great discourse concerning points of Religion” with the captives. From Cartagena the fleet sailed to Havana with Gage and the men from Providence, who were to be taken back to Spain. While in Havana Gage spent more time with the surviving crew of the *Blessing*, counseling the fractious Rous against raising his captors’ ire.⁷ Curiously, he also had occasion to visit Diego el Mulato’s mother, who lived in the town. Why would a European friar who had served the Spanish for a dozen years have felt compelled to call on the enslaved mother of a mixed-race pirate who had thrown his lot in with the Dutch? The easy answer to this question is the one that Gage gives, which is that Diego had allowed him to keep some of his less valuable possessions. A more interesting and suggestive one is that the renegade Dominican felt a certain kinship with the privateer that transcended ethnicity, class, and imperial allegiance. Both Gage and Diego had refused to conform to the roles thrust upon them at birth, and suffered the consequences, specifically in the form of estrangement from their immediate family.⁸

After checking in on Diego’s mother Gage would continue his voyage home to England, and from there after some time on to Rome. But like so many others he could never quite get the Caribbean out of his system, a dangerous attraction that would ultimately lead to his demise.⁹ As

⁶ Newton, *The Colonising Activities of the English Puritans*, 231.

⁷ Gage, *The English American*, 199 – 200.

⁸ The seventeenth-century Caribbean proved an ideal environment for behavior that transgressed conventional social norms in creative ways. Another example of this phenomenon that Diego, and possibly Gage as well, would have been familiar with was the “distinctive and remarkably democratic concept of justice and class consciousness” evinced by *les frères de la côte*, the diverse coalition of mariners and hunters who subsisted on their own terms in and around Tortuga. Latimer, *Buccaneers of the Caribbean*, 75.

⁹ See Chapter 5.

for Rous, he too made it back to Europe, albeit not by choice. Sevillian authorities committed the men from Providence to the prison of the *Casa de Contratación*. Rous repeatedly appealed to the Providence Island Company for relief while imprisoned.¹⁰ The shareholders turned a deaf ear to his pleas, but company treasurer John Pym eventually bailed Rous out in late 1639 with the aid of the English consul in Seville.¹¹ Like Gage, Rous would soon return to the Caribbean, serving as the land commander for William Jackson's privateering expedition during the early 1640s.¹²

The Providence Island Company had bigger things than Rous's release to worry about during the winter of 1636 – 37. The plague had returned to London after the *Blessing* sailed for Providence, compelling most of the shareholders to disperse to the countryside. The company did not meet for almost six months, delaying the sailing of the next supply ship for the island and further imperiling the colonists. When the *Mary Hope* finally did sail, the shareholders had yet to hear about the failure of the *Blessing*'s voyage. They were mostly concerned with the burgeoning numbers of enslaved Africans on Providence. Not only was this a dangerous state of affairs, but it was financially injurious to the company as well, "it bringing down the bodies and labors of men to such cheap rates that we shall not be able to supply you with servants as we have done formerly."¹³ With no other means by which to exert their authority, the shareholders resorted to veiled threats in hopes of scaring the colonists into line. This was a largely futile approach, particularly given the company's inability to supply an adequate number of servants and the low

¹⁰ See, for example, PIC, *Journal of the Governor & Company*, Court Proceedings, 29 January 1638 and *Ibid.*, Court Proceedings, 10 July 1639.

¹¹ Newton, *The Colonising Activities of the English Puritans*, 233.

¹² Kupperman, *Providence Island*, 347.

¹³ *Book of Entries*, PIC to Governor and Council, March 1637. It was suggested privately to Governor Hunt that a portion of Providence's slaves be shipped out to Bermuda or Virginia to be sold there for the colonists' benefit. *Ibid.*, PIC to Hunt, March 1637.

cost of slaves at a time when the demand for enslaved labor in the English Caribbean had yet to outpace supply.¹⁴

The company pursued a similar tack in seeking to dissuade some who had pledged to leave Providence if supplies did not arrive in a timely manner. The emigrants would face legal consequences upon their return to England if the island were lost.¹⁵ In their letter to Governor Hunt, the shareholders added that “his majesty takes special notice of the island.” It was “very likely” that members of the company would be making the trip to Providence soon.¹⁶ But as desirable as they might have seemed, Charles’s ministrations did not come without a cost. Even as the shareholders voiced a willingness to double down on their investment in letters sent by the *Mary Hope*, another possibility was being discussed behind the scenes. The Dutch West India Company had expressed interest in acquiring Providence. The island would serve to distract Spanish attention from the Hollanders’ presence on Curaçao and in Brazil. This transaction would have been an unexpected financial windfall for the Providence Island Company, allowing the grandees to extricate themselves from the venture with their reputations intact. Once the King was made aware of Providence’s potential strategic importance, however, he prohibited any such sale on the grounds that the price offered by the Dutch was not commensurate with its value.¹⁷

¹⁴ Reliable data for the price of slaves in the Caribbean prior to the 1670s is hard to come by. The real (i.e. inflation-adjusted) price of slaves transported from Africa more than doubled during the century that followed. Anecdotal evidence indicates that prices fell slightly during the foregoing period from the 1640s through the 1670s. Exports from the Caribbean increased more rapidly in this interval, though, such that slaves may have been less expensive relative to available spending power during the years that Providence was in existence than they would be at any point for the next half century. David Eltis, Frank D. Lewis, and David Richardson, “Slave Prices, the African Slave Trade, and Productivity in the Caribbean, 1674 – 1807,” *The Economic History Review*, 58.4 (2005): 676 – 680. The relative price of slaves and indentured servants is relevant here – the widespread adoption of enslaved labor on Barbados occurred when slaves became less expensive just as servants were becoming dearer. Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted*, 119. Nominal slave prices on Barbados may have fallen by as much as a factor of two during the first decade of the sugar revolution. Beckles, *A History of Barbados*, 30.

¹⁵ *Book of Entries*, PIC to Governor and Council, March 1637.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, PIC to Hunt, March 1637.

¹⁷ Newton, *The Colonising Activities of the English Puritans*, 238 – 239.

With their hopes of a *deus ex machina* denied, the shareholders were forced to expand their efforts to salvage the project. First they needed to find a competent leader. A stopgap in a time of crisis, Governor Hunt's term was to be a short one. But very few men had the chops to turn around a struggling Caribbean colony. Thus in mid-1638 the Providence Island Company turned to Nathaniel Butler, whose efforts on Bermuda a decade earlier had not been forgotten. Butler's commission gave him permission to participate personally in privateering voyages. The shareholders were cognizant of the risk to the new governor's person, but hoped that his long experience would increase these expeditions' chances of success. A softening of their stance against enslaved labor was similarly indicative of mounting desperation. In the absence of sufficient indentured servants, the company encouraged Butler to purchase one hundred slaves if they could be had at reasonable rates. A further caveat had also now become necessary: if Butler found the Spanish in possession of the island, he was to establish a beachhead at Cape Gratia de Dios instead.¹⁸

This note of caution was less pessimistic than realistic. The shareholders felt that Hunt was largely to blame for the continuing deterioration of the situation on Providence during his time in office. He was guilty of exacerbating the petty interpersonal dramas that had plagued the colony since its inception by leading a very public smear campaign against Philip Bell. This had contributed to the pervasive unrest that motivated many of the colonists to threaten to abandon the island without leave. The company could scarcely conceive of a graver transgression than this, nor long countenance the governor who had presided over such disorder.¹⁹ Disregard for the common good had practical consequences for the material wellbeing of the colonists, as "some

¹⁸ *Book of Entries*, PIC to Butler, 23 April 1638.

¹⁹ Kupperman, *Providence Island*, 269 – 270.

particular families” engaged in “riotous feasting whereby provisions have been made scarce.”²⁰ Hunt had failed to maintain sufficient control over Providence’s privateers, whose efforts might otherwise have lent credibility to his own. During the fall of the previous year a frigate crewed by six northern European mariners had appeared in the harbor of Puertobelo. The ship, which had previously belonged to a Cartagenan merchant, had been captured only a month earlier and brought to Providence. Before its cargo of sugar, corn, and honey could be sold, a disagreement had arisen between the crew and their unnamed captain. In what may in hindsight have been a somewhat rash decision, the six crewmen absconded to Puertobelo with the prize.²¹ The fate of these uniquely opportunistic mariners is unclear, but that they felt more comfortable amongst the enemy than on Providence does not speak highly of the state of affairs on the island.

And so it fell to Nathaniel Butler to do for Providence what he had done for Bermuda. Mindful by now of the trials and tribulations of transatlantic communication, the shareholders chose a governor with a track record of success in the Caribbean. Almost as important, Butler was personally known to many in their company. Philip Bell, long absent from England prior to his governorship, had failed, as had Hunt, whose lack of experience in the Americas had been all too evident. Correlation may not in this case have implied causation, but the number of men both familiar and well-qualified for this role was small indeed.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of political leadership to English ventures in the seventeenth-century Caribbean. Royal patents were typically quite vague when it came to the organization of local governance in the Americas, and Providence’s patent was no exception. In theory the executive powers of a governor could be checked by countervailing input from his

²⁰ Note the similarity to the woes that had befallen the food supply on Bermuda. *Book of Entries*, PIC to Butler, Axe, and Gladman, 3 July 1638.

²¹ AGI, SF, leg. 223, “Como se entro en aquel Puerto una fragata conducida de 6 marineros ingleses y olandeses que la robaron en las costas de Cartaxena [. . .],” Don Enrique Enriquez Guerra, Puertobelo, 15 julio 1638.

counselors, but in practice these handpicked cronies rubber stamped their superior's decisions. This led in to the appearance of all but absolute power in the person of one man, a state of affairs staunchly opposed by colonists who had left England to escape from arbitrary authority.²² With this great power came great responsibility, a responsibility that frequently overmatched the men who possessed it during the early decades of the English enterprise in the Caribbean.

The governor's position was further complicated by the fact that while his word might be law, that law was not enforceable until confirmed by company officials an ocean away. Caught between colonists and company, he was forced to walk the narrowest of tightropes or attract the disdain of subordinates and superiors alike. And if he somehow successfully did so, the notion of an autocratic governor as originally conceived of on Providence and elsewhere in the Caribbean would ultimately prove untenable. Struggling freeholders would not accede to constrained rights indefinitely and would do what was necessary to make their voices heard if conditions did not improve.²³ When the shareholders appointed Butler in late spring 1638, Providence was rapidly approaching this critical juncture.

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In addition to reasserting the rule of law on Providence and seeing to its defense, the new governor inherited the search for a profitable export commodity. The company instructed Butler to begin planting oranges and lemons “for the comfort and refreshment of the colony” and follow with sugar as soon as he could procure viable canes.²⁴ Sugar cultivation would not have time to flourish on Providence, but it soon would on Barbados under the governorship of none other than

²² See Beckles, *A History of Barbados*, 10 – 12, with respect to the evolution of this political trajectory on Barbados.

²³ Kupperman, *Providence Island*, 52, 121.

²⁴ *Book of Entries*, PIC to Butler, 3 July 1638.

Philip Bell. Citrus fruits had been successful on Bermuda, and the shareholders had recently sent sugar to that island to preserve fruit for shipment back to England.²⁵

A more pressing issue continued to hold the shareholders' attention. Their instruction to limit the number of enslaved Africans on the island had been entirely ignored. However, since their presence had so far been "advantageous," the Providence Island Company was inclined to excuse this disobedience. In the short term, enslaved labor would make up the dearth of new indentures, but down the line they were to be exchanged for English newcomers.²⁶ This was a particularly convenient plan considering another new policy that entitled the company to twice as much tobacco per annum from enslaved laborers. The grandees directed the colonists to careful with a handful of recently-arrived slaves. These "cannibal negros" had been imported from New England, and there were serious doubts concerning their fitness for employment on Providence.²⁷ The origin of rumors concerning their taste for human flesh can only be guessed at, since these were Pequots who had been enslaved in the aftermath of the Pequot War in Massachusetts.²⁸ Their stay on the island, which is not subsequently addressed in the records, is only the most exceptional example of unexpected diversity on Providence. Originally envisioned as a haven for a select group of staunch Puritans, during its decade of existence the colony would play host to indigenous from either end of the continent, both free and enslaved peoples of African descent, and Europeans of all nations and religious creeds.

This was made possible by Providence's location on the permeable maritime periphery of England's nascent American empire. The colony occupied a liminal physical and cultural space

²⁵ Add Mss 63854A, Jessop to Hugh Wentworth, 21 September 1635.

²⁶ *Book of Entries*, PIC to Butler, 3 July 1638.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, PIC general letter, 3 July 1638.

²⁸ Kupperman, *Providence Island*, 172. These Pequots had originally been intended for Bermuda, but the captain of the ship in which they were sailing failed to locate the island and sailed on for Providence. Games, "'Sanctuary of our Rebell Negroes,'" 7.

on the hotly contested fringes of the Caribbean, but in 1638 neither England nor Spain could effectively project power so far from the European metropole. Many sought to profit from this opportunity, among them indigenous and Africans afforded greater agency than peers in more well-trafficked New World locales – even Providence’s Pequots may have benefited from their new circumstances by escaping the daily malice of New Englanders who had recently been their enemies in a brutal conflict. For these Pequots and the many other ethnic, social, and doctrinal outsiders who called Providence home during the 1630s, the very peripheral-ness of the island allowed for a greater freedom of thought and action than was possible closer to the imperial core, facilitating any number of unlikely interactions across lines of race, class, and religion.

But circumstances would soon dictate that Providence might not be quite peripheral enough. During their usual piratical meanderings along the coast of the main, a crew from the island stumbled upon what they claimed was a substantial silver vein somewhere in the Gulf of Darién. A sample made its way back across the Atlantic, piquing the interest of the Providence Island Company. The problem was that this putative treasure trove lay outside of their original patent. Aware of this, those who discovered it had at first sought to keep knowledge of it from the shareholders. This design was thwarted when word arrived that an extension of the patent included the location of their find.²⁹ By a lucky coincidence, several assayers had recently been sent to Providence to determine whether the island showed any metallurgical promise.³⁰ Their task was to judge if the ore had value rather than refine it themselves. The shareholders refused to send over refining equipment, explaining that “we will not make ourselves subjects of men’s scorn and derision as heretofore some of our countrymen have done who sent out many ships

²⁹ A small patent extension from 1631 survives, but the one referenced here does not seem to have. It is entirely possible that it was secured after the fact – the language of the letter is deliberately vague on this point.

³⁰ *Book of Entries*, PIC instructions concerning refiners, 3 July 1638.

upon small trial and brought home nothing but dirt.”³¹ Yet even as they sought to avoid making the same mistakes as the previous generation of New World adventurers, the company was unable to formulate a coherent vision of a viable future for Providence. They would be denied the opportunity to exploit any silver deposits that might have existed on the isthmus, but even if they had had that chance a purely extractive operation would not have reversed their fortunes.

Neither would Nathaniel Butler’s leadership, despite his best efforts. Butler’s time on Providence is of especial note because he left a record of his experiences, a journal that provides the only English-language account of daily life on the island. It begins in 1639 and follows the governor for more than a year, constituting an invaluable record highlighted by his participation in an ill-fated privateering expedition. More than anything else, Butler’s journal underscores the difficulties that the English encountered in attempting to both figuratively and literally navigate the Caribbean during the first half of the seventeenth century. Butler spent his days traveling from one end of the island to the other, vainly attempting to satisfy the wants and needs of his fractious charges. His daily journeys were frequently interrupted by alarms announcing the appearance of unknown ships, which proved without fail to be either company ships, Dutchmen, or captured Spanish prizes. The temporary hysteria that accompanied every alarm makes it clear that the colonists were perpetually on tenterhooks, expecting the full force of Spain’s wrath to come sailing over the horizon at any moment.³² These fears engendered a siege mentality that empowered old soldiers like Samuel Axe and Robert Hunt, whose aggressive tendencies and

³¹ Ibid., PIC letters, acts, and instructions, 7 June 1639. Here the shareholders may have been referring to Martin Frobisher, who brought back more than a thousand tons of worthless ore from Canada during the 1570s. Roger M. McCoy, *On the Edge: Mapping North America’s Coasts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 70 – 88.

³² Providence’s lookouts were so jumpy that false alarms were also common. On at least one occasion, men were sent out after what proved to be only a star. BL, Sloane MS 758, Journal of Nathaniel Butler, 28 April 1639.

harsh discipline set them at loggerheads to Providence's civilian population, intensifying the colony's downward spiral prior to Butler's arrival.³³

Providence's military integrity was compromised by internal threats as well as external ones. An abortive slave rebellion had taken place in the spring of 1638, adding to the substantial population of escaped Africans in the mountainous interior.³⁴ The specter of slave rebellion was especially troubling on small islands like Providence precisely because fleeing into the interior to escape a mob of vengeful former bondsmen was not an option.³⁵ Nonetheless, local Caribbean authorities typically favored taking runaways alive rather than killing them on sight to allow for exemplary punishment.³⁶ Butler was among those opting for attempts at capture; he frequently organized expeditions to track down slaves who had escaped into the bush. These efforts were largely unsuccessful, as the maroons "were so nimble" that the English could "scarce get a sight of them."³⁷ The ease with which these men and women had adapted to Providence's barren crags must have shamed Butler and his peers, uncomfortable as they were while sticking to the island's much more forgiving lowlands.

When he wasn't entertaining fractious planters, investigating newly-arrived vessels, or searching out renegade slaves, Butler focused much of his attention on overseeing Providence's fortification and the training of the island's militia. Sundays offered his only occasion for respite, but even the Lord's day gradually became an ordeal as the sermons of one of the few preachers who remained on the island turned vitriolic. With all that took place on Providence in a short

³³ Kupperman, *Providence Island*, 181 – 185.

³⁴ Games, "'Sanctuarye of our Rebell Negroes,'" 13.

³⁵ A decade later on Barbados, Richard Ligon noted that planters' homes resembled fortresses, built to protect their owners in case of an "uproar or commotion" by plantation workers. Susan Dwyer Amussen, *Caribbean Exchanges: Slavery and the Transformation of English Society, 1640 – 1700* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 57.

³⁶ Zacek, *Settler Society in the English Leeward Islands*, 28 – 41.

³⁷ PIC, Butler's Journal, 27 March 1639.

span of time, it is easy to forget that it was originally conceived of as a religious endeavor as much as an economic one. The members of the Providence Island Company were nearly as closely aligned with the Puritan leadership in England as their counterparts in the Massachusetts Bay Company.³⁸ Twin aspirations of godliness and profitability impelled the shareholders' expansionary zeal. As good as they might have been, these intentions placed more than a few paving stones on the island's road to Hell. It was difficult enough to attract willing servants without discriminating on the basis of belief, and casting a wider net meant that the religious differences and tensions that afflicted contemporaneous England took root on Providence as well.³⁹ Doctrinal differences on a small island were impossible to smooth over, and each of the clergyman who tried to do so on Providence before 1634 quickly departed in frustration.

Religion friction on Providence reached a climax as a result of the words and actions of Hope Sherrard, who arrived on the island in that year. By all accounts he was a commendably pious man, but Sherrard also exhibited a terminally fractious personality. Quickness to quarrel was particularly problematic in the person of a preacher, whose primary role was to function as a voice of reason during times of trouble. Sherrard's radical and invective-laden ministrations had begun to serve the opposite purpose by the spring of 1639, when he exacerbated matters by refusing to administer the sacraments to any but the most hard-bitten of his already diminished congregation.⁴⁰ Religious disputes had long been interwoven throughout the pattern of personal conflict that threatened the fabric of society on Providence, and Sherrard's misbehavior severely dampened any remaining hopes that its cloth might be mended.

³⁸ Newton, *The Colonising Activities of the English Puritans*, 60 – 61.

³⁹ Carla Gardina Pestana discusses the implications of this "Great Migration" of heterogeneous religious dissidents for English colonies throughout the Atlantic during the 1630s in *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 66 – 99.

⁴⁰ Kupperman, *Providence Island*, 259 – 262.

Sensing more trouble ahead, Butler exercised his freedom to sail with the privateering fleet at precisely this juncture. The ships departed for Cape Gracias a Dios at the end of May; Captain Axe's misdeeds of several years before must have been either forgiven or forgotten as a handful of indigenous joined the expedition there. The next item on their itinerary was a raid on the minor Spanish port of Trujillo. Even though Trujillo was less than two hundred miles up the coast, their "over-confident" pilot misjudged the distance that the fleet had traveled and the element of surprise was lost. The English were still able to take the town without incident, but found it so poor as not to have been worth the effort. From there, the voyage grew increasingly star-crossed. While resupplying onshore weeks later, several of the sailors were struck ill with cyanide poisoning after eating raw cassava root. Only men poorly-versed in the practical realities of the Caribbean would have made such a mistake, and one of them paid for it with his life.⁴¹

Poor navigation and bullheaded leadership worsened matters. The Englishmen were unable to deduce where they were without sufficient knowledge of the currents and shorelines of the southern Caribbean. They sailed in circles for months, tempers flaring as supplies ran short. Some in the crew grew convinced that their voyage had been cursed. At one point that only man aboard who had his bearings was an escaped Spanish slave; his easy knowledge enraged the ship's master and pilot as it underscored their ignorance.⁴² After more than three months at sea Butler finally made a very un-triumphant return to Providence. The voyage had succeeded only in exposing the personal, logistical, and navigational challenges that hamstrung the effectiveness of the island's would-be privateers.

⁴¹ The natural world still had surprises in store even for one as experienced as Butler, who was struck by the splendor of a bird, likely a toucan, that had been killed by a sailor. Butler's Journal, June 1639.

⁴² Ibid., August 1639.

The situation on Providence deteriorated further during the fall of 1639. Both indentured servants and enslaved Africans continued to run away, often working in concert as Juan and Francisco Biafara and Herbatons had years before.⁴³ Sherrard's preaching became intolerable, and Butler stopped attending his sermons. Growing disillusioned with the colony's prospects, just as he previously had on Bermuda, Butler began to retreat from public life. Just more than a year into his stay on island, he embarked on a return voyage to England. Ironically, this sailing would quickly prove more remunerative than Butler's previous one when the crew captured a Spanish prize laden with cochineal only days after leaving Providence. Butler's account of this episode complicates any notion of personal enmity between Englishmen and Iberians. Most of the Portuguese sailors who had been aboard the Spanish vessel were set free off the coast of Florida, and a few sailed on to England. Capturing the ship was a matter of economic exigency, it just made sense – and cents – for the English to use their superior force when the opportunity presented itself. They had no quarrel with the crew, particularly since the Iberians had not mounted a substantive opposition. Lived experience belies the conventional wisdom that Spaniards and Englishmen were always at each other's throats in the Caribbean. Commercial competition was metropolitan policy, cooperative coexistence the peripheral reality.⁴⁴

Informal, nominally illegal trade between Englishmen and Iberians continued where and when it proved economically beneficial and politically possible for both parties. In the event that one or more of these conditions were not met, individuals had to decide in the moment whether the rewards of enforcing “exchange” on their own terms outweighed the attendant risks. For

⁴³ Ibid., October – November 1639.

⁴⁴ This tension dated from the earliest English efforts in the Caribbean. Spanish authorities initially allowed John Hawkins to sell his cargos of slaves relatively freely at Hispaniola and on the main; only after intervention from the metropole did hostilities break out at San Juan de Ulúa in 1568. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement*, 117 – 127. For more about the illicit slave trade on Hispaniola, see Marc Eagle, “Chasing the Avença: An Investigation of Illicit Slave Trading in Santo Domingo at the End of the Portuguese Asiento Period,” *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies*, 35.1 (2013): 99 – 120.

Butler and his shipmates in 1640, the calculation was simple. Spain was a hostile power in Caribbean waters, prize-taking had received official sanction from the king, and the armaments of a single merchantman did not pose an immediate threat to their persons. But their actions following the capture of this prize reveal that the English did not bear any ill will toward its crew despite the violence that had recently been visited on their colony. After the Portuguese were deposited at Florida, Butler's ship caught the Gulf Stream and was home before two months were out.⁴⁵

By the time that Butler returned to England, the shareholders' commitment had flagged. Although most of the men who had invested heavily in the island were quite wealthy, the inability to recoup any portion of their investment on Providence whatsoever had begun to seriously impact the finances of some. As early as 1639, it was no longer possible to raise funds strictly on account of company members. When the shareholders sent a ship to the Caribbean to take the fight to Spanish, it was underwritten by a trio of London merchants. In exchange, these newcomers would receive the bulk of any captured loot as well as the freedom to ply their wares on Providence.⁴⁶ Early the next year, the company contracted with another London merchant for the express purpose of supplying the island.⁴⁷ If the shareholders had been willing to delegate responsibility for the material wellbeing of their venture at an earlier juncture, its economic trajectory might have been very different. Instead the hopes of even the most optimistic among them had crumbled, rekindling talk of selling the island to the Dutch West India Company. With the king's eye firmly on the escalating domestic situation in England, the shareholders sent an

⁴⁵ Butler's Journal, March – May 1640. Given the difficulties that he had recently encountered in navigating the Caribbean, Butler must have been struck by how much easier it could be to travel three thousand miles than three hundred if weather and currents permitted.

⁴⁶ *Books of Entries*, Articles of agreement between PIC and Anthony Hooper, Theophilus Bolton, Abraham DeLeau, and Captain John Dell, 10 June 1639.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Articles of agreement between PIC and Maurice Tompson, 25 February 1640.

emissary empowered to negotiate a sale to Amsterdam.⁴⁸ But these overtures, likewise embraced too late, would fail. The Providence Island Company had simply run out of time, their scattershot exertions outdone by the potent product of the Spanish imperial apparatus.

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Whether or not they had been made aware of the trouble brewing on Providence by Simon Zacarias and Diego de Mercado as early as 1620, the men who called the shots in Madrid knew all about it in the aftermath of Gregorio de Castellar y Mantilla's failed 1635 attempt on the island. The threat that it posed was brought to Philip's attention during the following year, when the Council of War warned of the "inconveniences and damages" that would result if Protestant privateers were allowed to continue to use Providence as a base of operations from which to harry Spanish shipping. Delegating the problem to Caribbean authorities would not be practicable; they did not have the vessels or manpower to overcome the island's armaments and fortifications.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, no decisive action was in the offing. In this case actions did indeed speak louder than words, and despite the inflammatory rhetoric repeatedly invoked in relation to Providence, peninsular administrators refused to foot the bill for a concerted assault. Philip's counselors acknowledged that it was unlikely that the crisis could be dealt with militarily without their intervention, but seem to have taken on faith that it would somehow take care of itself. This was not an entirely unfair assumption given the rather spotty track record of English ventures in the tropics during the first half of the century.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Earl of Warwick to Mr. Webster of Amsterdam, 9 December 1639.

⁴⁹ AGI, SF, leg. 223, "Lo mucho que conviene se desaloxen de la isla de santa cathalina los ingleses que la tienen poblada por los danos que resultan y se pueden seguir y propone medio conque se podra hacer," Junta de Guerra de Indias, Madrid, 14 junio 1640.

But this laissez-faire attitude crumbled over time as reports of crimes against Spaniards and their property continued to flow in from the southern Caribbean.⁵⁰ Word from Panama City of the ongoing English depredations reached the Council of War in the summer of 1640. The timing was fortuitous since the *Flota* was to sail for the Americas soon. Would it not be a trivial matter to divert a few galleons to the island? The Council thought so; Philip agreed and gave the order to the admiral of the outgoing ships.⁵¹ The English presence on Providence contravened the terms of Treaty of Madrid, justifying military intervention. Reports of more than eight hundred slaves on the island were encouraging; their capture and sale would go a long way toward paying for the expedition. After routing the enemy, the invaders were to dismantle their fortifications and destroy their plantations.⁵² Francisco Díaz Pimienta, the admiral whose plan to construct a Caribbean “coast guard” had fallen on deaf ears in 1636, would put these orders into execution.

But the Council were not the only ones who had decided that enough was enough. Even as they were ordering Díaz to put an end to the English on Providence, the island faced a second Spanish assault. Don Melchior de Aguilera, the new governor of Cartagena, was fed up with the “many robberies and insults” that English and Dutch privateers had perpetrated on his people. He convinced the commanders of the vessels previously tasked with the recapture of Brazil to assist him. A dozen vessels of various sizes sailed for Providence from Cartagena on June 1, 1640. Had they waited just one more day to depart Cartagena for Providence, the Iberians would have been

⁵⁰ See, for example, AGI, Audiencia de Panama leg. 19, r. 5, n. 55, “Carta del presidente Enrique Enriquez de Sotomayor,” Enrique Enriquez de Sotomayor, Puertobelo, 15 julio 1638. The English population of Providence is mentioned specifically in these letters, as are Dutch efforts to collude with Indians on the Isthmus of Panama to reach the Pacific.

⁵¹ AGI, SF, leg. 223, Junta de Guerra de Indias, Madrid, 12 junio 1640.

⁵² *Ibid.*, “Copia del despacho de su magestad para que el general don Juan de Vega Bazán pasase desde Cartagena a desalojar los ingleses que estaban en las islas Santa Catalina y San Andrés,” Junta de Guerra de Indias, Madrid, 19 julio 1640.

much better informed as to the current state of the island's defenses. Spanish authorities brought an English mariner who had been captured attempting to defect from a privateering crew in for questioning on the second of June. The sailor revealed that Providence was defended by at least 500 men-at-arms and sixty pieces of artillery. He suggested that the southeastern point of the island would offer the least resistance, but cautioned that approach from that direction required careful sounding on the way in.⁵³

This poorly timed departure typified an expedition that was calamitous from the start. Several launches were destroyed during a brief stop en route to the island, and then the fleet got lost for several days – the English were not alone in their navigational difficulties. When they reached the island, the Spanish were surprised to face more than seven hundred enemies.⁵⁴ As they maneuvered themselves into position, contrary currents and fierce winds forced several ships far enough away from Providence that they abandoned the cause. Once the time came to send men ashore, the lack of up-to-date information and loss of launches proved telling. The invading force was smaller than had been intended, and defensive fire laid down by the English was overwhelming. In a vain effort to reach land, many of the soldiers slipped into the ocean while the water was still above their shoulders. Very few made it to the beach, and those who did

⁵³ Ibid., “Declaracion de Juan Simio Ingles,” Licenciado Fernando de Berrío, Cartagena, 2 junio 1640. The prisoner was questioned by one “Fernando de Barrio,” almost certainly Fernando de Berrío Caicedo, the grandson of Antonio de Berrío, who had apparently received the Caribbean posting that he requested from Bogotá in 1635. His fate may have been happier, if more mundane, than those of his father and grandfather. Berrío's presence in Cartagena here also highlights the ties of duty and blood that bound those who sought their fortunes in the seventeenth-century Caribbean. AGI, SF, leg. 135, n. 11, “Informaciones: Fernando de Berrío Caicedo,” Hernando de Angulo Velasco, Santa Fé, 11 agosto 1635.

⁵⁴ There were 600 people, predominately Europeans, on the island in 1635, and slightly more than 700 in 1641, by which time the majority were African slaves. Games, ““Sanctuary of our Rebell Negroes,”” 11. These figures would also have varied seasonally to a substantial degree; the force that opposed the Spanish might have been bolstered by the return of Providence's privateering fleet, which typically departed in early spring.

were slaughtered. With their infantry depleted, and no small boats left, the Spanish had no choice but to retreat.⁵⁵



Figure 3.1: Aguilera sent this map of Providence to Spain after his 1640 defeat. Note the intersecting lines of fire in the main harbor, the placement of artillery all along the coast, and the forbidding topography of the island's east. AGI, MP – Panamá, 61, "Plano de la Ysla de Santa Catalina," 29 noviembre 1640.

Although the English received warning of the invasion fleet, the men who had risen to power after Governor Butler's departure refused to take the possibility of its existence seriously. The conduct of these men, Elisha Gladman and Captain Andrew Carter, would only grow more problematic once the attackers made their presence known. As the conflict grew near, Carter had not "so much spirit or power left in him, as to use but the words of command." The colonists

⁵⁵ AGI, SF, leg. 223, "Relacion de la jornada y faccion de la isla de santa catalina," Padre Frai Matheo de San Francisco Capellan Maior y administrador de la armada de Portugal, Cartagena, 29 noviembre 1640.

wondered at the Spaniards' delay, reasoning that their enemies hoped to gain the upper hand through the defection of servants or slaves. Though this outcome was entirely conceivable to them, they were pleasantly surprised to see "the common sort" hold firm. Women and children gathered at Warwick Fort, which commanded Providence's northern headland. Before venturing out to meet the invaders, the defenders "gave an exceeding great show, which much revived the drooping spirits of the weaker sex."⁵⁶

The English commanders concentrated their forces where the Spanish seemed most likely to land and left the least accessible parts of the coastline mostly undefended. There were scarcely enough trained soldiers to man the islands' numerous forts because Carter and Gladman had dispatched almost half of Providence's strength to seek prizes. Many who remained were sorely ill-equipped, lacking helmets and shoes. As the Spaniards rowed in, they chanted an eerie battle cry: "*Perro, diablo, cornudo, sasasa!*" Those who reached the beach screamed "*Victoria!*" as they came ashore. This bravado faded as they struggled to find purchase on slippery stones. Examining the corpse-strewn shoreline afterward, the colonists noted that some of the attackers carried seeds, candles, and other supplies, and had their weapons strapped to their backs – prisoners would subsequently explain that they had been told to expect the English to flee.⁵⁷

Even as the Spanish were cut to pieces Carter barricaded himself in a fort overlooking the engagement, ducking his head at every shot. Once the outcome was no longer in doubt, the surviving Iberians asked for quarter but were denied by frenzied defenders. Several would-be invaders managed to escape into the woods, only to quickly be tracked down and captured by enslaved Africans. Despite willingness to share information regarding their previous posting at

⁵⁶ PIC, Leicestershire Record Office, Finch MS (DG7) Box 4982, Henry Halhead, Richard Lane, Hope Sherrard, and Nicholas Leverton to PIC, Providence, 17 June 1640.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

“Fernando Buck” – Pernambuco – and the opposition of many on the island, Carter had these captives summarily executed. Ten days after the battle, Providence’s inhabitants gathered at the “bloody beach” where it had taken place to give thanks for their deliverance. They built a bonfire and burned the “Gods and idolatrous monuments” of the Spanish dead.⁵⁸ As the flames rose into the cloudless summer sky, the colonists must have felt that their fortunes had changed for the better once again. But the nature of this second escape, and the manner in which news of it was relayed back to England, put the lie to any such optimism. The fundamental division between the faction led by those who penned the account and that led by Carter and Gladman is evident in the space allocated by the former to belittle and defame the latter. This “spirit of difference” would be made manifest again shortly thereafter when the account’s authors were sent from Providence as prisoners. They had thought to back up their words with action and remove Carter from office, but were thwarted by force of arms and put in irons.⁵⁹

This news was as troubling to the shareholders as that of the Spaniards’ defeat was welcome. Still espousing hopes of bringing their venture back from the brink, the shareholders had finally accomplished a long-intended end. They had convinced a cohort of godly New England Puritans to emigrate to the island. Captain John Humphrey, the leader of this group, was to be the new governor in Carter’s stead. Optimism prevailed; Humphrey’s commission did not even contain a clause concerning what he should do if he arrived to find Providence in the hands of the enemy.⁶⁰ The company had also prepared a resupply, complete with 100 servants. These are not the actions of men who had given up, despite the fact that their priorities were rapidly shifting. Already the shareholders commented that they had been unable to address recent letters

⁵⁸ Presumably referring to rosaries and other Catholic religious objects. Ibid.

⁵⁹ Kupperman, *Providence Island*, 293.

⁶⁰ *Book of Entries*, PIC to Captain Humphrey, 31 March 1641.

and petitions from the island due to “the many public occasions” in England that required their attention – the Long Parliament had by this point been in session for several months.⁶¹ Even so, none of them could have conceived that the Parliament would outlast Providence by almost two decades.

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But Francisco Díaz Pimienta might have. Only days after Aguilera’s failed assault on Providence, the treasure fleet had sailed for the Caribbean, and before 1640 was out Díaz lay at anchor in Cartagena’s harbor with a score to settle. As disheartening as the defeat had been, Díaz was consoled when survivors of the expedition arrived to advise him on Providence’s terrain and defenses. But he was also upset with the state of the troops under his command. Food prices in Cartagena were so high that many were starving, and they were as ill-equipped with clothing and other necessary materiel as their enemies.⁶² The problem was the organization of the force into an absurd number of small companies commanded by excessively-salaried officers. Díaz sought to dismantle this structure and redirect a greater proportion of pay to the common soldier.⁶³ This strikingly unequal distribution of wealth echoes the socioeconomic discord that had hamstrung the plantation of Providence for a decade.⁶⁴ Denied the means to provide for their basic needs, English servants and Spanish soldiers alike were disincentivized from performing to the standard that they otherwise might have.

⁶¹ Ibid., PIC to Governor and Council, 29 March 1641.

⁶² For more on the physical dimensions of life in early modern Cartagena, see Pablo F. Gómez, *The Experiential Caribbean: Creating Knowledge and Healing in the Early Modern Atlantic* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

⁶³ AGI, SF, leg. 223, General Francisco Díaz Pimienta a su magestad, Cartagena, 3 diciembre 1640.

⁶⁴ See, for example, Kupperman, *Providence Island*, 130 – 134 with respect to the company’s insufficient supplies of clothing and foodstuffs. In this case, however, the shareholders were quick to blame the colonists for exorbitant prices, claiming that they were caused by islanders’ attempts to resell goods for a profit.

As he dealt with this situation, Díaz received encouraging news from Jamaica. Jacinto Sedeño y Albornoz, the governor of that island, had captured a French mariner. This man had previously been on Providence, but left after being treated poorly by the English. The Frenchman related that those on the island had quailed at the appearance of the Spanish ships months before, and some had even sought to flee. The only men with the courage to defend the fortifications had been slaves who had been promised freedom in exchange for their service. But after the battle no such liberty had been forthcoming, and the captive was confident that the Africans would much less willing to fight for their masters a second time. And the English themselves would not offer much opposition – they were not “experienced soldiers, but pirates, only good for banditry.” These scoundrels would abandon their posts at the Spaniards’ first charge. The Frenchman suggested that the Iberians attack in April because that was when the pirates departed to ply the coasts.⁶⁵ Sedeño’s missive is noteworthy not only in that it provides further evidence of the deterioration of the situation on Providence, but also because it demonstrates that concern regarding the island’s privateers was not concentrated on the main. While Jamaica had not to this point been targeted directly by the English, its inhabitants still suffered from the disruption to Caribbean shipping that accompanied the depredations of the enemy. As such, Sedeño was quick to seize upon the opportunity to gain critical intelligence from his captive.⁶⁶ For his part, Díaz must have been happy to receive it. Although the notions of English cowardice were slightly too

⁶⁵ Sedeño also offered Díaz his services as a soldier; if nothing else he wanted to contribute a thousand pesos for the pay of the island’s garrison once it was captured. AGI, SF, leg. 223, Jacinto Sedeño y Albornoz a Díaz Pimienta, Santiago de Jamaica, 17 enero 1641.

⁶⁶ The “geopolitical literacy” of the men and women who crossed permeable imperial borders on the maritime periphery was often leveraged as a source of invaluable intelligence. See Phillip Troutman, “Grapevine in the Slave Market: African American Geopolitical Literacy and the 1841 *Creole* Revolt,” in Walter Johnson, ed., *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), for an articulation of this concept.

good to be true, the dissension in the Protestant ranks was very real and could be exploited when the time came.

Also of use was the Frenchman's advice concerning the timing of the attack. Díaz led the fleet out from Cartagena on May 6. He brought with him eleven large ships, 1,400 soldiers, and 600 mariners, along with supplies for two months. Despite the short distance between the port and Providence, calms and contrary winds lengthened the voyage to almost two weeks. Careful deliberation regarding where to land troops ensued. The defenses on the more accessible western side of the island were as stout as ever, and Díaz decided that the only recourse was to hazard the shoals to the east. Winds and currents complicated this endeavor, and once the Spanish were positioned a downpour threatened their cord and powder, causing yet another delay. By this time the English had repositioned their own men. There was talk of simply sailing back to Spain and abandoning the venture, but a change of plans was made instead: the invaders would convert their eastern thrust into a feint, taking advantage of the favorable winds and currents to sail back to the west immediately prior to their assault. Forced to march overland, the defenders would be unable to return to their fortifications in time.⁶⁷

Díaz gave the signal to attack at dawn on the morning of May 24. His scheme worked to perfection as the launches came in swiftly, evading cannon fire. And the Frenchman's prediction came to fruition – stunned by the rapid turn of events, entrenched English defenders on the beach abandoned their posts. Once again, a group of Africans opposed the Spaniards most valiantly, but they too were pushed back. The invaders consolidated their position, then marched to the governor's house and raised the Spanish flag. The next target was Warwick Fort, where the bulk of the English had barricaded themselves, leaving their remaining slaves outside to guard the

⁶⁷ AGI, SF, leg. 223, "Copia de la carta que Francisco Díaz Pimienta escribió a su magestad dando cuenta de haver recuperado de ingleses la isla de santa catalina," Francisco Díaz Pimienta, Cartagena, 11 septiembre 1641.

narrow approach. Before the final engagement could be consummated, the colonists raised a white flag of their own. All that was left for Díaz was to take stock of the newest addition to Spanish America. Though his countrymen had received no such concession the year before, he granted the European survivors quarter; they sailed back to Spain with the fleet so that they could no longer wreak havoc in the Caribbean. Not included in this amnesty were the four hundred Africans who the Spanish found on the island, almost half of whom had been hiding in the interior. This total was substantially lower than had been expected, and Díaz reasoned that many slaves had been moved from Providence to combat the risk of insurrection.⁶⁸ Apart from a handful reserved for the service of the king, those who remained were sold at auction in either Puertobelo or Cartagena.

Although he had originally been ordered to dismantle Providence's fortifications and abandon the ruins, Díaz had other ideas. He understood that it would be "almost impossible to man, much less supply additional garrisons in the Indies," but thought that the island was too important to be left empty. The Hollanders had already expressed interest – Díaz was aware of the Dutch West India Company's overtures to the Providence Island Company – and if they were to find it unoccupied and invest in its defense, Providence could quickly become an unassailable stronghold. No port in the Spanish Caribbean would be safe. But if the island was kept free of privateers, commerce would flourish. The admiral noted that during the two months after the

⁶⁸ Díaz's surmise was correct, but it probably did not account for all of the absent. Several pieces of circumstantial evidence indicate that a substantial number of slaves may have fled to the indigenous on the Mosquito Coast during the chaotic days surrounding Providence's capture. Miskito oral traditions record the arrival of a group of Africans via shipwreck, and the "most commonly reported year" of the wreck is 1641. If these were in fact escaped slaves from Providence, they might have been introduced to the natives of the Cape when accompanying Englishmen trading at the outpost there during the previous decade. And the first mixed-race Miskitos appear in the historical record shortly thereafter in the vicinity of the Río Kruta, just north of the Cape along the coast. Offen, "The Samba and Tawira Miskitu," 340 – 341. While no primary confirmation of such an escape exists today, it is a tantalizing and plausible possibility. Diverse maroon communities arose following shipwrecks elsewhere in Spanish America, notably at Esmeraldas in northwestern Ecuador. For more on the Esmeraldas maroons, see Kris E. Lane, *Quito 1599: City and Colony in Transition* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), chaps. 1 and 6.

conquest of Providence, more ships had traded at Cartagena than in the two previous years. Díaz asserted that Spanish citizens grateful for their deliverance from the English scourge would be more than happy to pay to support a permanent garrison on the island. Providence was so fertile that only thirty slaves would be required to provide for the sustenance of the soldiers. With the king and his advisors an ocean away, the admiral was free to trust his own judgment, confident that the success of his design would quell any retroactive censure.

But Díaz recognized that leaving sufficient forces and supplies to defend the entire island would significantly detract from his primary objective, the defense of the treasure fleet, so he formulated an alternative plan. He would focus on holding the *cortadura*, the narrow passage that connected the stronghold on Providence's northwestern tip to the rest of the island. These fortifications could be held by less than 150 men, two Castilians *tercios* – each equivalent to an English regiment – as well as a smaller Portuguese contingent.⁶⁹ The admiral left a trusted captain named Geronimo de Ojeda in command of these troops with the understanding that he would be relieved soon by a permanent governor.⁷⁰ Before the month was out, Díaz sailed on to the main to load his ships, confident that he had removed a persistent thorn from the side of the Spanish imperial behemoth.

Ojeda was almost immediately forced to grapple with the difficulty and thanklessness of the task with which he had been entrusted. Although he recognized the imperatives that had compelled the admiral to leave him shorthanded, the men and munitions he had been furnished with were not sufficient to garrison even the centralized defenses of the *cortadura*. Ojeda also

⁶⁹ While the Iberian Union was shattered by revolt in late 1640, it had still been intact when the fleet had departed Spain earlier in the year. Díaz would almost certainly have been aware of the altered state of affairs at home, and perhaps saw this as an opportunity to offload men who were once again subjects of a foreign monarch and might cause trouble later in the voyage.

⁷⁰ AGI, SF, leg. 223, General Francisco Díaz Pimenta a su magestad, Cádiz, 6 abril 1643.

requested a resupply since the island offered very little in the way of usable provisions. All of this toward the ultimate end of the enrichment of the realm, as the best way to open the king's purse was always to promise to refill it subsequently. Ojeda wrote that the erstwhile pirates of Providence had made off with no less than 60,000 ducats worth of goods in the past year alone and precluded the profitable exchange of much more.⁷¹

The immediate response from Madrid was favorable. As ever, "immediate" was relative in this case. Information was gathered as letters came in over the course of years, not days or months, and no formal deliberations as to the island's fate took place until the spring of 1643. At that point the Council of War ordered that several dozen African slaves be sent to Providence to raise crops and livestock for the garrison, as per Díaz's plan. The municipal governments of the surrounding ports would be responsible for the upkeep of the defenses and the soldiers' salaries, as the Council provisionally agreed to hold the island as a bulwark against Northern European aggression.⁷² This was the opening salvo in a convoluted administrative standoff that would leave Providence's fate in the balance for the better part of the remainder of the century, as the buck ascribing responsibility for its support was passed time and again. Attempting to redirect even the slightest portion of the empire's embarrassment of riches to its maritime periphery was a fool's errand. But this was a problem that the Spanish were lucky to have; both the Englishmen who escaped Providence and the grandees who had underwritten the venture found themselves no less embarrassed and without any riches to compensate.

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⁷¹ Ibid., Don Geronimo de Ojeda a su magestad, Santa Catalina, 1 junio 1641. If Ojeda's estimate is correct, the goods would have been worth roughly 40,000 pounds sterling. The exact calculation – based on a pounds to pesos exchange rate from later in the century – is $60,000 \text{ ducats} * 375 \text{ (maravedis/ducat)} / 272 \text{ (maravedis/peso)} * .5 \text{ (pounds/peso)} = 41,360.29 \text{ pounds}$. John J. McCusker, *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600 – 1775* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 100 – 106.

⁷² AGI, SF, leg. 223, Junta de Guerra de Indias, Madrid, 5 mayo 1643.

The Company's correspondence ends abruptly with the capture of the island. The final letter is dated June 27, 1641, after the Spanish invasion had taken place but before news of their conquest had filtered back to England, and reflects a perpetuation of the trend toward reliance on outside contractors. It detailed a contract made with an independent merchant providing for the transport of the contingent of New Englanders led by John Humphrey, who would assume the governorship of Providence.⁷³ But when these long-desired righteous Puritan colonists arrived, they found their intended island in the hands of the enemy. They were fired on by the Iberians and quickly fled back to Massachusetts.⁷⁴ As had been the case throughout the previous decade, circumstances conspired cruelly against the success of the English venture on Providence. Had Humphrey and his people arrived a year or even six months earlier, perhaps the imposition of strong leadership and injection of moral fiber would have righted the colony's fortunes just as the Company imagined. And an organized and disciplined defense might have stood a chance of repelling Díaz's fleet. But they did not, extinguishing any chance of a renaissance on the island. All concerned could only curse their fate and bemoan what might have been.

And curse and moan they did. Much of the post-1641 communications from those who had invested in Providence or been on the island when it fell concern the financial fallout from the colony's failure. The highest profile cases concerned the members of the Company who had put up vast sums of money toward an ultimately chimerical effort; Providence was the ruin of more than a few wealthy men. Among these was Thomas Barrington, a Baronet and relative by marriage to Oliver Cromwell. After Barrington died in early 1640, his son John was forced to petition Parliament for relief from the debts that he had inherited. The dispossessed heir opined

⁷³ *Book of Entries*, "Article of agreement made by the right honorable the governor and company of adventurers of the city of Westminster for the plantation of the island of Providence with Emanuel Truebody, gentleman," 27 June 1641.

⁷⁴ Kupperman, *Providence Island*, 341.

that Providence “was by the hard and undue dealing of such as then swayed the affairs of this realm exposed to the rapine of the public enemy.”⁷⁵ This unsubtle dig at the soon-to-be captured Charles and his Royalist allies played up the petitioner’s connection to Cromwell’s rising star. Barrington’s strategy proved a successful one, and his person and inherited properties were made inviolate by act of Parliament.⁷⁶ Less influential debtors had no hope of similar absolution. More than a decade after the destruction of the colony on Providence, these men were still suffering the consequences of their ill-fated investments. The sister by marriage of one such unfortunate feared that the social and economic burden of his default would be transferred to her husband. She had heard that the high sheriff lay in wait to arrest her brother-in-law over the comparatively paltry sum of 300 pounds – here, at least, the arm of the law was long indeed.⁷⁷ This man’s fate is unclear, but with concerned relatives looking out for him at least he had a fighting chance.

Others were not even this lucky. While those who started with much were left with little after Providence failed, those who began with little were left with nothing at all. One particularly beleaguered survivor of the Spanish assault later appealed for aid through the mediation of Hope Sherrard, the minister whose increasingly hateful sermons had helped to factionalize the colony during its final years. This man, Samuel Young, had suffered “a sore and long captivity under the hands of a tyrannical and cruel enemy, occasioned by the loss of Providence” and “lost all [the] estate that [he] there possessed, and [was] thereby driven to miserable and extreme poverty.”⁷⁸ Young was especially adversely affected by his imprisonment, but he was far from alone in having had his prospects suffer a severe reverse as a result of the events on Providence. This

⁷⁵ PIC, House of Lords Record Office MS 1645 No. 7, John Barrington’s petition to the House of Lords, undated (likely January 1645).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Essex Record Office D/DbA/02/28, January 14, 1645.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Cambridgeshire Record Office M28/7/15, February 14, 1652.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, Cambridgeshire Record Office M32/9/13, Samuel Young’s petition to Edward Montagu, prior to November 1642.

collective trauma would be carried forward by a generation of outward-looking Englishmen, unforgotten even as domestic political affairs were temporarily overrun by violent strife.

Chief among these crusading visionaries was the future Lord Protector. Connected to the Providence venture by family and faith, by the time that he came to power Cromwell believed the establishment of an English presence in the Caribbean to be every bit as critical as Robert Rich had conceived it a decade and a half previously. This worldview was informed during the intervening years by none other than Thomas Gage, the itinerant Dominican last seen visiting the mother of a notorious pirate in Havana. Upon his return to Europe, Gage's disappointment with his years in Spanish America manifested in a spectacular conversion to radical Puritanism and avid boosterism for English overseas expansion. In the throes of this new fervor he produced a polemical account of his travels in the New World that bitterly decried Spanish persecution of Protestants. Among the cases that he cited in support of this thesis was "the loss of that little Island named *Providence* [. . .] which though but little, might have been of a great, nay greater advantage to our Kingdom, than any other of our Plantations in *America*."⁷⁹ Gage's hyperbolic invective became a popular sensation and gained him Cromwell's ear, which influence he used to guide the Lord Protector toward what would ultimately become the Western Design.

When it came time to explain this renewal of hostilities with Spain, Providence's legacy was invoked once again. Under Cromwell's stewardship, economic and strategic ends that had formerly been the object of the shareholders' quixotic ardor became English national policy.⁸⁰ Spain, and specifically Spanish possessions beyond the line, became a target for the royal navy rather than privateers of dubious repute. The Lord Protector's aggressive stance was bold, and proved predictably contentious both at home and abroad. In the fall of 1655 these rumblings

⁷⁹ Gage, *The English American*, 78.

⁸⁰ Kupperman, *Providence Island*, 348.

compelled Cromwell to commission a formal justification for the war effort. One passage stands out amidst a narrative that reads like a mashup of the Black Legend's greatest hits and Thomas Gage's siren song: "And notwithstanding that neither the said Company, nor any employed by them, did give the least just Cause of Offense unto the King of *Spain*, or any of his Subjects [the Spaniards killed] diverse of the English therein, burning and destroying their plantations."⁸¹ The joint-stock endeavor in question was, of course, the Providence Island Company; the colony's destruction was the first and lengthiest in the document's climatic list of grievances. And so, in a final unpredictable turn, Providence became a rallying cry for the first extra-continental invasion in English history. Cromwell's fleet departed Portsmouth for the West Indies in late December 1654, but that is a story for another chapter.

In comparison with court cases and travelogues that launched several dozen ships, the final records of the Providence Island Company are prosaic in the extreme.⁸² The minutes of official Company meetings record a handful of sessions in the spring of 1641 and a single, brief entry in early 1642, none of which directly acknowledge the elimination of the colony. A seven-year gap, likewise unmentioned, ensues, followed by a final flurry of meeting between April 1649 and February 1650.⁸³ At this late date, the debts of the company had yet to be resolved. Matters had only become more complicated with time, as many of the original adventurers had by this point died, of natural causes or otherwise. Among the latter was Robert Greville, Lord Brooke, at whose home Company meetings had often been held throughout its existence. He died in action during the early years of the Civil War while commanding Parliamentary forces. At the

⁸¹ *A declaration of His Highnes, by the advice of his council; setting forth, on the behalf of this Commonwealth, the justice of their cause against Spain* (London: Henry Hills and John Field, 1655), 129 – 132.

⁸² More than three dozen, to be slightly more precise. Pestana, *The English Conquest of Jamaica*, 28.

⁸³ *Journal of the Governor & Company of Adventurers for ye Plantation of the Island of Providence*, Court Proceedings, April 1649 – February 1650.

penultimate meeting of the Company, his wife requested that the erstwhile adventurers hasten the resolution of their affairs in an effort to reconcile her husband's estate.⁸⁴ At the final recorded meeting two weeks later, letters to all Company members outlining their outstanding debts were drawn up, and those present moved to "pray an answer with convenient speed." They would reconvene in a fortnight, and hopefully at that point would be able to complete the decade-long process of tying up loose financial ends.⁸⁵

Alas this meeting, if it did in fact take place, is not attested to in the record. But the apparent optimism that it might achieve its intended end despite years of inertia is a striking metaphor for the English venture on Providence more generally. Through a combination of naivety and necessity, every setback was met with a grandiose plan for renewed success rather than rational retrenchment. As their debts mounted, the grandees were only more convinced that untold riches lay just around the bend as long as they stayed the course, almost as if it was owed them for the pains that they had taken. There was a providential element to this thinking: if "all events could be read for signs of God's intent" and "every happening had meaning in the grand scheme," then even reverses could be counted as positive developments when accompanied by the guarantee that the final outcome would be the desired one. Regrettably, this was not the way that things worked in a seventeenth-century Caribbean ruled by fate rather than providence. Or, as Diego el Mulato consoled Thomas Gage while confiscating his wealth in 1636, "*Oy por mi, mañana por ti*" – [. . .] to day I have got what tomorrow I may lose again."⁸⁶ The experience of the Iberians who inhabited Providence during the century's middle decades was living proof of this axiom.

⁸⁴ Ibid., Court Proceedings, 5 February 1650.

⁸⁵ Ibid., Court Proceedings, 19 February 1650.

⁸⁶ Gage, *The English American*, 189, quoted in Kupperman, *Providence Island*, 190 – 191.

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Despite the fact that the Council of War had ordered the governor of Cartagena and the president of Panama to send people and material support to Santa Catalina, no such aid was immediately forthcoming. Writing in late 1644, Geronimo de Ojeda railed against their neglect – the island was still populated exclusively by the soldiers who Francisco Díaz Pimienta had left there more than three years earlier. To make matters worse, the single caravel that had been left with Ojeda when Díaz sailed on had recently been captured as it returned from a voyage to the main, leaving the garrison completely dependent on help from the surrounding ports.⁸⁷

Several of Ojeda's more specific concerns speak to the tenuousness and difficulty of life on the maritime periphery of Spain's American empire. In keeping with the initial plan, he had focused his efforts on rebuilding and fortifying the northern tip of the island. But in the event of an invasion Ojeda and his men would not have been able to hold out there for long because the islet had no source of naturally-occurring fresh water. He requested the means to construct a cistern. Concerns about water were matched by those regarding fire. Santa Catalina had no magazine, so the Spanish stored their powder in the fort of Santa Teresa – formerly Warwick Fort – overlooking the harbor. Santa Teresa was a wooden fort, so the Spaniards lived in constant fear of the explosive repercussions of a wandering spark or unlucky lightning strike. More stone would be required to build a safe place in which to stow flammable armaments. In the event of the powder going up or any other accident, the victims were doubly endangered because Santa Catalina did not have a hospital. The ill and injured all had to be sent to the main and, none of those who recovered from their ailments had seen fit to make their way back to the island. One of Ojeda's officers had taken the occasion of a trip to Puertobelo to flee to Spain without leave,

⁸⁷ AGI, SF, leg. 223, Don Geronimo de Ojeda a su magestad, Santa Catalina, 10 noviembre 1644.

accepting the consequences of desertion rather than returning to what must have been a life of perpetual misery.⁸⁸

The penury and deprivation in which the soldiers who had been left on Santa Catalina were forced to live had recently been compounded by violence. The Portuguese regiment that Díaz assigned to Ojeda's command proved as troublesome as the admiral had imagined that it would be. Ojeda recounted that they had planned a mutiny, intending to kill the Spaniards and leave the island in search of English or Dutch ships. Once they contacted the enemy, they would tell them that Santa Catalina had once again been depopulated and was theirs for the taking. Step three would presumably be profiting from the disclosure of this valuable information. But the beleaguered governor caught wind of their "evil intention and design" and ordered the execution of seven of the leaders; eleven others were sentenced to the galleys.⁸⁹ Not only were Ojeda and his men isolated and ill-supplied, they could not even trust their fellow exiles. Whether it was called Providence or Santa Catalina, the island seemed to have a way of turning its inhabitants against each other.

In early 1648, almost seven years after the extirpation of the English presence on Santa Catalina, concrete action was finally taken to determine the island's fate. Juan de Somovilla Tejada, the same military engineer who had scouted Providence's defense during the initial Spanish assault more than a decade previously, was sent from Cartagena to assess the outpost's fortifications and report back as to whether they were worth shoring up.⁹⁰ Somovilla produced a detailed report as well as a neat map of the island. He stated unambiguously that the remaining fortifications were so negligible as to be essentially worthless. The unmortared stone walls

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ AGI, SF, leg. 223, Diego Añez de Balenzuela a su magestad, Santa Catalina, 29 febrero 1648.

erected by the English already lay in ruins, and even the vaunted *cortadura* would not hold off a determined enemy for long. But the situation was not hopeless: Somovilla had a plan to remedy these defensive deficiencies. If the principal fort were moved to the opposite side of the harbor, on the main island, the natural defenses of the island would augment even paltry emplacements. This would also afford the Spaniards access to the fresh water and livestock that they would need to survive a protracted siege.⁹¹

⁹¹ Ibid., “Relación hecha por el Capitan Juan de Somovilla Tejada ingeniero militar de Cartagena del estado y fortificaciones de la isla de Santa Catalina y de lo que necesita para su conservación,” Santa Catalina, 16 enero 1648.



Figure 3.2: Somovilla's 1648 map shows how little of Santa Catalina had actually been build up, as well as the reefs that made navigation to and from the island so difficult. The walls built by the English are marked with the letter A, and the former site of their principal fort with the letter B. Somovilla proposed that new fortifications be built on the opposite side of the *cortadura*, around the bay labeled "el portete." AGI, MP – Panamá, 69, " Mapa de la isla de Santa Catalina," 1648.

The engineer had some suggestions that were not directly related to defense as well.

Somovilla offered a particularly novel solution to the problem of augmenting Santa Catalina's civilian population. Rather than importing African slaves from the main, what about recruiting an indigenous community? Eighty to one hundred households would suffice. The Indians could

grow corn, raise cattle and pigs, and fish the waters surrounding the island. When enemies threatened Santa Catalina, the natives would take up bow and arrow and fight alongside the Iberian soldiers. Somovilla recommended that this group include single women to marry lonely soldiers.⁹² Nowhere in Somovilla's letter is there any indication that he seriously considered the possibility of abandoning the island. Local observers echoed the necessity of maintaining a presence on Santa Catalina. The problem of the garrison's supply could be solved by formally annexing the island to an adjacent political unit, potentially either the captaincy of Panama or that of Cartagena, the proximity of the latter making it the most logical candidate.⁹³ But years continued to pass with very little in the way of substantive change. More than a decade elapsed between the Council of War's "temporary" approval of Francisco Díaz's plan to retain Santa Catalina and their next consideration of the matter. The unanimity of opinion emanating from the Caribbean swayed the Council, and they signed off on the course of fortification recommended by Somovilla. But there was a catch: these improvements were to be made without cost to the crown.⁹⁴ Given the extreme difficulty that had been encountered in ensuring that the island be supplied with basic staples, this edict strains credulity.

Can officials in the metropole really have been so out of touch as to think that sufficient funds to completely rebuild Santa Catalina's defenses could be diverted from the pockets of their Caribbean subjects? In the same way that the breadth of the Atlantic had given the inhabitants of Providence leeway to evade the mandates of their superiors in England, Spanish authorities on the maritime periphery were free to privilege local interests over imperial concerns. That was especially true in this case since the island's geographic remoteness gave the governors of each

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., General Juan de Echaverri a su magestad, 18 enero 1651.

⁹⁴ Ibid., Junta de Guerra de Indias, 22 noviembre 1656.

of the surrounding ports plausible deniability in ignoring their responsibility for its upkeep. Perhaps the members of the Council simply sought to dispense with the matter without losing face by evacuating Santa Catalina or explicitly condemning the garrison that remained there to squalor or death. But the timing of the decree offers an alternate explanation. The English had invaded and occupied Jamaica in 1655 as part of Oliver Cromwell's Western Design. Although the battle for that island continued, the possibility that the enemy might gain a foothold in the Caribbean increased the importance of preserving Spain's remaining possessions. The ongoing violence was directly reflected in correspondence from Santa Catalina when Geronimo de Ojeda warned that an Englishman taken prisoner on Jamaica had mentioned that his garrison might be the next target of the Design.⁹⁵

But the protracted struggle on Jamaica ultimately precluded this eventuality, and nothing was done to ameliorate the situation on Santa Catalina. The Council tried to instigate change yet again during the early 1660s. First a letter floated the possibility of an *asiento* to supply African slaves to populate the island, since the council feared that any indigenous sent to there would die, as they were "not people that thrive in climates different from those in which they grew up."⁹⁶ This speculative missive was followed by another that outlined a concrete plan to bring 400 slaves to Santa Catalina, half to rebuild the fortifications and half to be parceled out among the island's Iberian denizens.⁹⁷ One can only imagine what the grizzled soldiers, many of whom by now had been on Santa Catalina for more than two decades, would have made of scores of Africans being assigned to their service had this notion ever been realized. Although it was not,

⁹⁵ Ibid., Geronimo de Ojeda a su magestad, Santa Catalina, 7 abril 1657. No doubt similar fears were being raised on every island within striking distance of Jamaica, but had the English sought a second prize Santa Catalina would have made sense for both tactical and political reasons. Its proximity to the main was as valuable as ever, and the rhetorical value of Providence as a justification for the Design should not be discounted.

⁹⁶ Ibid., Junta de Guerra de Indias, 9 abril 1661.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 24 abril 1663.

the unfortunates stranded on the island still succeeded in making lives for themselves. Around this time it occurred to authorities in Cartagena that it might be appropriate to relieve members of the original garrison, who were by now quite old.⁹⁸ They encountered a surprising amount of resistance in trying to do so – some of the men had become quite “naturalized” to Santa Catalina, farming the land to provide for their women and children.⁹⁹ It is not explicitly addressed in the records, but in all likelihood these were mixed race families, further complicating the social dynamics of the situation. A more gradual solution was proposed, whereby a dozen new men would be sent to the island each year to replace the ill and disaffected.¹⁰⁰

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Neither this solution nor any other would ever have occasion to be implemented. History repeated itself as the warning of the English prisoner from Jamaica, like Diego Mercado’s half a century earlier, proved premature but prophetic. In May 1666, a substantial Northern European force invaded and quickly recaptured the island with very little opposition.¹⁰¹ They allowed the Iberians who remained, some 170 or 180 in total, many of them women and children, to leave in small boats; these refugees showed up on the coast of Panama several weeks later.¹⁰² Spanish documentation refers to the invaders uniformly as Englishmen from Jamaica, but they were a fleet of multinational privateers operating under a commission from Thomas Modyford, the

⁹⁸ This realization was probably triggered by the death by natural causes of Ojeda, who had spent the final two decades of his life loyally enduring in an assignment that persisted long beyond its originally intended duration.

⁹⁹ Ibid., Diego Añez de Balenzuela a su magestad, Cartagena, 6 mayo 1663.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. Reading between these lines, these replacements were in fact to be petty criminals, undesirables, and other “disaffected” from the main. In a subsequent letter, Diego de Portugal, who had succeeded Ojeda in the governorship of the island, voiced his opposition to this practice, arguing that it would redound to the detriment not only of his garrison, but to the defenses on the main as well. Ibid., Diego de Portugal a su magestad, Cartagena, 9 mayo 1663.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., Juan Perez Guzman a su magestad, Panama, 23 junio 1666.

¹⁰² Ibid., Esteban de Ocampo a Juan Matias Fernandez, Río Chagres, 14 junio 1666.

newly appointed governor of that island.¹⁰³ Their admiral was a veteran buccaneer named Edward Mansvelt who was briefly the scourge of the Spanish Caribbean.¹⁰⁴ Mansvelt left a garrison of 100 men, as well as the Spaniards' former slaves, on Santa Catalina and planned to reestablish the island as a logistical hub for maritime depredation.¹⁰⁵ This scheme was scuttled in the short term by Mansvelt's untimely death, but its long-term prospects were ensured when he was succeeded by his second-in-command, a promising young seaman named Henry Morgan.

The timing of this assault may not have been coincidental, as the death of Geronimo Ojeda had recently thrown the island into turmoil. The aged captain's steady hand was the only thing keeping the baser instincts of the motley assortment of men under his command in check. Once Ojeda was gone, they became ungovernable, prompting his successor to send a letter to the main pleading for relief.¹⁰⁶ Estevan de Ocampo's missive made its way back to Spain shortly after Santa Catalina was recaptured in conjunction with a contemporaneous map. A detailed description included on the map offers a snapshot of life during the final days of the Iberian regime. There were 140 soldiers on the island as well as 309 civilians including around fifty women, close to 100 children, and more than a dozen free people of African descent. These inhabitants lived in a cluster of straw-roofed buildings defended by a palisade. The garrison was "woefully undermanned," comprised of "men slowed by old age and continuous work as well as those who have for their crimes been condemned to serve in this prison without hope of leaving, although they have fulfilled their sentences." The author alludes to the fact that some of the latter

¹⁰³ Alexandre Exquemelin describes a fleet of fifteen vessels crewed by 500 men, many of them Walloons and Frenchmen. *The Buccaneers of America* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), 119.

¹⁰⁴ Or possibly Mansfield. The buccaneer's origins are obscure – some identify him as a Dutchman from Curaçao, while others figure him as an Englishman. See, for example, Latimer, *Buccaneers of the Caribbean*, 138.

¹⁰⁵ Exquemelin, *The Buccaneers of America*, 120 – 121.

¹⁰⁶ AGI, SF, leg. 223, Esteban de Ocampo, 1663.

might be tempted to sedition or treason by way of escaping Santa Catalina. A coda describes Mansvelt's assault, which consisted of some 300 men and took no more than two hours.¹⁰⁷



Figure 3.3: The final Spanish map of Santa Catalina. Adding to the poignancy of the mapmaker's description, the inhabitants of the island had made its shores their own. Their names for Santa Catalina's beaches included the "beach of the student" [4], the "beach of the orange trees" [8], and the "beach of the burned houses" [10]. AGI, Mapas y Planos de Panamá, 77, "Plano de la Ysla de Santa Catalina," 1666.

Just how much the privateers knew about the state of affairs on the island prior to its recapture is difficult to know. It is certainly possible that word of popular unrest and defensive decrepitude had filtered into the wider Caribbean, but the deterioration of the situation on Santa Catalina was also directly related to those elsewhere that had dictated the timing of Mansvelt's sailing. The capture of Jamaica furnished the English and others who sought to chip away at

¹⁰⁷ AGI, MP – Panamá, 77, "Plano de la Ysla de Santa Catalina."

Spain's hegemony in the Americas with a base of operations, serving the same function that the colony on Providence had for a brief time during the latter half of the 1630s. By the early 1660s, the development of Port Royal had outstripped anything that had ever taken place on Providence. Perhaps most importantly, colonial governors were granted the power to issue letters of marque in 1664, a change of policy that would grant legitimacy to Mansvelt's invasion of Santa Catalina several years later.¹⁰⁸

Regardless of how it came about, when news of the English recapture reached Madrid the Council of War expostulated at length on the necessity of keeping the island out of Northern European hands. They studied the tactics employed by Francisco Díaz Pimienta to retake the island in great detail – in fact, the copy of his account of that earlier battle that was analyzed in 1666 is the only one that survives. A detachment of ships would be added to the next sailing of the *Flota*, and these vessels would be used to remove the enemy from Santa Catalina once more. The efficiency of this stratagem would be enhanced by conducting the assault during the fair at Puertobelo so that the armada could immediately make its return voyage.¹⁰⁹ Among the leaders of this detachment was to be the ever-present military engineer Juan de Somovilla Tejada.¹¹⁰ In their letter to Somovilla, the Council stressed the need to respond forcefully to the English action against Santa Catalina since it contravened the terms of the peace that had terminated the Anglo-Spanish War in 1660.¹¹¹ This echoed events earlier in the century, when the precise timing of

¹⁰⁸ Initially conceived of as a means of responding to Spanish aggression, this development was repurposed to attack Dutch interests after war was declared between England and Holland in May 1665. Nonetheless Mansvelt – again, possibly a Dutchman himself – certainly had Dutch crewmen, even as he sailed with an English commission and attacked the Spanish on Santa Catalina in 1666. Latimer, *Buccaneers of the Caribbean*, 146. Once more ties of imperial allegiance were subordinated to more immediate social ties and the promise of an economic windfall.

¹⁰⁹ AGI, SF, leg. 223, Junta de Guerra de Indias al Principe de Montesarchio, Madrid, 20 diciembre 1666. See Enriqueta Vila Vilar, *Aspectos Sociales en América Colonial: De Extranjeros, Contrabando y Esclavos* (Bogotá: Instituto Caro y Cuervo, 2001), 41 – 101 for more on the fairs at Puertobelo.

¹¹⁰ AGI, SF, leg. 223 Junta de Guerra de Indias a su magestad, Madrid, 12 noviembre 1666.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, “Al Capitan Juan de Somovilla Tejada ordenandole se embarque para la faccion de Santa Catalina,” Junta de Guerra de Indias, Madrid, 20 diciembre 1660.

Daniel Elfrith's initial occupation of the island served to dictate the legality of his settlement. While these sorts of diplomatic arguments were largely immaterial to men on the ground in the Caribbean, they provided a convenient pretext by which metropolitan policymakers could justify directives with the potential to ignite larger conflict.

As relations between England and Spain warmed in the wake of the Restoration, these arguments had real weight. The Earl of Arlington, Charles II's secretary of the state, professed to have been as surprised as anyone by the events on Santa Catalina in a letter that reached the Spanish court by way of his agent at Brussels. He stated in no uncertain terms that the assault "had not been committed with any order from [Whitehall] nor from the governor of Jamaica." Mansvelt had only been given leave to attack the Dutch at Curaçao; his other activities were purely piratical.¹¹² This may have been strictly true, but Modyford had supported the outcome insofar as it strengthened his position on Jamaica. And after condemning Mansvelt's misdeeds, Arlington laid out a series of grievances against the Spanish in the Caribbean. English ships had been denied shelter and fresh water in times of need and many Englishmen had been held and set to hard labor on the main. Arlington feared that the tenuous peace in the Americas would not hold in the face of these affronts. It would be impossible for England and Spain "to live in Friendship in those parts" if Englishmen were "denied the ordinary offices and courtesies of neighborliness and common humanity."¹¹³ This was all a delicate dance, of course – even if continued hostility toward Spanish possessions and shipping was not universally accepted in London, neither was it dismissed out of hand despite the nations' newfound accord. Merely by engaging in high-level diplomatic correspondence concerning the maritime periphery, Arlington

¹¹² Ibid., "Capitulo de cartas de Monseñor De Arlington primer secretario de estado del rey de la gran bretana a su resident en la corte de brusela sobre lo sucedido en la isla de santa catalina," Henry Bennet, 1st Earl of Arlington, 4 enero 1667.

¹¹³ Ibid.

tacitly endorsed the tactical and political importance that Santa Catalina/Providence had accrued during the preceding half century.

The Council was unmoved and the plan to yet again repulse interlopers from the island proceeded as drawn up.¹¹⁴ Once that end had been realized, Díaz's long-ago folly was not to be repeated – all remaining fortifications on Santa Catalina were to be destroyed so that it could never again afford protection to the enemies of Spain.¹¹⁵ In keeping with the pattern of events in the seventeenth-century Caribbean, decisive orders were issued only in response to long-awaited disaster. A diverse Iberian force arrived at the island in later summer 1667. Cartagenan troops including black and mixed-race volunteers and a small group of indigenous archers joined the ships that had been detached from the treasure fleet.¹¹⁶ The Spanish sent emissaries ashore to ask on whose authority their adversaries had displaced Santa Catalina's garrison. Mansvelt's crew replied that Governor Modyford had formally declared a state of war and entrusted them with the government of the island, putting the lie to Arlington's doublespeak.¹¹⁷ Theirs was a much more resolute opposition than that put forward by Providence's colonists at the similar parley during the 1630s.

But just as had been the case at that occasion, weather conditions prevented the Spanish contingent from immediately enforcing their sovereign's claim. As they waited for the wind to turn in their favor, three Africans – holdovers from the Iberian regime – rowed out from the island and informed them of the meager defenses of the privateers, who numbered less than 100. Despite being so badly outnumbered, these men put up a comparatively stern defense when the

¹¹⁴ Ibid., Decreto de su magestad, Madrid, 11 enero 1667.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., Copia de cedula de su magestad, Junta de Guerra de Indias, Madrid, 6 enero 1667.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., "Testimonio de autos sobre averse ganado la isla de Santa Catalina y asistencia que se dieron por el gobernador de Cartagen de Indias," Francisco Jimenez, Cartagena, 22 julio 1666.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., "Relación de la restauración de la isla de Santa Catalina," sin fecha..

time came, holding out for the better part of a day. They finally broke when the invaders put their stockade to the torch, at which time the contingent of *negro* and *pardo* volunteers led the charge to the main fort, where they replaced the English flag with that of Spain. When the dust settled, most of the Northern European survivors were allowed to flee with their lives, excepting a pair of Spaniards who had fallen in with Mansvelt's crew some time before and were sentenced to death for their treachery.¹¹⁸

In the aftermath of the second Iberian conquest of Santa Catalina, the old dilemma regarding whether to retain a physical presence on the island reared its head anew. For his part, Juan de Somovilla Tejada stuck to the argument that he had made when initially called upon to survey the fortifications: a Spanish Santa Catalina was critical to protecting the vulnerable ports of the main from English and Dutch pirates.¹¹⁹ This was not the only longstanding problem that remained unresolved, as the new governor of the island, Joseph Ramírez de Leyva, was soon complaining of delayed salaries and supplies, the shortage of women, and his inability to find a priest or surgeon willing to minister to his charges.¹²⁰ Ramírez's thankless vigil would not be nearly as long as his predecessor's. Spain formally declared war on England within the confines of the Caribbean in April 1669 in response to Henry Morgan's assault on Puertobelo during the previous year. The two empires renewed hostilities in the spring of 1670, when Iberian privateers attacked Jamaican ships attempting to trade peacefully. Modyford begged permission to retaliate, but the rapidly evolving situation "forced" him to act unilaterally.¹²¹ The Jamaican governor

¹¹⁸ Ibid. Officers on either side of the imperial divide reserved the harshest treatment for turncoats.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., Juan de Somovilla Tejada a su magestad, Puertobelo, 10 julio 1667.

¹²⁰ Ibid., Joseph Ramírez de Leyva a su magestad, Cartagena, 2 diciembre – 2 enero 1669 – 70.

¹²¹ Violet Barbour, "Privateers and Pirates of the West Indies," *AHR*, 16.3 (1911): 559 – 560. Note the lag time between the metropolitan declaration and its arrival in the Caribbean, another illustration of the logistical challenges discussed above, as well as the relatively free hand that distance gave Modyford, who was confident that his actions would be sanctioned retroactively once they proved profitable. Though much larger than Providence, Jamaica was still very much "peripheral" in 1670.

issued a commission to Morgan “to do and perform all manner of exploits, which may tend to the quiet and preservation of [Jamaica].”¹²² Morgan correctly interpreted this as *carte blanche* to assault any and all Spanish targets, and personal knowledge of and earlier experience on Santa Catalina made it his first stop.

His fleet arrived to face the downtrodden garrison of “the place of banishment for all the felons of the region” in December 1670.¹²³ A brief cat-and-mouse game ensued, as heavy rain dampened the privateers’ powder and gave the Spanish time to escape to the fortified redoubt on Santa Catalina’s northern tip. Hoping not to risk his men in order to overwhelm the outnumbered Iberians, Morgan sent emissaries under a flag of truce. With defeat inevitable, Ramírez agreed to surrender, but only if one rather peculiar request was satisfied. The invaders had to make it look good – some fighting would be staged, during which the governor would be captured while trying to “escape.” Perhaps amused, Morgan agreed, and a faux skirmish ensued. Afterward the privateers released the island’s 450 inhabitants, apart from three condemned men who Morgan took on to act as guides during his next venture.¹²⁴ The captain sailed on the *Panama*, his fortune about to be made.

Ramírez’s fortunes had taken a less desirable turn. Embittered by the inattention to his pleas and humiliated by the defeat that he had been forced to endure, Ramírez complained of the gross negligence that had compelled him to give up the island so easily. Why had his men not been reinforced, rather than allowing the enemy to “return and win [Santa Catalina] with the

¹²² Jeremy Paxman, *Empire: What Ruling the World Did to the British* (London: Viking, 2011), 19.

¹²³ Exquemelin, *The Buccaneers of America*, 174.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 176 – 179. Morgan’s magnanimity, as well as Ramírez’s willingness to surrender, speaks to the absence of personal enmity between the inhabitants of the Spanish Caribbean and the Protestant interlopers who prowled its shores. Material wealth and territorial possession, not demonstrating the superiority of faith and crown at all costs, were the *modus operandi* of interactions on the ground. This observation is underscored by the privateer’s earnest desire for Iberian guides – their local knowledge, not their imperial allegiance, was what mattered.

same ease that they won it before and that [the Spanish] won it with in '66?"¹²⁵ He was only the last of many to ask this question during the middle decades of the century. This line of reasoning was particularly poignant when it flowed from the pen of the island's final Spanish governor. Ramírez sought to preserve his person and reputation, both of which had been imperiled by his decision not to actively defend Santa Catalina, despite his best efforts to conspire with Morgan to disguise that fact – a commission would soon be opened to investigate and assign culpability for the island's loss.¹²⁶

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No matter what this commission's ultimate judgment was, it was not correct. Ramírez was culpable for the loss of Santa Catalina: he had not done enough to ameliorate the situation on the island during his governorship, he had been directly responsible for its security when it was surrendered, and, most damning of all, he had tacitly refused to fight to retain possession of his charge. But the unfortunate officer also could not possibly be blamed for the outcome: none of the men entrusted with the development of Providence/Santa Catalina during the preceding half century had succeeded in meeting the expectations thrust upon them from an ocean's remove. Many, like Ramírez, had presided over the loss of the island to an imperial rival, and those who had in fact sought to stave off defeat by force of arms had proven ineffectual at best. Ramírez's fate was theirs as well, and all shared an epitaph with the colony that they had sought to build and defend. It was a story of squandered potential, fortunes ruined, and lives lost, but also of expanded horizons, audacious hope, and unbridled opportunity.

Providence's legacy is ambiguous, every bit as contradictory and difficult to define as the foregoing narrative has indicated. What is not in question, though, is that for a brief interval of

¹²⁵ AGI, SF, leg. 223, Joseph Ramírez de Leyva a su magestad, Puertobelo, 13 octubre 1671.

¹²⁶ Ibid., Manuel de Salazar y Echaverri, Madrid, 8 julio 1672.

time the inconspicuous island was important to Englishmen and Spaniards alike in positions of power on either side of the Atlantic. Lived experience on Providence during the middle decades of the seventeenth century belied the stark oppositions between war and trade or plunder and settlement promulgated through metropolitan policy. The men and women who sought to build lives on the island's rocky shores between 1630 and 1670 certainly existed within the larger framework of nascent imperial rivalry, but they alone dictated the terms of their day-to-day existence, and in so doing crafted a world that did not conform to the whims of their superiors. Providence's story complicates the monolithic metropolitan perspective carried forward in time by historians either incapable of or not interested in contravening it.¹²⁷

The lives of the colonists, mariners, and slaves who shaped the Providence's colonial trajectory and extended afterlife also demonstrate "just how open the [maritime] periphery of empire could be." Unencumbered by staunch religious or national identities, this exceedingly diverse cohort absolutely did crisscross insular, cultural, and imperial boundaries, affording posterity with a vivid illustration of the physical and social mobility that historiography of the early modern Caribbean has only begun to explore.¹²⁸ Their creative navigations – both literal and metaphorical – set the stage for the imperial contest that began in earnest during the years immediately following the initial destruction of Providence. As scions of an established colonial power, Spanish authorities could not long condone the culturally and commercially transgressive behavior that an established Northern European presence in the Caribbean enabled. Still seeking to secure just this sort of presence, English legislators and businessmen continued to seize at any

¹²⁷ For example, a scholar can acknowledge that "individual motivation was as variable, complex and obscure in this movement as in any other, defying generalization" while simultaneously crafting a study that denies individuals the generalization-defying agency that this complexity implies. Andrews, *Trade, plunder and settlement*, 31. This justly-beloved work is far from alone in this regard, it is simply particularly appropriate by virtue of a title that explicitly sets out the trade/plunder/settlement trichotomy.

¹²⁸ Paquette and Engerman, eds., *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion*, 5.

chance to penetrate the sphere of Iberian influence in the region. The spectacular success of sugar cultivation on Barbados from the mid-1640s exposed the first chinks in Spain's ostensibly inviolable economic armor, but the military superiority that had enforced material preeminence for more than a century would remain unchallenged for another decade. It too would falter, albeit in a manner that even the most optimistic of Providence shareholders could not have guessed.

IV. “DISORDER, INSUBORDINATION, AND CONSPIRACIES”: REDISCOVERING SPANISH JAMAICA, 1603 – 1651

On January 24, 1603, a tranquil winter afternoon on Jamaica was disrupted by the unexpected appearance of a squadron of ships. The island’s governor, Don Fernando Melgarejo de Córdoba, had been having lunch at home when word arrived that eight unknown vessels had been spotted off the southeastern coast. Melgarejo immediately sounded the alarm and gathered the few men that he could, then headed down to the sea. There the Jamaicans found the eight interloping ships, which had already made their way into the island’s principal port at the village of Santiago de la Vega and landed men. Firmly on the back foot, the governor sent an “honored” – and apparently expendable – subordinate to parley with the strangers and determine who they were and what they wanted.¹

The envoy returned unharmed, and informed Melgarejo that the new arrivals were the vanguard of an English fleet under the command of one “Don Cristoval Naucur,” known to his countrymen as Christopher Newport, and they had come to Jamaica in search of supplies.² If the Jamaicans would willingly hand over the provisions that they demanded, Newport pledged that he would not occupy the island. Before Melgarejo had a chance to respond, eight more vessels arrived in the port and sent men ashore; Spanish estimates put the invaders at more than 1,500 in

¹ AGI, SD, leg. 177, n. 17. “Relación de lo sucedido en la isla de Xamaica de las Yndias del Mar Oceano contra el armada ynglesa que llegó a el puerto principal della que venia por ql della Don Xpoval Naucur con dies y seis velas,” Baltasar Díaz, Jamaica, 26 enero 1603.

² Newport’s early career took him to Brazil, Virginia, and the Caribbean. He is best known today as captain of one of the ships that carried the founders of Jamestown across the Atlantic in 1607. Kenneth R. Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering: English Privateering during the Spanish War, 1585 – 1603* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 84 – 86. Several years later, Newport was in command of the *Sea Venture* when it ran aground on Bermuda, unintentionally launching the colonization of that island, from whence the notion of settling Providence would later originate. Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 12 – 13.

total. Despite the rapidly rising odds against him, the governor refused to deal with Newport and began to prepare to defend Jamaica by force of arms.³

Melgarejo exhorted his men to “find God and their King and turn to them to guide their weapons.” Some of the defenders were to divide into small groups and set up ambushes along the path into town from the harbor. The municipal guard was to defend a trench dug further north along the same path with only a single cannon and an additional small ambush party in reserve. The governor sought to buy time by sending Newport an allotment of ammunition, the only of the requested supplies with which he was willing to part. This stratagem proved successful as night fell without an attack, and Melgarejo forsook sleep to rally a company of royal infantry to reinforce the entrenched guardsmen, where they anxiously awaited the enemy.⁴

At daybreak more than five hundred English troops began to advance “with flags and drums and trumpets.” The invaders pushed through the emplaced ambushes, and the Spanish survivors fell back to the governor’s position, leaving him with sixty men. Desperation dictated recourse to unorthodox tactics: a herd of cattle were deliberately stampeded toward the Anglo ranks, sowing disorder and slowing their momentum.⁵ Although overwhelmingly outnumbered, the human defenders “fought like lions” from the shelter of their fortifications and succeeded in repelling the English. Gleeeful cries of *Victoria!* echoed across the battlefield, drowning out the lowing of disoriented livestock. Melgarejo was quick to credit his unlikely victory to God and St.

³ Díaz, “Relación de lo sucedido en la isla de Xamaica.” Melgarejo’s decisions, and those of his successors, were always complicated by the knowledge that they would face an extensive review of their conduct as governor at the conclusion of their term. A pattern of accommodating foreign interlopers could and would be taken as evidence of collaboration with the enemy and punished accordingly.

⁴ Ibid. Note that Melgarejo seems to have considered bullets to have been more fungible than food. This judgment alludes to the difficulty of securing the basic necessities of life on Jamaica, as well as a plan of action that revolved around attrition rather than combat as a path to victory.

⁵ James Robertson, *Gone is the Ancient Glory: Spanish Town, Jamaica, 1534 – 2000* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2005), 33. Robertson cites several independent descriptions of the events surrounding the battle in translation, all of which broadly agree with the presumably composite account that made its way back to Spain.

James, who the Jamaicans counted as their patron. All who had taken part in the island's defense agreed that a higher power must have interceded on their behalf, since their salvation seemed to be a literal miracle.⁶

Newport's assault came during the waning days of the first Anglo-Spanish War, which had opened with the defeat of the Spanish Armada almost two decades earlier.⁷ Elizabeth still ruled England when her Sea Dogs touched at Jamaica, but her reign was also rapidly drawing to a close. She died on March 24, 1603, two months to the day after their defeat. Newport would strike a further blow against Spain while the Queen yet breathed, successfully capturing and sacking Puerto Caballos in February.⁸ This was one of the final engagements of the war, which was formally concluded by the Treaty of London in August 1604.

Newport's attempt on Jamaica was part of a war effort with direct historical ties to the era embodied by Drake, Hawkins, and Raleigh, waged against a Spain that was unambiguously an enemy both on the European continent and throughout the Atlantic. Newport's efforts were the product of a specific context, "an exceptional period, when the maritime and commercial forces of [England] strove to achieve modern ends with medieval means, only half conscious of their purpose."⁹ His – and Raleigh's – was a transitional moment when the English enterprise in the New World was still grounded in the bloody, extractive calculus that had earlier driven of the Iberian conquest of the Americas.

⁶ Díaz, "Relación de lo sucedido en la isla de Xamaica." St. James was the patron of the Reconquista, as well as Santiago de la Vega's namesake.

⁷ In fact, Newport's maritime career coincided almost exactly with this conflict. His first big break came after participating in Francis Drake's audacious attack on Cadiz in 1587. Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, 85.

⁸ Modern Puerto Cortés, Honduras. The initial Spanish account of this raid appears in AGI, GU, leg. 39, r. 13, n. 81.

⁹ Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, 222.

But the episode also bore some of the hallmarks of a different, nascent Caribbean paradigm. Most obviously, Jamaica was a novel target, very much the least of the Greater Antilles yet still relatively distant from the more frequently trafficked mainland ports. The 1603 attack was not strictly speaking the first of its kind. Sir Anthony Shirley's raid on the island in January 1597, which succeeded in procuring supplies in the absence of richer spoils, was likely the inspiration for Newport's incursion.¹⁰ But where Shirley's efforts elsewhere in the Caribbean had failed mightily, the very mixed results that Newport met with on Jamaica served as a springboard for depredations on the main.¹¹ Harrying the maritime periphery of Spain's American empire might not make a man's fortune, but it could certainly be a means to a more lucrative end.

So maybe the repulsion of Newport's forces was not such a miracle after all. What were the English captain's intentions in pointing his ships toward Jamaica? Did Newport think that there was real wealth to be plundered from the island, or was he simply hoping to duplicate Shirley's meager feat of six years prior by way of setting the stage for greater triumphs further afield? Even some of the victorious Spaniards believed the English had not been particularly interested in a protracted investment of Jamaica, but rather an expedient smash and grab. Met

¹⁰ Ibid., 64. Shirley's earlier invading fleet was piloted into the harbor by a Taíno fisherman, offering an intriguing glimpse at the survival – and resistance – of the Jamaican indigenous. Robertson, *Gone is the Ancient Glory*, 46. Like the English in 1603, Shirley and his men landed at Santiago de la Vega, albeit with a slightly smaller force. Rather than attempt to negotiate as he would several years later, however, Melgarejo instructed the inhabitants to grab what possessions they could and flee into the interior when he saw the enemy's strength. Once his position was established, Shirley demanded substantial quantities of bread and meat; the penalty for non-delivery would be the destruction of the town. The Spaniards' initial reluctance to comply was overcome once Shirley began to carry out this threat, and they sent over the requested provisions. After some forty days on the island the English departed for Honduras, where they would be turned aside at Trujillo before attempting a quixotic overland crossing of Central America. For a detailed account of this episode, see Irene A. Wright, "The Spanish Version of Sir Anthony Shirley's Raid of Jamaica, 1597," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 5.2 (1922): 227 – 248.

¹¹ After Jamaica, Newport's fleet captured the two principal vessels of the Spanish treasure fleet in the harbor of Puerto Caballos. Although neither ship was laden with bullion when taken, the privateers still made off with a rich haul of Caribbean commodities and Spanish munitions. Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, 180 – 181.

with a modicum of resistance where they had expected none, the invaders had made the obvious choice to cut their losses and find easier quarry.

And in any case, the gratitude and relief that prevailed in the wake of the defenders' unlikely victory proved short-lived by virtue of a second important development signaled by Newport's tactics. The attack on Jamaica might have been masterminded by Englishmen, but they had not acted alone. Among the fleet that had descended on the island were a handful of French vessels based out of Hispaniola.¹² The crewmen aboard these ships were not acting as duty-bound representatives of an imperial rival, but as self-motivated, opportunistic individuals. That Newport saw fit to enter into a partnership with their leaders reflects a novel understanding of imperial sovereignty and the rules of engagement in an entangled Caribbean. An ocean away from Europe, metropolitan allegiances were no longer a prohibitive barrier to either cooperation or conflict. By the turn of the seventeenth century, forceful interventions on these waters and the shores that surrounded them were increasingly divorced from monolithic state politics.

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During the decades that followed, Jamaica was one of the principal theaters in which this transition came to fruition. The preconditions for this peculiarly pivotal role originated in the island's distinctive early history. Columbus formally discovered Jamaica on May 5, 1494, during his second voyage to the Americas, anointing it "the most beautiful of all [the lands that] he had seen."¹³ Nine years later the explorer returned to the island in less happy circumstances when his diminished and storm-battered fleet ran aground at what would later be known as St. Ann's Bay

¹² Irene A. Wright, "Rescates: With Special Reference to Cuba, 1599 – 1610," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 3.3 (1920): 347.

¹³ Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, cited in Francisco Morales Padrón, *Spanish Jamaica*, trans. Patrick E. Bryan (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2003), 1.

on Jamaica's northern coast. Columbus and his men were marooned there for more than a year, encountering difficulties including scarce supplies, mutiny, and indigenous hostility before they succeeded in procuring relief from Hispaniola.¹⁴

Nueva Sevilla, the first permanent settlement on Jamaica, was founded in 1509 just inland from the site where Columbus had been stranded.¹⁵ The initial wave of colonists chose this location in hopes of profiting from the precious metals that would surely be mined in the mountains to the south and east and to facilitate inter-island trade with the proximate coasts of Cuba and Hispaniola.¹⁶ But as the focus of Iberian endeavors in the Americas shifted away from the Caribbean and toward *Tierra Firme*, the decision to settle on the northern coast soon became a source of regret. Jamaica's rugged interior precluded easy travel from the north to the south, the latter of which was not only more convenient to the main but also better-irrigated and more fertile. This contrast was drawn in even starker relief by the "pestilential swamps" that separated Nueva Sevilla from the sea and caused the inland breeze to carry vectors of disease rather than refreshment.¹⁷ The town was moved to higher ground in 1518 to alleviate this issue, and a new round of construction including the island's first church was underway by the mid-1520s.¹⁸

But by this time it was also obvious to all concerned that Jamaica's future lay toward the leeward littoral. Opportunistic Spaniards migrated over the mountains piecemeal, and by the

¹⁴ Morales Padrón, *Spanish Jamaica*, 8 – 15.

¹⁵ Many members of the Jamaican colonial vanguard were men who had been broken or disillusioned by their participation in the search for El Dorado. Ibid., 158. But within half a decade, women were making their way to the island as well. AGI, CC, 5536, leg. 1, f373r, "Catalina de Plados," 1 junio 1514.

¹⁶ Robertson, *Gone is the Ancient Glory*, 18. This explication may ascribe too high a degree of intentionality to the location of Nueva Sevilla, since this was also the only part of the island with which any Spaniards had extensive experience during the early years of the sixteenth century. Nonetheless, Jamaica was included in royal grants of mining privileges as early as the mid-1520s. See, for example, AGI, IG, 421, leg. 11, f41r – f42r, "Asiento para sacar oro con Juan Fernández de Castro," Granada, 20 junio 1526.

¹⁷ Morales Padrón, *Spanish Jamaica*, 26 – 28.

¹⁸ The royal commission for the construction of this church can be found in AGI, IG, 421, leg. 11, f165r – f165v, "Orden en favor de la construcción de la iglesia de Sevilla," Granada, 9 septiembre 1526.

early 1530s several competing communities had been established on or near the southern shore. The last and most important of these, Santiago de la Vega, was established near the present-day site of Kingston in 1534 and preparations made for the arrival of twenty households from Nueva Sevilla. These initial settlers would soon be joined by an additional thirty Portuguese families that had been given license to immigrate. Jamaica's capital was officially relocated to the "villa de la Vega" shortly thereafter, and it would remain the administrative and commercial center of the island throughout the Spanish era.¹⁹

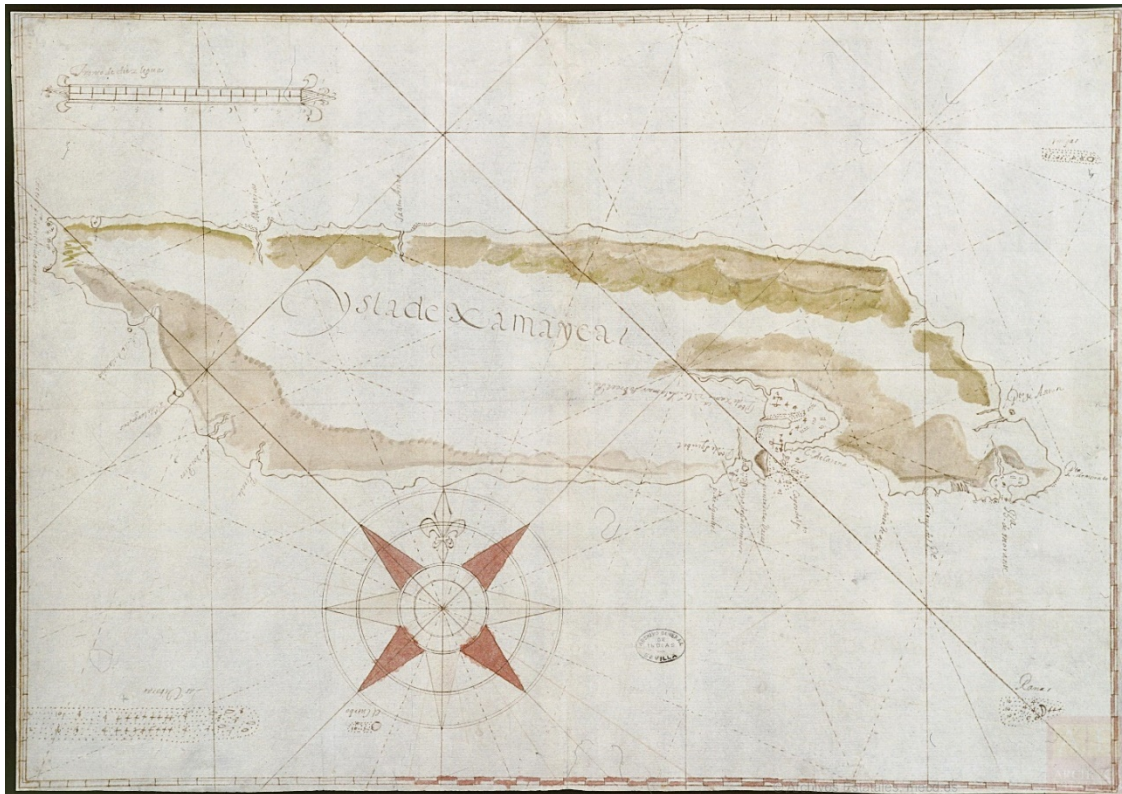


Figure 4.1: This seventeenth-century map of Jamaica emphasizes the port of Santiago de la Vega in the island's southeast. The location of Nueva Sevilla in the northwest is marked only by the mention of St. Ann's Bay. AGI, MP – Santo Domingo, 53, "Ysla de Xamaica," c. 1656.

¹⁹ Robertson, *Gone is the Ancient Glory*, 21 – 24, 30. Santiago de la Vega prevailed over its southern competitors for several different reasons. Oristán, near Jamaica's southwestern corner, was too distant from the island's existing infrastructure, while Port Esquivel, twenty miles to the west of the villa de la Vega, was judged too vulnerable due to its immediate proximity to the coast.

Just two years after Santiago de la Vega's founding, Jamaica's historical trajectory began to take shape. The Capitulations of Santa Fe, secured by Columbus from Ferdinand and Isabella prior to his first voyage, had promised the navigator several substantial concessions in exchange for his overseas efforts.²⁰ Columbus was denied many of these rights and privileges following his 1500 arrest, triggering a legal battle that would persist long after his death six years later. In 1536, Columbus's widow accepted a settlement that included a substantial annual pension, the title of Admiral of the Indies for her husband's heirs, and "entail of the island of Jamaica."²¹ No longer a royal colony, the island's prospects changed overnight. Its development would proceed based on the priorities of the Columbus family and at a distinct remove from the larger Iberian project in the Americas.

During the middle decades of the sixteenth century Jamaica suffered from the combined effect of a number of external forces pushing flows of people, supplies, and investment from the Caribbean toward the main.²² First the discovery and conquest of the Aztec and Inca empires during the 1520s and 1530s drew ambitious Spaniards to *Tierra Firme*, then the settlements and *encomiendas* that sprang up in the wake of these campaigns ensured that metropolitan attention and financial support would continue to disproportionately prioritize Central and South America.

²⁰ The Capitulations appear in Archivo de la Corona de Aragón, Cancillería, Registros, n. 3569, "Fernando II el Católico. Diversorum Sigilli Secreti 9. [Cathalonie et Insularum]," f135v – f136v. Among other things, Columbus would become Viceroy of any lands that he might discover and would receive ten percent of the revenues derived from them in perpetuity. The Crown was willing to offer these outlandish considerations because his prospects for success seemed so remote.

²¹ Morales Padrón, *Spanish Jamaica*, 62 – 64. She was also granted title to a large portion of mainland Central America between the Providence Island Company's future outpost at Cape Gratia a Dios and Portobelo; Jamaica was an afterthought intended to serve as a base of operations for the colonization of this region. Charles I's official concession of the island's ecclesiastical administration to Luis Colón, Columbus's grandson, can be found at AGI, Mapas – Documentos Reales, 1, "Real Provisión de Carlos I concediendo a don Luis Colón, marqués de Jamaica y nieto del descubridor, facultad para proveer la abadía y otros cargos eclesiásticos de dicha island," 17 febrero 1537.

²² The Antilles were the destination of roughly half of Spanish emigrants to the New World prior to Cortés's 1519 arrival in Mexico. During the next two decades, almost three times as many colonists sailed to New Spain as to the Caribbean islands. By mid-century, less than ten percent of peninsular Spaniards who came to the Americas arrived in the Antilles. Peter Boyd-Bowman, "Patterns of Spanish Emigration to the Indies until 1600," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 56.4 (1976): 602.

Many of the social, economic, and military problems that would plague Jamaica for a century to come originated during these decades of stagnation and neglect. As on the mainland, the major demographic and economic changes that took place during this period resulted from forces that had been at work nearly from the moment of discovery, namely the destruction of the island's indigenous population and introduction of African slaves by way of replacement.²³

Per Bartolomé de las Casas, there were as many as 600,000 Taíno Indians on Jamaica and Puerto Rico in 1492.²⁴ By the time the Dominican reformer penned his *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* a half century later, las Casas estimated that no more than two hundred indigenous remained, their numbers cruelly reduced by “many huge and infamous cruelties,” hard labor and the complete disregard of their new Spanish masters chief among them.²⁵ Las Casas's agenda certainly colored this account – the most recent research estimates that Jamaica's pre-contact Taíno population was at least an order of magnitude smaller than he indicates – but the fact remains that a large indigenous community was decimated in the span of less than two generations.²⁶ At least some of the Taíno may have been absent rather than deceased. Fleeing

²³ For a detailed discussion of similar processes at work in contemporaneous Central America, see Murdo K. MacLeod, *Spanish Central America: A Socioeconomic History, 1520 – 1720* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2008), 96 – 119.

²⁴ The island was colonized by the Taíno, themselves an offshoot of the Arawak people of northern Guiana, around AD 600. Native settlements were concentrated on the coast, near several of the sites that the Spaniards would later occupy (not coincidentally, due to agricultural and defense considerations). Lesley-Gail Atkinson, ed., *The Earliest Inhabitants: The Dynamics of the Jamaican Taíno* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2006), 1 – 7.

²⁵ Bartolomé de las Casas, *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*, ed. José Miguel Martínez-Torrejón (Alicante, Spain: Digitalia, 2006), 124. For more on the fate of the Caribbean's indigenous during this period, see Erin Woodruff Stone, *Indian Harvest: The Rise of the Indigenous Slave Trade and Diaspora from Española to the Circum-Caribbean, 1492 – 1542* (Dissertation: Vanderbilt University, 2014).

²⁶ A 2013 study estimates the pre-Colombian indigenous population of Jamaica to have been 40,000, comparable to that of Puerto Rico (50,000) but less than those of Hispaniola and Cuba (100,000 and 80,000, respectively). Ángel Rosenblat, “La Población Americana en 1492,” in *Los Taínos en 1492: El Debate Demográfico*, Frank Moya Pons and Rosario Flores Paz, eds. (Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic: Academia Dominicana de la Historia, 2013), 30. Las Casas's “after” figure can be corroborated in the archive. A 1611 account counts 64 “Indians native to the island” on Jamaica. AGI, SD, leg. 177, “Relación verdadera y breve de Jamaica,” Bernardo de Balbuena, Jamaica, 16 julio 1611.

into the inaccessible interior proved the most effective form of resistance, foreshadowing events of the centuries that followed.²⁷

The replacement of the depleted indigenous workforce with Africans began as early as 1523, when a consignment of 300 slaves was allocated to Jamaica. Terms were drawn up with Portuguese traders for the importation of an additional 700 Africans several years later, but just how many of this initial thousand made it to the island is unclear. Regardless, enslaved laborers certainly participated in the construction of the new settlements in southern Jamaica during the 1530s.²⁸ The influx of slaves slowed after the midpoint of the century as demand on the main rapidly outstripped supply.²⁹ As the decades passed, it became increasingly difficult to procure Africans by legal means. The labor shortage that resulted significantly complicated efforts to transform Jamaica into a productive unit of Spain's American empire.³⁰

By the final years of the sixteenth century, the situation on the island seemed dire. In 1585, a retired soldier named Pedro Lope Lasso de la Vega beseeched metropolitan authorities for relief. Lasso wrote that Santiago de la Vega had been "destroyed by pirates." He feared that if nothing was done the interlopers would return and capture Jamaica, then fortify the island as a

²⁷ Morales Padrón, *Spanish Jamaica*, 149. An expedition was sent into the interior in 1601 to subdue Indians living independently in the mountains. AGI, SD, leg. 177, Baltasar Díaz, 12 diciembre 1601. Relatedly, several scholars have argued that the etymological origins of the Spanish word "cimarrón" can be traced to the Taíno word for "fugitive." José Juan Arrom, "Cimarrón: apuntes sobre sus primeras documentaciones y su probable origen," *Revista Española de Antropología Americana* 12.10 (1983): 47 – 57.

²⁸ During the late 1520s several Spaniards received permission to import a small number of slaves on their own account, in one case explicitly to search for gold. AGI, IG, 421, leg. 12, f250v – f251r, "Licencias de esclavos," Burgos, 13 diciembre 1527. Several years later María de Toledo, Vicereine of Santo Domingo and wife of Columbus's son Diego, was permitted to import 100 slaves for farming and animal husbandry on Hispaniola, Cuba, and Jamaica. AGI, IG, 422, leg. 16, f148r, "Real Cédula dando licencia a la vierreina doña María de Toledo para llevar a Indias 100 esclavos," c. 24 diciembre 1534.

²⁹ Morales Padrón, *Spanish Jamaica*, 153 – 157. As early as 1526, Jamaican officials were reprimanded for taking slaves from consignments intended for Hispaniola. AGI, IG, 421, leg. 11, f260r, "Orden sobre el repartimiento de esclavos hecho por los oidores de Santo Domingo," Granada, 26 octubre 1526.

³⁰ In 1611, there were 558 slaves (not explicitly identified as African) on the island as well as 107 free blacks living among the Spaniards and a maroon population of unspecified size in the interior. Balbuena, "Relación verdadera y breve de Jamaica."

new headquarters for their nefarious design against Spain. The solution that he proposed was to mandate the migration of one hundred married couples from one of the surrounding territories; these newcomers could help to rebuild and repopulate the island.³¹

Six months later, Jamaica's governor proposed a different solution.³² He agreed with Lasso regarding the gravity of the island's predicament. The governor opined that if "the enemy is able to fortify himself [on Jamaica], all of the Indies and even the fleets would be in grave danger." But instead of seeking salvation through demographic renewal, he thought that the cure for the ills of his jurisdiction would be to revert the island to royal control. He felt that the heirs of Columbus were only interested in maintaining the status quo on Jamaica, and if they were never turned from this course the worst would eventually happen.³³ As the island's precarious position persisted during the decades that followed, this argument would be made repeatedly.

Neither of these complaints received satisfaction prior to Fernando Melgarejo de Córdoba's appointment as governor of Jamaica in 1596. Their urgency was only heightened after Anthony Shirley's attack on the island during the following year, but still peninsular authorities did not take decisive action. Melgarejo was a reformer, or at least sought to style himself as one. Shortly into his term he claimed that he had established Jamaica's first coastal defenses, sent expeditions against pirates occupying the island's western coast, and was working toward the reduction of an indigenous population living independently in the interior. Contemporaneous accounts from his constituents paint a rather different picture, portraying the governor as greedy,

³¹ Lope cited a remarkable career in support of his request. He had participated in the settlement of Mérida on the Yucatán Peninsula as well as that of Trujillo, where he had helped to foil the schemes of the "tyrant" Lope de Aguirre by "taking his minions prisoner." AGI, SD, leg. 177, n. 60, Pedro Lopez Lasso de la Vega, Santiago de la Vega, 8 mayo 1585.

³² The document is unsigned, and it is not entirely clear who governed the island in 1586. It may have been a lawyer with the surname of Delgado, or possibly Diego Fernández de Mercado. Morales Padrón, *Spanish Jamaica*, 76.

³³ AGI, SD, leg. 177, n. 53, Jamaica, 22 febrero 1586.

duplicitous, and power-hungry – a man who sought to manipulate Jamaica’s weakness for his own gain.³⁴

A climate of palpable disunion prevailed on the island immediately prior to Christopher Newport’s arrival in January 1603. Whether or not the opportunistic English knew about this state of affairs is impossible to determine, but it does make it all the more remarkable that the Spaniards were able to repulse them. Between emerging from the trenches victorious and starting to round up their bovine auxiliaries, Melgarejo and his countrymen must have wondered what the future held for them.³⁵ Would Philip and his advisors finally recognize that Jamaica was in danger now that it had been directly targeted by the enemy, or would the island’s economy and social fabric continue their long slide toward oblivion?

The answer to this question would prove critical in determining Jamaica’s fate. Just as England’s project in the Americas reached a crossroads during the years surrounding the turn of the seventeenth century, authorities in the Spanish metropole had some decisions to make when word of Newport’s assault arrived in the spring of 1603. The Crown possessed the resources to shore up the empire’s threatened maritime periphery in the southern Caribbean, but doing so would require stinting on necessary improvements closer to the developing imperial core on the main. Close to a century after the conquest, metropolitan attention remained focused on the viceroyalties that had replaced the Aztec and Inca empires. Holding Santiago de la Vega and similarly afflicted settlements in the Lesser Antilles permanently would also require repeated

³⁴ Morales Padrón, *Spanish Jamaica*, 79. See AGI, SD, leg. 177, n. 39, junio 1604 regarding Melgarejo’s alleged misdeeds. Jamaica’s leading citizens accused the governor of misusing of public funds for his own benefit, flaunting imperial commercial regulations, and shamelessly resorting to nepotism in selecting his subordinates.

³⁵ Personally, Melgarejo hoped that he would be rewarded for his strong leadership. An account of his services produced two years later proclaimed that he had “won many victories, slain many enemies, and captured many vessels.” AGI, SD, leg. 17, n. 8, “Informaciones: Fernando Melgarejo de Córdoba,” Santo Domingo, noviembre 1605.

outlays of manpower and materiel, since the islands could not be held indefinitely without some semblance of a militarized population.

These costs would have to be weighed against the potential benefit of a fortified Jamaica as a first line of defense against Northern European aggression.³⁶ The names of the principal Elizabethan privateers continued to be invoked to compel peninsular authorities to underwrite defensive improvements, but the effectiveness of this argument decreased as politics were gradually abstracted from piracy. This effect was compounded by James I's ascension to the English throne in March 1603, which raised hopes that a lasting peace in the Caribbean might be possible and supplied yet another excuse to defer material support for the lesser colonies of the Indies.³⁷ The geopolitical negotiation that ensued was part and parcel of an entangled Atlantic in which Spanish policy was dictated as much by England's expanding colonial enterprise as it was by the wants and needs of Iberian colonists.

During the decades that followed, Jamaica's downtrodden denizens fought for their lives on two fronts: literally, on and around the coastlines of their home, and figuratively in the halls of El Escorial and the meeting rooms of the *Casa de Contratación*, which oversaw the finances of Spain's overseas empire. Inextricably linked and yet dissociated in their respective means and ends, the intertwined struggles on either side of the Atlantic had implications that extended far

³⁶ Founded in 1533, Cartagena had to wait more than half a century before a military engineer was commissioned to see to its defenses. There were no stone fortifications in the city as late as 1610. Segovia Salas, *Fortifications of Cartagena*, 9 – 11. As one of the more important peripheral ports, Cartagena would have been among the first to receive modern defenses. The prospects of Jamaica being granted a similar upgrade in a timely manner were remote.

³⁷ The new king formally forbade his subjects to disrupt Spanish shipping in June 1603. Negotiations to end the Anglo-Spanish War had begun a month earlier, and a treaty was agreed upon in August. James continued to seek peaceful relations during the following decade when he explicitly instructed Raleigh not to trouble Iberian persons or property upon his return to the Orinoco. This era was also colored by the prospect of a "Spanish match" for the future Charles I, which ultimately foundered in the face of parliamentary opposition and the King's unwillingness to repeal laws that discriminated against English Catholics. For more on James's policy toward Spain, see Croft, *King James*, especially 48 – 68 and 117 – 130.

beyond the shores of a smallish island and culminated in an unlikely denouement that shook the foundations of England and Spain alike.

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There were many junctures at which Spanish Jamaica's undesirable fate might have been averted. One of these occurred when an ambitious, worldly, and reform-minded cleric named Bernardo de Balbuena became the island's abbot in 1611. Soon after assuming his new position, Balbuena penned a description of Jamaica for the Council of the Indies.³⁸ The island's abbacy was not the most desirable of postings, but one from which the opportunity for advancement did exist with the support of the proper patrons.³⁹ Balbuena opened the letter by singing the praises of his new home. He found the climate warm, but with "less excess and more mildness" than any of the surrounding lands, and the soil was "abundant and suitable for the cultivation of all of the

³⁸ This is the same Bernardo de Balbuena who would later become the first Spanish poet to gain fame for celebrating the New World in verse. During his time on Jamaica Balbuena revised one of his major works, *El Bernardo*, and the version that was later published contains several stanzas referring to the island. John Van Horne, *El Bernardo of Bernardo de Balbuena: A Study of the Poem with Particular Attention to its Relations to the Epics of Boiardo and Ariosto and to its Significance in the Spanish Renaissance* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1927), 17 – 18. On Balbuena's life and times, see also Jose Rojas Garcidueñas, *Bernardo de Balbuena: La Vida y la Obra* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1958).

³⁹ And the nobles of the Council of the Indies were precisely the sort of patrons that an ambitious ecclesiast might seek out. Balbuena's new position was less than ideal because Jamaica was relegated to the ecclesiastical margins when it was granted an abbacy as opposed to a bishopric. The direct superior of the island's abbot was the bishop of Santiago de Cuba, and this subjection served as an additional layer of friction in quotidian inter-colonial squabbles. Morales Padrón, *Spanish Jamaica*, 88 – 92.

seeds and grains grown in Spain.”⁴⁰ In contrast to other sections of his account, the Abbot had very little negative to say regarding Jamaica’s environment and landscape.⁴¹

Although Balbuena does not make this distinction, Jamaica actually features two distinct climatic zones: an upland tropical climate to the north and east, on the windward side of the island’s central mountain chain, and a semiarid zone to the leeward south and west. But as the Spanish had learned during the sixteenth century, the windward coast was quite rugged, with very little coastal plain, and the flatter, drier lee proved more fertile ground for colonization as a result. The Blue Mountains, which rise to a peak of nearly 7,500 feet a dozen miles east of the former site of Santiago de la Vega, are Jamaica’s defining geographical feature.⁴² Much like on Providence, the island’s inaccessible interior made circumnavigation easier than overland travel and provided opportunities for marronage. Jamaica’s maroon communities would play a major role in the island’s history, figuring much more prominently than they had on Providence.⁴³

⁴⁰ Balbuena, “Relación verdadera y breve de Jamaica.” The earliest continuous daily weather record from anywhere outside of Europe and the future United States was produced on Jamaica during the following century by Thomas Thistlewood, better known as a brutal slave master (see Trevor G. Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004). Thistlewood’s journals reveal that the island was cooler and moister during his lifetime than it is today, and it is reasonable to expect that the environment might have skewed slightly further in that direction in Balbuena’s day. Michael Chenoweth, “The 18th Century Climate of Jamaica: Derived from the Journals of Thomas Thistlewood, 1750 – 1786,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 93.2 (2003): 1 – 153.

⁴¹ Likely he had yet to experience a hurricane or the aftermath of one’s passing. After a comparative respite during the first years of the century, the Caribbean would be struck by several major storms during the early 1620s. Stuart B. Schwartz, “Hurricanes and the Shaping of Circum-Caribbean Societies,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, 83.4 (2005): 395. Hurricanes and weather more generally had a major impact on the development of European colonies in the Caribbean. For more, see Sherry Johnson, *Climate and Catastrophe in Cuba and the Atlantic World in the Age of Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011) and Matthew Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean, 1624 – 1783* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

⁴² The mountains were never formally named by the Spanish; this label dates from the eighteenth century.

⁴³ Such importance was the rule rather than the exception in the early modern Atlantic World, where subaltern peoples were able to exert agency through specialized local knowledge and the metropolitan inability to effectively project power into the backcountry. See Richard Price, ed., *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) for a comparative survey of marronage in the New World.

Balbuena describes the island as being fifty leagues in length and fifteen in width, but both are substantial exaggerations – Jamaica is 150 miles long and between 20 and 50 miles wide, with a total surface area of just more than 4,000 square miles, slightly smaller than the state of Connecticut.⁴⁴ The island is 90 miles south of Cuba, 120 west of Hispaniola, and 400 miles northeast of both the Central American mainland and Providence; the maritime borders of modern Jamaica extend halfway to the latter. As close to the “center” of the Caribbean as any sizable scrap of solid ground, Jamaica’s strategic importance was only beginning to become apparent to Balbuena and his contemporaries.

The cleric paired his geographic and climatological observations with an informal census. Balbuena counted 1,510 people “of all sorts and conditions” on Jamaica. 523 of these were adult Spaniards and 173 were Spanish children. There were 107 free blacks on the island against 558 slaves, as well as 74 Indian “natives” and 75 white foreigners. But the apparent healthy diversity of this flock had been undermined by a problem four generations in the making. Per Balbuena, every Spaniard on the island was descended from one of three lineages, with all of the unseemly social and genetic consequences that such stagnation entailed. He had done his best to punish those who had sinned in this shocking way, but worried that it would not be possible to “put out so large a fire because censures and other ecclesiastical methods serve more as a guide than a remedy.”⁴⁵ As Pedro Lope Lasso de la Vega had suggested a generation earlier, Jamaica literally needed an infusion of new blood.

Balbuena’s second major complaint may have been, at least in his mind, related to this genealogical debasement of the island’s population. Without exception, he wrote, “the people

⁴⁴ Balbuena, “Relación verdadera y breve de Jamaica.”

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

here are idle and enemies of work, and as a result the general suffer great misery.” His grievance also seems to speak to traditional notions of the torpor experienced by Europeans after relocating to the tropics.⁴⁶ This terminal lassitude was particularly galling to Balbuena in light of Jamaica’s natural wealth. His letter’s longest passage describes the island’s plentiful flora and fauna and, consequently, its commercial potential. Herds of feral cattle and pigs descended from those brought by the first settlers were an excellent source of lard and cured meat, although they also provided sustenance to escaped slaves in the interior. The staple starch, cassava bread, drew Balbuena’s praise for its affordability and durability.⁴⁷

The Abbot described an island “totally surrounded by very secure ports, beaches, and freshwater rivers.” Unlike Providence, Jamaica is well-irrigated: the Río Cobre, since dammed, ran directly through the villa de la Vega during the seventeenth century, with the Río Negro to the west and the Río Minho to the east along the south coast. Forests of cedar, brazilwood, and mahogany would be extremely convenient for shipbuilding, and Balbuena suggested that naval industries might figure prominently in the island’s future. Less familiar woods like *granadillo*, *espino*, and *canela* were superior to timber sourced from elsewhere in the Spanish empire.⁴⁸ Also of note was Jamaica’s native “*pimiento*,” which had similar taste, spice, and color to the “pepper

⁴⁶ This belief transcended imperial divisions. Shortly after the Englishman Richard Ligon arrived in Barbados a generation later, he described the “great failing in the vigour, and sprightliness we have in colder Climates” that he and his fellows perceived. Anglo observers were, however, inclined to imagine that their Iberian counterparts were better adapted to life in the tropics, perhaps because of the Spaniards’ Mediterranean heritage. Kupperman, “Fear of Hot Climates,” 214, 216.

⁴⁷ Balbuena, “Relación verdadera y breve de Jamaica.” The Abbot’s willingness to embrace an American crop flew in the face of conventional wisdom that dictated that European bodies needed European food to fortify them against the unhealthy vapors of the tropics. This discourse was particularly prevalent during the early decades of the conquest of the New World as Spanish authors attempted to explicate high rates of morbidity among the colonial vanguard. Balbuena’s praise for cassava speaks to the softening of this stance over time as well as the lack of culinary options on Jamaica. Rebecca Earle, “‘If You Eat Their Food...’: Diets and Bodies in Early Colonial Spanish America,” *AHR*, 115.3 (2010): 688 – 713.

⁴⁸ This last known literally as “cinnamon wood” due to its similarity to the oriental tree that gave rise to the lucrative spice.

of India.”⁴⁹ Balbuena’s contemporaries did not appreciate the prescience of his commoditized economic vision. He was writing in the midst of the 1580 – 1630 acme of Spanish colonial silver production, during which time bullion never made up less than eighty percent of the value of imports from the Americas. Throughout this period, peripheral areas that could have been “major exporters of pastoral and agricultural products were either marginalized by the official routes of international trade or were in a primitive state of economic development.”⁵⁰ Jamaica satisfied both criteria. Despite the Abbot’s remonstrations, the metropolitan preoccupation with all that glittered would prove difficult to dispel, to the island’s detriment.

Balbuena was upset that more serious efforts had not been made to transmute its natural wealth into a prosperous local economy. Part of the explanation for this failure lay in Jamaica’s unique ownership history – the Crown had declined to move to retake control of the island, and the Columbus family had never come up with a coherent plan for its development. The cleric also mentioned a second barrier to economic integration. Almost no currency of any sort was extant on Jamaica.⁵¹ What little specie there had been during previous decades had been leeched away little by little by shifty foreign merchants, to the point that the island’s inhabitants could not have purchased goods from the main even if the opportunity had presented itself.⁵²

⁴⁹ Balbuena, “Relación verdadera y breve de Jamaica.”

⁵⁰ Silver production had peaked in 1594, when ore accounted for an astounding ninety-six percent of all imports. Two centuries later, bullion would still constitute a majority of American exports, epitomizing a Spanish colonial model that never fully escaped its roots. Fisher, *Economic Aspects of Spanish Imperialism*, 38.

⁵¹ Spain’s maritime periphery was not alone in suffering from a shortage of coinage during the early decades of the seventeenth century. The English metropole was stricken with a dearth of specie as well, engendering a protracted theoretical discussion regarding the true nature of wealth. Proto-economists concluded that trade in goods, not currency hoarding, was the most dynamic commercial force, setting the stage for a commodity-centric approach to the settlement of the New World (as evidenced by Providence’s subsequent economic trajectory). Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 206 – 207. Had a similar solution been emphasized in the Spanish Caribbean, the outcome on Jamaica might have been very different.

⁵² Balbuena, “Relación verdadera y breve de Jamaica.”

Without a commodity of their own to sell, this was a truly intractable problem. Although the necessity of searching for such a commodity was not spelled out as explicitly to Jamaican secular and religious leaders as it would later be on Providence, it was plain to Balbuena that no other recourse short of charity would cure the island's existential ills.⁵³ This transitional moment happened earlier on Jamaica than elsewhere in Spanish America because the colony's mines had failed to pan out and its ports, unlike those of the other Greater Antilles, were not critical to the transshipment of the mineral product of the main. The predicament that the Jamaicans faced in 1611 was eerily similar to that which confronted the settlers on Providence three decades later, without the benefit of financially-interested patrons in the metropole.

Balbuena's account is one of the few from the early seventeenth century that does not include news of an attack on the island. It was written during a period of relative peace – this was the same era during which Walter Raleigh's inability to resist plundering Spanish ports led James to order his execution, while the Twelve Years' Truce had temporarily halted hostilities with the Netherlands, Jamaica's other chief antagonist. This detente mitigated the immediate threat to the island by stabilizing the situation in the Caribbean, and as a result the better part of the next two decades passed without major event. But no news did not equate to good news in this case, since the absence of imminent danger made it easier to explain away deferring identifying a permanent solution to secure Jamaica's military safety and financial solvency.

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⁵³ Metropolitan authorities had also noted this problem. As recently as 1609, a royal cedula had temporarily cut duties on leather, sugar, and other goods exported from Jamaica to Seville in half. AGI, SD, leg. 1126, Madrid, 14 enero 1609.

Several years after the expiration of the Truce in 1621, Protestant interlopers returned to the Caribbean. In September 1625 a Dutch fleet under the command of Boudewijn Hendricksz, known to the Spanish as Balduino Enrico, besieged Puerto Rico.⁵⁴ The invaders were eventually repelled, but not before burning down the better part of San Juan. They spent the next several months harrying weaker ports near Isla Margarita before sailing back north. May 1626 found them off the westernmost point of Jamaica, where they made off with a cache of pelts, meat, and tallow.⁵⁵ From there Hendricksz sailed on to Cuba, where he briefly investigated attempting to capture Havana before dying suddenly. Nowhere during this sequence did the Dutch consider assaulting Jamaica – the island seems to have been entirely beneath their regard. Nonetheless the raid, as minor as it was, was an ill omen that foreshadowed the renewal of imperial conflict in the Caribbean during the decades that followed.

But before that fateful promise could be realized, Jamaica's tenuous subsistence was threatened by a baser form of greed. A new governor had arrived at the island around the same time as Hendricksz's fleet. Francisco Terril was a recent appointment of the aging fourth Duke of Veragua, Columbus's great-great-grandson. Many of Terril's predecessors had taken casual advantage of the island's economic isolation and lack of administrative oversight for personal enrichment, but graft and embezzlement quickly became a single-minded obsession for the new governor. The pernicious consequences of his eight-year career on Jamaica are extremely well-

⁵⁴ Dutch privateers had been active in the Americas since the outbreak of the Eighty Years' War in 1568. Just two years before Hendricksz's voyage, a large armada under the command of Piet Heyn had temporarily seized control of Bahia. Heyn's greatest feat, the capture of the Spanish treasure fleet, followed in 1628. The next great "Dutch" privateer would be Providence's own Diego el Mulato, who departed from Cuba a year later. And contraband trade carried by Dutch shipping, particularly in the vicinity of South America's maritime periphery – Pacific as well as Atlantic – was as damaging to Iberian interests in the New World as more overt theft. Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*, 62 – 95. See also Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire* and Benjamin Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad: The Dutch Imagination and the New World, 1570 – 1670* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁵⁵ Morales Padrón, *Spanish Jamaica*, 144 – 145.

documented by virtue of the voluminous court proceedings initiated against him by plaintiffs across the socioeconomic spectrum.⁵⁶

The governor's crime spree began shortly after his arrival on the island. A Portuguese merchant named Juan Nuñez de Sepúlveda had departed from Lisbon in September 1625 with a cargo of merchandise to be exchanged for Angolan slaves. After encountering fierce storms early in his voyage, Sepúlveda claimed to have been lost at sea for four months before being "forced" to make landfall at Jamaica. His fortunes nearly ruined by this misadventure, the would-be slave trader gave Terril a frank account of the events leading to his arrival on the island and begged him for a skilled pilot and fresh supplies of food and water so that he might sail on to Angola. Sepúlveda promised the governor 5,000 pesos for his troubles and came ashore to make the final arrangements, confident that they had an understanding.⁵⁷

But instead of dealing faithfully with the storm-wracked Portuguese, Terril promptly arrested him. Then, "against the divine and human right," the governor sent soldiers out into the harbor, where they seized control of Sepúlveda's vessel. Terril distributed some of the cargo to

⁵⁶ Court cases appear in this dissertation most often as a means by which to perceive the historical contexts that their plaintiffs inhabited, but they are also important insofar as they illuminate competing Caribbean legal regimes. The maritime aspect of this space was critical in that multiple competing European powers were able to exert influence without absolute control, while its peripheral-ness made administrative misbehavior and exploitative governance permissible to an extent impossible closer to the metropole. Both dynamics were in play during Terril's Jamaican reign of terror. For more on the interplay between geography and law on the imperial margins, see Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*, particularly 104 – 221.

⁵⁷ AGI, ES, 158B, Juan Nuñez de Sepúlveda, Jamaica. Terril subsequently maintained that Sepúlveda's claims of trouble at sea were entirely false, and that he had in fact arrived at Jamaica with plenty of provisions, his ship completely intact, and a perfectly competent pilot. Opportunistic merchants often used unsubstantiated claims of dire circumstances to call at ports, like Jamaica, that would otherwise be forbidden them and where they could get a better price for their cargo as a result. These allegedly forced arrivals, or *arribadas forzosas*, provided a common pretext for contraband trade of various kinds. Ships that requested shelter were allowed to anchor and sell a limited amount of cargo to pay for repairs and provisions. Once in port, they often sold additional goods (or people) off the books, free of royal duties. Eagle, "Chasing the Avença," 101. Merchants employed forced arrivals throughout Spanish America. See, for example, Kara D. Schultz, *"The Kingdom of Angola is Not Very Far from Here": The Río de la Plata, Brazil, and Angola, 1580 – 1680* (Dissertation: Vanderbilt University, 2016), 51 – 52.

Jamaican landowners, and earmarked the rest for sale in Cartagena, Cuba, and elsewhere. Next, “adding crimes to crimes,” the governor stripped the merchantman of its armaments and metal fittings, which he went on to use in the construction of a new ship for his patron’s fleet. Still not satisfied, Terril’s coup de grâce was setting free six Portuguese exiles who Sepúlveda had been transporting to Angola and commending them to “to go where they willed.”⁵⁸

His remarkably comprehensive business now complete, Terril returned his attention to the merchant. The governor condemned Sepúlveda to death without any form of due process, a fate that the Portuguese was only able to escape by taking refuge in a convent on the island. Terril denied Sepúlveda any and all forms of aid, legal or otherwise, while he was holed up there, reiterating that on Jamaica, he was “king.” After months of de facto imprisonment the merchant was able to smuggle out word of his predicament, and his case eventually made its way to the courts of Santo Domingo. Terril was quick to answer the accusations against him, arguing that Sepúlveda and his brother were well-known dealers in contraband who went to great lengths to avoid prosecution, intimidating witnesses and even arming slaves to advocate for their interests by force.⁵⁹ The legal proceedings dragged on into the early 1630s, when the absurd amount of similar suits lodged against the governor forced metropolitan authorities to have him recalled.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ AGI, ES, 158B, Francisco Terril, Santiago de la Vega, 8 mayo 1627. The implied presence of contraband trade pervades the history of Jamaica, and indeed the seventeenth-century Caribbean more generally, but smuggling is a difficult question to tackle quantitatively precisely because of its necessarily clandestine nature. A substantial amount of illegal trade no doubt passed to and from the island throughout its first century and a half of existence, particularly because of the limited licit means of acquiring goods available to Spanish Jamaicans. But much of the evidence to this effect is, like Terril’s claim, anecdotal, making even an ordinal comparison with legal exchange impossible. See Wim Klooster, “Inter-imperial Smuggling in the Americas, 1600 – 1800,” in *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500 – 1830*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 141 – 180 for a short overview of the contraband phenomenon.

⁶⁰ Unsurprisingly the governor proved a tenacious legal adversary, launching a number of countersuits himself. His chief tactic, as seen in the case of Sepúlveda, seems to have been to maintain that any goods that he seized (often slaves) had been imported illegally. See, for example, AGI, ES, 158B, Francisco Terril contra Juan Antonio de Lobayna y Juan Martinez Borumbel. Terril’s presumed fabrications had genuine Jamaican precedent. Several decades earlier, a merchant with an *asiento* to import slaves into Cartagena and New Spain had been prosecuted for

The wayward governor's intended replacement, Juan Martínez de Arana, was in for a surprise when he arrived in Santiago de la Vega to assume control of the island. Rather than hand over power peacefully – although who could realistically have expected that at this point – Terril and his cronies barricaded themselves into several fortified homes, defended by “artillery, slings, arquebuses, and other arms” and intent on preserving their regime by force. They had a chance to do just that once Martínez rallied a cohort of his own and attacked. A battle in which six or seven men were killed and a substantial amount of property destroyed ensued, resulting in the defeat of Terril's loyalists and the renegade administrator's capture.⁶¹ From there Terril was swallowed up by the imperial legal system; while a certain amount of fraud might be permissible, concerted rebellion most certainly was not. But the damage had been done as the better part of a decade of blatant misuse of authority culminated with fighting in the streets of Jamaica's capital.

Terril's reign of terror had been possible in the first place only because of the continued unwillingness of colonial administrators to project power onto the island. Part of the explanation for this reticence, as it would be in the parallel case on Providence several years later, was the tacit inability of metropolitan policymakers to decisively influence events on Jamaica. Another was the fact that the island remained under the jurisdiction of Columbus's heirs, although their disinterest by this time bordered on criminal.⁶² During the early 1630s, the maritime periphery of the Spanish empire remained a space where individual agency could trump bureaucratic control. The short-term effects of the governor's misdeeds were damaging indeed: lives lost, precious

selling 300 slaves at Jamaica. This stratagem had allowed him to pocket a greater proportion of the proceeds than would have been possible closer to the imperial core. AGI, ES, 1021A, Antonio Fernandez de Elvas contra Hernando de Acosta, Madrid, 29 abril 1617.

⁶¹ AGI, ES, 158B, Juan Martínez de Arana contra Francisco Terril, Santiago de Cuba, 10 mayo 1632.

⁶² Not to mention that there were some indications that the Duke of Veragua had been in league with Terril for the duration. He was interviewed toward the end of the governor's case, but it seems to have been more of a formality intended to cement Terril's guilt. AGI, ES, 158B, “Duque de Veragua con Don Francisco Terril.”

infrastructure demolished, and the colonists who remained factionalized and impoverished. But in the slightly longer term, Terril did ironically succeed in putting Jamaica back on the imperial map. Fear of another tyrant rising to the fore redirected attention to the island, and in no small part as a result the final decades of the Spanish regime on Jamaica are much better documented than those that came immediately before.

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Two major concerns dominate Jamaican correspondence after 1632. The conversation surrounding the first of these, the insufficiency of the island's defenses, remained largely the same after Terril's governorship as it had been previously. But that pertaining to the other topic, the perpetual search for a viable export commodity, rapidly acquired focus once the worst-case consequences of a stagnant, unregulated island economy had been so spectacularly displayed. Sometime during the months following Terril's downfall, a prospective agricultural entrepreneur named Rodrigo de Noreña arrived in Madrid to make a pitch to the King. Noreña was confident that his big idea could enrich the royal estate while simultaneously providing a realistic path for Jamaica's economic development. He proposed the cultivation of the island's *pimiento*, the same mentioned in passing by Balbuena, for export on the Crown's account.⁶³ Noreña's proposal was carefully calculated to tickle the collective fancy of Philip and his advisors. With flows of specie from the New World beginning to dry up, the importance of exportable commodities to a healthy imperial economy had dawned on even the most old-school of latter-day conquistadores.⁶⁴

⁶³ AGI, SD, leg. 178B, "Proyecto de Rodrigo de Noreña del beneficio de la pimienta que se halla en la isla de Jamaica." The pepper in question is known in English as allspice. It is native to the Greater Antilles and adjacent mainland coast, but was and remains most closely associated with Jamaica, where it grew, and grows, in abundance.

⁶⁴ Treasure imports never fell below an average of five million *pesos* per year until the 1630s. During that decade they dropped to approximately 3.3 million, followed by 2.6 million in 1640s and 1.7 million in the 1650s. This trend continued for the remainder of the century, and by 1700 annual imports were well below 500,000 *pesos*. Fisher, *Economic Aspects of Spanish Imperialism*, 59 – 60. The implications of this precipitous drop were compounded by

Within a few years the notion received a favorable response from Philip, who requested further information. The excitement was palpable – there was hope that Jamaica’s pepper might “have the same force and effect as that of India” had had in fueling the economic revolution in the Netherlands during the generation since the foundation of the Dutch East India Company.⁶⁵ But Noreña’s marching orders also cautioned that the Duke of Veragua, who “made no use whatsoever” of the *pimiento*, remain out of the loop for the time being.⁶⁶ Even for the Spanish monarch, the Duke’s nominal control of Jamaica continued to be a practical and legal barrier to efforts to put the island on the commercial map of the seventeenth-century Caribbean. A report on the prospective commodity reached Madrid before 1635 was out. The pepper trees grew in abundance in the lowlands on both the north and south sides of the island, and the only limiting factor to how much could be harvested was manpower. This harvesting was achieved through the destructive expedient of cutting down all fruit-bearing branches, but the trees were extremely resilient. The *pimiento*’s quality was judged to be inferior to that of the East Indies, but it still

the financial circumstances of Philip’s reign, during which the public debt expanded to twelve times the empire’s annual revenue. Although American silver typically constituted less than a quarter of the King’s revenues, it was disproportionately important because it provided the liquidity required to fund ongoing war efforts in Europe and the Atlantic. Spain’s wealth was gradually dispersed through the resulting imbalance between expenditures and receipts. Stein and Stein, *Silver, Trade, and War*, 40 – 56.

⁶⁵ The foundation of the English East India Company in 1600 had preceded its Dutch competitor by two years, but the newcomers soon began to reap unprecedented profits by monopolizing trade with the Spice Islands (Moluccas). Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500 – 1815* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 384 – 385. This work is the best to date to address early modern Dutch commercial enterprise around the world. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire* also considers the Dutch Republic in a global context.

⁶⁶ AGI, SD, leg. 178B, “Horden de su magestad de 30 de Agosto 1635: sobre la pimienta que se cria en la isla xamayca,” Conde de Castrillo, Madrid, 30 agosto 1635.

sold well in Cuba and on the main.⁶⁷ It was particularly useful in the production of chocolate, as it could be mixed with cocoa beans to add a hint of bitterness.⁶⁸

All the pieces were in place for a venture that could benefit all parties concerned, but the scheme's progress ground to a halt as quickly as it had begun. Noreña had to wait for four years before the underlying reason for this turnabout was explicitly articulated. By the late 1630s, the emergence of external threats to the Spanish Caribbean, not least the piratical Protestants on Providence, had made Jamaica's paltry defenses a potentially critical weakness. Calls for the Crown to assume control of the island had grown impossible to ignore in the face of a palpable threat.⁶⁹ But if Noreña's *pimiento* plan were allowed to move ahead, Jamaica might turn into a profitable asset overnight, and if the island began to produce a stream of income, it would "give the Duke [of Veragua] occasion to place greater value" on Jamaica.⁷⁰ It was a classic catch-22: the island's lack of development put it at risk, but the situation could not be improved unless the King was willing to pay a succession of costs that might very well total to more than a fortified Jamaica would be worth.

⁶⁷ AGI, SD, leg. 178B, "Report of Francisco Díaz Pimienta in response to the account of Alonso Espinosa Centeno," Madrid, 16 septiembre 1636, cited in Morales Padrón, *Spanish Jamaica*, 166 – 167. Note the author of this report – the very same Francisco Díaz Pimienta who would oversee the capture of Providence Island five years later. The cast of important characters in the seventeenth-century Caribbean was not large; it is no coincidence that the same names come up time and again in this narrative.

⁶⁸ AGI, SD, leg. 178B, "El beneficio de la pimienta que se coje en jamayca y arbitrio propuesto por Rodrigo de norona en esta razon," Consejo de Indias, Madrid, 27 julio 1636. This was a timely suggestion – the first treatise on chocolate, Antonio Colmenero de Lesdesma's *Curioso tratado de la naturaleza y calidad del chocolate*, had been published in Madrid in 1631. For more on chocolate during the colonial era, see Martha Few, "Chocolate, Sex, and Disorderly Women in Late-Seventeenth- and Early-Eighteenth-Century Guatemala," *Ethnohistory*, 52.4 (2005): 673 – 687; Cameron L. McNeil, ed., *Chocolate in Mesoamerica: A Cultural History of Cacao* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006); and Marcy Norton, *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures: A History of Tobacco and Chocolate in the Atlantic World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

⁶⁹ A Jamaican priest named Alonso de Espinosa Centeno was an especially outspoken proponent of a return to royal dominion, and more than 70 folios of his correspondence to this effect survive in the archive. AGI, SD, leg. 178B, folios 31 – 103.

⁷⁰ AGI, SD, leg. 178B, Gabriel de Alarcón, Madrid, 31 mayo 1639.

Before this dilemma could be resolved, the pepper's fate was decided when Columbus's heir caught wind of the scheme and fired back. He was outraged by the pretensions of the "so-and-so" Noreña, whose claims of special knowledge and business connections were completely specious. The Duke wrote of his exclusive right to Jamaica and its "minerals and fruits" in no uncertain terms. Moreover, he claimed that since his predecessors had first received news of the *pimiento* more than a half century previously, they had independently been assigning "titles and privileges" for its commercialization to inhabitants of the island.⁷¹ Regardless of the truth of this assertion, the Duke was certainly aware that the mere possibility of extended litigation would dissuade the Crown from taking further action. And so Noreña's plan came to naught, and the last best chance for Spanish economic success on Jamaica fell by the wayside.

The rise and fall of the Jamaican pepper coincided almost exactly with the parallel search for a profitable export commodity on Providence. Although the precise circumstances differed, top-down economic regulations were the fundamental cause of the failure to build a functional agricultural base on either island. The Duke of Veragua and the Providence Island Company alike sought to impose tight controls on the import and export of goods in hopes of maximizing their take but succeeded only in stifling legitimate trade and antagonizing their colonists. In the latter case, Englishmen like Daniel Elfrith eventually turned their frustrations outward and sought to acquire remuneration by force. Without access to vessels of any appreciable size, the Spanish Jamaicans did not have this option. And even if they had, their fate was to be the nail rather than the hammer.

⁷¹ AGI, SD, leg. 178B, Duque de Veragua, Madrid, 31 agosto 1643.

By the mid-1630s, fears regarding the island's tenuous defenses had reached a fever pitch. One observer asserted that "if the enemy decided to take [Jamaica] and fortify himself there, all trade in the Indies would cease."⁷² He proposed that a member of the famed Bautista Antonelli family of military engineers presently resident in Puerto Rico be sent to survey the island and develop a plan for its fortification.⁷³ Bautista Antonelli was entirely occupied with rebuilding the damage inflicted on Puerto Rico by the Dutch in 1625, and in the absence of another appropriate candidate the president of the *audiencia* of Santo Domingo undertook to perform the duty himself. He was dismayed to discover that Jamaica's militia numbered no more than 300.⁷⁴ Since there was still no fort to speak of in Santiago de la Vega, these men guarded the path inland from the harbor, just as the Spanish force had when it repelled Newport's attack three decades previously. The president felt that Philip should seize the island because of, rather than in spite of, its decrepitude, since if it fell "no ordinary vessels would escape the enemy's hands and the fleets would run great risk."⁷⁵

⁷² Ibid., Junta de Guerra de Indias, Madrid, 20 setiembre 1635. Although Providence is never mentioned explicitly, the timing of this upwelling of concern is suggestive. The first, failed Spanish attempt to expel the English presence on that island had taken place several months previously.

⁷³ Giovanni Bautista Antonelli and his brother were Italians who had served Philip II in Europe and the Caribbean during the previous century. A generation after the brothers' deaths their descendants were still held in high esteem as masters of the *trace italienne* that had redefined military architecture in Italy after 1450. For more on this style of fortification, which was ubiquitous in the seventeenth-century Caribbean and emphasized low-lying ramparts and intersecting lines of fire, see Mahinder S. Kingra, "The *Trace Italienne* and the Military Revolution During the Eighty Years' War, 1567 – 1648," *The Journal of Military History*, 57.3 (1993): 431 – 446.

⁷⁴ Given the demographics of the island's population, this force likely included a substantial proportion of free black militiamen. Companies consisting of mixed-race and Afro-descended individuals existed on Cuba and in Mexico by the turn of the seventeenth century, and became increasingly common throughout the Caribbean during the decades that followed as the Northern European threat escalated. Jane Landers, "Transforming Bondsmen into Vassals: Arming Slaves in Colonial Spanish America," in *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age*, ed. Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 124 – 125. The military acumen of Jamaica's free blacks would gain renown following their fierce defense of the island during the 1650s and 1660s.

⁷⁵ AGI, SD, leg. 178B, "Santo Domingo: la audiencia 28 de noviembre en materias de la isla de xamayca," Juan Vitrian, Santo Domingo, 28 noviembre 1638.

A second, more detailed report was commissioned from the Duke of Veragua around the same time and completed by his uncle, the Marquis of Villanubla. He describes new trenches and lunettes near the harbor, referred to as “el puerto de Caguaya,” but agrees that the Jamaicans had few armaments, and that those that they did have were in poor condition after having been “exposed to the rigors of the weather.”⁷⁶ The Marquis also despaired of how few fighting men were available and blamed this shortage on the recent unsanctioned emigration of much of the island’s population. He requested multiple concessions intended to ameliorate the situation, including permission for an annual commercial sailing to Jamaica and, citing success on Isla Margarita, for the legalization of pearl fishing.⁷⁷ None of these requests, which would have enhanced the Duke’s autonomy instead of curtailing it, received an immediate response, but many of them, including the *navío de permiso*, would subsequently be granted. But in the short term, despite much handwringing on either side of the Atlantic, nothing was done to improve the state of affairs on the island. The traditional passing of the buck from Jamaica to the Council of War to authorities in the surrounding ports and back again was only compounded in this case by real questions as to who was responsible for the island’s protection in the face of the Duke of Veragua’s patent disinterest.

Near the end of his term as governor in 1640, Jacinto Sedeño Albornoz produced a description of Jamaica painfully similar in its broad strokes to Balbuena’s of 1611. Few of those

⁷⁶ The body of water to which the Marquis refers is known as Cagway Bay today. Although this name has Taíno etymological origins, his is one of its earliest documentary mentions.

⁷⁷ Ibid., “Informes pedidos al Duque de Veragua sobre la fortificación y estado de defense de la isla de Jamaica,” Marqués de Villanubla, 1638. By the mid-seventeenth century, the development of Caribbean pearl fisheries was tightly regulated because of the economically devastating impact of over-fishing. Michael Perri, “‘Ruined and Lost’: Spanish Destruction of the Pearl Coast in the Early Sixteenth Century,” *Environment and History*, 15 (2009): 129 – 161. Molly Warsh uses the notion of “political ecology” to explore negotiations between metropolitan authorities and peripheral experts as imperial policy regarding pearl fishing evolved during the 1500s. “A Political Ecology in the Early Spanish Caribbean,” *WMQ*, 71.4 (2014): 517 – 548. This research has recently been expanded into a monograph: *American Baroque: Pearls and the Nature of Empire, 1492 – 1700* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

developments that were new were positive. Sedeño reported that the island's indigenous had been completely exterminated, although he blamed their deaths on the conquistadores having forced them to drink "agua de yucca."⁷⁸ Unpleasant tidings also surfaced regarding the persistent fallout from the misrule of Francisco Terril, who Sedeño claimed to have personally taken prisoner. He wrote that Jamaica's inhabitants were still divided, to the extent that the first thing that they taught their children was "to make them know they are Guzmanes or Franciscanos," the two feuding factions. Members of these clashing clans were too busy trying to one-up each other to provide for anything beyond their own basic subsistence, and so Sedeño despaired of the island ever escaping the vicious cycle that it had been trapped in for the better part of a century.⁷⁹

Jamaica's prospects during the 1630s were a study in contrasts. The decade opened with what was essentially a worst-case scenario: the complete breakdown of the established colonial chain of command in the face of a particularly sociopathic and venal individual. Terril's reign highlights the extreme power of individual agency on the imperial margins; it is not a stretch to say that its subsequent ramifications sealed the island's fate. But before that fate could come to pass Noroña's *pimiento* offered a glimpse at an alternate future in which Jamaica assumed its rightful place as an Iberian commercial entrepôt. If things had broken differently, it still might have, but unfortunately for Spain the long-prophesied arrival of hostile, determined foreigners would eliminate the possibility of this scenario.

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⁷⁸ Without proper preparation, cassava can be toxic because it contains a substantial amount of hydrogen cyanide. Cyanide poisoning was certainly not responsible for the entirety of the collapse of Jamaica's native population, and Sedeño does not address the seventeenth-century survivors mentioned by Balbuena.

⁷⁹ AGI, SD, leg. 178B, "Descripción de la isla de Jamaica realizada por el capitán Jacinto Sedeño y Albornoz," Jacinto Sedeño y Albornoz, Jamaica, 1640.

The opening shot in Jamaica's final act was fired by Captain William Jackson, who had been in the service of the Providence Island Company during the final years of that colony's existence. The Earl of Warwick granted Jackson a letter of marque in recognition of his efforts in that capacity. By the spring of 1643, Jackson had assembled a force of more than 1,000 men; two of his chief lieutenants were Samuel Axe, a decade removed from his murderous stint among the Miskito at Cabo Gracias a Dios, and William Rous, only recently bailed out of the prison of the *Casa de Contratación*. The English sought to strike a blow against Spain to avenge aggression on Providence and elsewhere in the Caribbean, "a good old-fashioned English show of force – quite consciously in the spirit of Drake."⁸⁰

Jackson's fleet arrived in Cagway Bay on March 25. His men landed on the west side of the harbor and marched inland until a group of Spanish slaves rose out of their concealment in the surrounding mangroves and thickets. Rather than attack, the Africans tried to and succeeded in intimidating and delaying the English. Jackson renewed the advance the next day and soon met a more determined ambush – clearly Jamaican tactics had not changed much during the four decades since Newport's assault. The Spanish brought cannon to bear and harassed the English with surprisingly skilled cavalry, but the invaders were able to turn the tide and before long they were "no longer molested with [those] Centaurs."⁸¹ After a final, murderous artillery salvo, the Iberian rearguard fled their fortifications toward Santiago de la Vega. The Spaniards continued to harry Jackson's men with small arms and set fire to vegetation in hopes of blowing up their powder. Several Englishmen were killed or maimed during a skirmish in a cassava field when the Jamaicans turned a battery of guns packed with shrapnel on them, but when the survivors

⁸⁰ Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*, 102 – 103.

⁸¹ Jackson, "The Voyages of Captain William Jackson," 16 – 17.

continued undeterred the defenders broke and Jackson took the town unopposed. There the English found that word of their arrival had preceded them. The villa de la Vega was stripped of everything of value – only “some few Chairs, Bedsteads, Jars of Mountego, and ye like poor materials” remained.⁸² Invasion was old hat for the Jamaicans by now, and they knew that the only way to ensure the safety of their possessions was to abscond into the interior with them.

This absence of movable wealth notwithstanding, Jackson found Jamaica’s capital “a fair Town, consisting of four or five hundred homes [. . .] beautified with 5 or 6 stately Churches” and “situated upon descent of a Delectable and Spacious plain.” The privateer waxed poetic, musing that “whatsoever is fabled by the Poets, or maintained by Historians, concerning the Arcadian Plains, or the Thessalian Tempe, may here be verified and truly affirmed.”⁸³ Many of Jackson’s men desired to put down their arms and settle on the spot, and more than a score followed through on this impulse by defecting to the Spanish.⁸⁴ Their treachery prompted the English to accelerate negotiations with the enemy for the return of the town. Jackson eventually received 200 cattle, 10,000 pounds of cassava bread, and 17,000 pieces of eight in exchange for his prize. Before the interlopers could depart, a party of Spanish slaves came to their camp and expressed their desire to switch allegiances. The captain chose to refuse their overtures and abide by the terms of his treaty, but informed the petitioners that the English would soon be back to

⁸² Ibid., 17 – 18. “Jars of Mountego” likely refers to butter or lard, *manteca* to the Spaniards. Jackson’s use of the Spanish word here, like Daniel Elfrith’s earlier use of Iberian place names, speaks to the cultural entanglement of the seventeenth-century Caribbean.

⁸³ Depictions of early modern privateers and pirates in pop culture, not to mention more than a few historical works, imagine them to have been nihilistic psychopaths, but many (including Jackson) were thoughtful and educated. The best known of the pirate philosophers was probably William Dampier, who began his peripatetic career on Jamaica during the early 1670s. Dampier went on to record scientific observations at land and sea while circumnavigating the world three times, privateering all the while. Dampier’s 1697 *A New Voyage round the World* brought him fame in his own lifetime, and renewed recent interest has produced several biographies including Anton Gill, *The Devil’s Mariner: A Life of William Dampier, Pirate and Explorer, 1651 – 1715* (London: Michael Joseph, 1997) and Diana and Michael Preston, *A Pirate of Exquisite Mind: Explorer, Naturalist and Buccaneer: The Life of William Dampier* (New York: Walker & Company, 2004).

⁸⁴ Jackson, “The Voyages of Captain William Jackson,” 18 – 19.

seize Jamaica for good. Jackson reported that this did not surprise them, as it corresponded with “an old Tradition [. . .] that they shall one day come under the subjection of the English.”⁸⁵ Less than a week after their arrival on the island, the English departed for further adventures along the coast of the Central American main.⁸⁶

Although Jackson’s expedition did not establish a permanent presence on Jamaica, it made a previously abstract threat all too concrete. In the face of a superior force, the island’s inhabitants had no choice but to retreat toward the mountains. If the enemy then decided to take possession rather than seek a ransom, the Jamaicans would have no realistic way of returning to their homes. Moreover, they would cut off the easiest lines of communication by departing the coast – it might be weeks until word of their predicament could reach a sympathetic ear. Mere bureaucratic inertia was no longer a tolerable excuse for the inability to deal with the worrisome situation on the island.

This problematic precedent compelled peninsular authorities to launch a formal attempt to restore civil society and kickstart the process of rebuilding the island’s fortifications. When their representative reached the island eighteen months after Jackson’s departure, he set out to interview leading members of the community. Among his interlocutors was Francisco de Proenza, who bemoaned the encroachment of foreign enemies on Jamaica’s shores. Lawless interlopers had been emboldened by Jackson’s success, and were using the adjacent bays to careen their ships, during which downtime they pillaged nearby *estancias* at their leisure.⁸⁷ The

⁸⁵ If not entirely apocryphal, this expectation might date from some earlier Northern European incursion, perhaps in a similar way to the persistent allegiance to Walter Raleigh among the indigenous of the Orinoco. *Ibid.*, 19.

⁸⁶ Jackson’s fleet went on to capture Trujillo and raid Costa Rica and the isthmus of Panama, but procured little in the way of plunder after Jamaica. Newton, *Colonising Activities of the English Puritans*, 316.

⁸⁷ Jackson directly contributed to this frenzy by emphasizing the meager means that had been required to effect a great success on Jamaica in his account of the attack. Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 91. The free reign that English privateers enjoyed in the Caribbean in the wake of Jackson’s raid would later help to convince Cromwell of the weakness of Spanish America. It also ingrained a flight response in the Jamaicans, most of whom came to feel that preserving

Jamaicans were scarcely able to fend off these attacks – their best of hope of thwarting these raiders lay in a mounted company of free blacks and mulattos under the command of Cristóbal Arnaldo de Isasi.⁸⁸ Isasi and Proenza were members of a new generation of Jamaican leaders who sought to rewrite their predecessors' legacy of corruption and decadence.⁸⁹ Both would figure prominently in the events that soon set the island on the path to economic success, albeit not in the roles that they would have imagined for themselves in 1644.

The result of the Crown's inquest was ambiguous at best, and the Spanish regime on Jamaica staggered on into an uncertain future. The will to see to the improvement of the island was there, but the financial means to do so were not. There was simply no one willing to foot the bill. But before Jackson's promise of an English Jamaica could be realized, a final ignominious domestic chapter awaited just on the far side of the midpoint of the century. Word of this episode reached Spain in typically inauspicious fashion during the fall of 1650, with the arrival of a letter written by former governor Jacinto Sedeño Albornoz while he was incarcerated in the common jail of the Inquisition in Cartagena.⁹⁰ The sequence of events that had landed him there could only have happened on seventeenth-century Jamaica.

their homes in the face of superior opposition and no hope of relief was futile. Both developments played a major role in the island's fate. Latimer, *Buccaneers of the Caribbean*, 93. See also Haring, *The Buccaneers in the West Indies in the XVII Century*, 57 – 84 with respect to the mid-century Caribbean buccaneers.

⁸⁸ Likely the same "centaurs" who had been a thorn in the side of the English in 1643. AGI, SD, leg. 178B, "Testimonio del informe y autos que hize del estado en que se alla la isla de xamaica," Juan de Retuerta, Santo Domingo, 4 diciembre 1644.

⁸⁹ The "de" in Isasi's name is not always present in Spanish records, but does appear frequently enough to conclude that Isasi was in fact his patronymic (and that he went by only one surname). For the sake of consistency, I will use "Cristóbal Arnaldo Isasi" as his full name - except in literal document titles - and "Isasi" when referring to him by a single name.

⁹⁰ Sedeño's was an unusual case for Cartagena's Holy Office, which more frequently dealt with cases related to the native religious heterodoxy of the seventeenth-century Caribbean. The Cartagena Inquisition was typically lenient with the Northern European Protestants who were occasionally commended to its care. Suggestively, a handful of Englishmen had presented themselves during the summer of 1643, in the midst of William Jackson's expedition. Block, *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean*, 81 – 91. Cartagena also hosted an extended conversation regarding the religious implications of chattel slavery during this period. *Ibid.*, 19 – 37 and Margaret M. Olsen, *Slavery and Salvation in Colonial Cartagena de Indias* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2004).

Pedro Caballero was the governor of the island during the late 1640s and first months of 1650. By all accounts, Caballero was a stubborn boor, more interested in perpetuating the petty rivalries that had defined Jamaican society for the previous decade and a half than improving his constituents' quality of life. He quarreled especially virulently with the island's abbot, who had identified gambling at cards, an activity that Caballero enjoyed, as the root of Jamaica's miseries. This dispute had manifested itself rather spectacularly when, in an act that surpassed even the excesses of Terril, the governor had scaled the walls of the abbot's monastery to forcibly remove two men attempting to take refuge there.⁹¹

Matters came to a head when the abbot, fed up with Caballero's antics, excommunicated him from the Jamaican church. Next the governor was removed from office and replaced in the interim by Sedeño. Shortly thereafter Caballero called at the abbot's home in Santiago de la Vega in hopes of having his excommunication lifted. He must have been quite worked up, because the commotion that ensued drew Sedeño from the adjacent cabildo. The two men had strong words for each other, and what began as a verbal altercation escalated into a physical one. A struggle resulted, and Caballero was accidentally slain – or brutally murdered, depending on who you asked – with his own sword. Although most of the witnesses agreed that Sedeño was not himself the killer, he bore responsibility for the death nonetheless because he had instigated the melee.⁹² And so the now twice-ex governor found himself imprisoned, the government of Jamaica a shamble in his wake, although some continuity was preserved when Francisco de Proenza was appointed governor in Sedeño's absence. The dispute between Caballero and the abbot that engendered this farcical denouement was reminiscent of Hope Sherrard's divisive

⁹¹ AGI, SD, leg. 178B, "Statement made by Friar Pedro de Balbuena," 1648, cited in Morales Padrón, *Spanish Jamaica*, 110.

⁹² *Ibid.*, "Jacinto sedeno de albornoz refiere la caussa de su prission y suplica a su magd provea de remedio," Jacinto Sedeño Albornoz, Cartagena, 20 septiembre 1650.

influence on Providence a decade earlier. Fault lines separating religious and secular authorities were a major hazard on the imperial periphery, where forceful metropolitan dictates could not cast the deciding vote.

Caballero's death might very well have been the straw that broke the camel's back, because almost immediately afterward decisions that had been put off for decades began to be made. Prime among these was the concession of an annual *navío de permiso* to the Duke of Veragua. The sailing was granted specifically because of the disorder on Jamaica as well as "repeated warnings and reports that Portuguese and French fleets had attempted to assault the island."⁹³ There was a tacit understanding that this new revenue stream would motivate the Duke to see to improving the fortifications. Columbus's heir was keen to establish a permanent defense force, albeit with the additional stipulation that the garrison consist of soldiers from elsewhere – he did not trust native Jamaicans to defend the island since they were "inclined to disorder, insubordination, and conspiracies."⁹⁴

Given sufficient time, this combination of expedients might have reshaped the Spanish regime on Jamaica. Predictable, regulated access to goods that could not be produced on the island and a renewed commitment to security would have made life there much easier and eliminated two major sources of social friction. With its comparatively temperate climate and strategic location, Jamaica might have become a migration destination rather than a place that inhabitants sought to flee at all costs. All of this could very well have come to pass if the Crown

⁹³ Ibid., "Sobre la permission del navio que le havia concedida para la isla de jamyca dize el conssejo lo que pareze," Consejo de la Indias, Madrid, 11 diciembre 1651.

⁹⁴ Ibid., "Sobre la concesión al Duque de Veragua de un navio permiso para Jamaica con cada flota," Duque de Veragua, Madrid, 7 agosto 1651.

had responded decisively to Newport's 1603 attack, Balbuena's 1611 letter, or even Sedeño's 1640 report. A decade later, the window to effect meaningful change on the island had closed.

Seventeenth-century Spanish Jamaica's story, much like that of English Providence, was defined by misplaced priorities, missed opportunities, and squandered potential. This tragicomic narrative underscores the notion that despite the additional experience of close to a century in the New World, Iberian colonial authorities were not all that much better prepared to deal with the challenges of managing a colony on in an increasingly entangled Caribbean than their Protestant rivals. The paradigm of mainland conquest and extraction, in which Jamaica was a malformed appendage with no clear purpose, was not displaced in time to keep pace with events elsewhere in the Atlantic. Only after the English – seen as no threat to Spain's Caribbean possessions as late as 1651 – turned their attention to the island would its true value become painfully apparent, but by then that ship had quite literally sailed.

V. “NOT TO PILLAGE, BUT TO PLANT”:
THE WESTERN DESIGN AND ITS AFTERMATH, 1651 – 1670

The residents of Santiago de la Vega awoke to a troubling sight on the morning of May 20, 1655. More than fifty large ships lay at anchor in Cagway Bay, accompanied by two dozen smaller vessels, although the exact number of the latter was difficult to descry because of their constant movement. Juan Ramírez de Orellana, who had inherited Jamaica’s governorship from Francisco de Proenza in 1651, received word of the fleet’s arrival slightly earlier from a pair of turtle fisherman who had raced from the eastern side of the island with the news, but not in sufficient time to mount a concerted defense. The governor sent Proenza, now his *maestre de campo*, down to the harbor to see what the new arrivals were about. Proenza promptly reported that it was an English armada, per their boldly displayed flags, and that they appeared to be making ready to land a large party of men.¹ Theirs did not appear to be a mission of peace.

The invasion came at a particularly inconvenient time of year, since many of the residents of Santiago de la Vega had repaired to their cattle *estancias* or sugar *ingenios* in the interior. Nonetheless, Ramírez sought to at least make some pretense of defense and went down to the harbor path with a small force, much as Fernando Melgarejo de Córdoba had done in the face of similarly lopsided odds half a century previously.² But in this case, there would be no cunningly controlled cattle stampede and, more to the point, the English stayed in their ships until their overwhelming naval advantage compelled Ramírez to pull back to town. When the raiders finally came ashore the next day, they did so in force – numbering some 9,000 in total by the estimates of the Spanish defenders, of whom there were less than 200.³

¹ Julian de Castilla, “The English Conquest of Jamaica 1655 – 1656,” ed. Irene A. Wright, in *Camden Miscellany Vol. XIII* (London: Offices of the Society, 1924), 1 – 2.

² See Chapter 4.

³ Castilla, “The English Conquest of Jamaica,” 2 – 3.

Unlike the previous seventeenth-century English incursions onto the island, this landing party was allowed to march into Santiago de la Vega and occupy it unopposed. This tactical lapse was subsequently questioned by all parties concerned, but perhaps Ramírez could simply sense from the beginning that something was different. Hewing more closely to the usual script, the governor sent an unlucky townsman into the English camp to initiate negotiations. The normal requests for livestock and other supplies were made and granted, although the Jamaicans were incensed that the hungry, undisciplined Protestant horde was in the process of slaughtering every domestic animal that they could get their hands on, not excepting dogs, cats, and donkeys.⁴

Even so, the English general's chaplain, who had taken "the habit of Saint Dominic" but later "fell from the faith," continued to report that the provisions on offer were insufficient. This itinerant clergyman with a weakness for bombastic discourse was none other than Thomas Gage, last seen whispering sweet nothings about world domination into Oliver Cromwell's ear. Gage took a leading role in the contentious diplomatic wrangling during the early days of the English occupation. When Ramírez's emissary reminded the assembled company that Jamaica was a sovereign Spanish possession by right of settlement as well as the dictates of papal authority, the disgraced Dominican replied that the Pope "could concede neither lands nor the right to conquer them, but should mind his churches and his papists," and that in any case his "monarch" had legitimately conquered the island by force of arms.⁵ Gage's choice of words was intentional. These English had not come solely in search of idle plunder as their forebears had. They had

⁴ Ibid., 5.

⁵ Ibid., 6. This echoed an argument that Gage had made earlier in print. He wrote of the Spanish claim to the New World that "I know no title he hath but force, which by the same title, and by a greater force may be repelled." Gage, *The English American*, 7. Gage also dismissed the efforts of Iberian colonists to make productive use of Jamaica's natural resources, which failing he used to buttress English claims of rightful conquest. Here he channeled Thomas More's Utopians, who considered "'it a most just cause for war when a people which does not use its soil [. . .] nevertheless forbids the use and possession of it by others who by the rule of nature ought to be maintained by it.'" More, *Utopia*, quoted in Pagden, *Lords of all the World*, 76 – 77.

come to seize control of Jamaica, a concept that must have shocked the Spanish in its sheer irrationality before the full weight of the potential consequences of such an outcome came crashing down.

The 1655 English attack on Jamaica was part of Oliver Cromwell's Western Design, through which the Lord Protector hoped to capture Spain's possessions in the Caribbean by way of gaining a foothold from which to launch attacks on Mexico and Peru.⁶ This grandiose scheme was a fiasco, as Jamaica was a meager consolation prize after a catastrophic attempt to capture Santo Domingo.⁷ The failure of the Western Design as originally conceived negated the notion of a South Atlantic empire founded upon the seizure of the mineral wealth of Spanish America via privateering or conquest.⁸ Beginning in the immediate aftermath of Jamaica's fall, commerce and agriculture would be the focus of English endeavors in the New World, and these pursuits would form the foundation for Britain's primacy in the Atlantic during the century that followed. But this was a contingent outcome - the ideological underpinning for the Western Design was archaic and its execution indicative of striking deficiencies in the English understanding of the Americas. The Iberian colonists were comparatively well-versed in the practical exigencies of survival in the Caribbean. Severely disadvantaged in terms of manpower and materiel, the Spaniards were nonetheless able to sustain a dogged resistance that dragged on for five years.⁹

⁶ For the background to and context of the Design, see George Louis Beer, "Cromwell's Policy in its Economic Aspects," *Political Science Quarterly* 16.4 (1901): 582 – 611; R. C. Anderson, "The Operations of the English Fleet, 1648 – 1652," *The English Historical Review* 31 (1916): 406 – 428; and Timothy Venning, *Cromwellian Foreign Policy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

⁷ Several accounts of the English attempt on Hispaniola appear in Irene A. Wright, ed., "Spanish Narratives of the English Attack on Santo Domingo," in *Camden Miscellany Vol. XIV* (London: Offices of the Society, 1926), 1 – 80.

⁸ Kupperman, "Raleigh's Dream of Empire and Its Seventeenth-Century Career," 136.

⁹ Jamaica was not officially ceded to England until the signing of the Treaty of Madrid in 1670. A reconquest was in the works as late as 1781. Morales Padrón, *Spanish Jamaica*, 215, 233, xviii.

The prelude to the Western Design began with Parliament's passage of the Navigation Act in October 1651, which codified the principle "that the Commonwealth had the power to regulate trade and to alter the governments of the plantations."¹⁰ Although its enforceability was questionable, the Act was designed to eliminate contraband foreign trade with English colonies. It was intended as a counter to Dutch commercial power in the Atlantic after negotiations to form an alliance against Spain and Portugal failed.¹¹ The outbreak of the First Anglo-Dutch War, in part a response to the passage of the act, soon followed, and was resolved in England's favor by 1654. Oliver Cromwell, who had been named Lord Protector in late 1653, subsequently sought to consolidate the Commonwealth's position by securing an alliance with another of the major continental powers, concentrating his efforts on France and Spain. Cromwell hoped to play his imperial rivals off of each other, and "a kind of diplomatic auction" ensued.¹² Negotiations with Spain failed after the Lord Protector proved unwavering in the unrealistic demand that England be allowed to trade directly with the West Indies, leaving him to cast his lot with the French.¹³

Unsurprisingly, no alliance with France was forthcoming, but Cromwell had in any case set his sights on war with Spain for reasons that were only partially grounded in the geopolitical and economic best interest of England. Opposition to Catholicism was certainly a core tenet of

¹⁰ Carla Gardina Pestana, *The English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution, 1640 – 1661* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 120. A prior round of reforms had been initiated under the stewardship of John Pym, the former treasurer of the Providence Island Company. Pestana, *Conquest of Jamaica*, 17. There were strong links between members of the Company and the revolutionary clique in England, but the existence of a direct, causal relationship between their colonizing efforts and the genesis of the Civil War is more doubtful. Nonetheless, it is not a coincidence that the same Puritan grandees who funded Providence, including Warwick, Brooke, and Pym, were at the forefront of the revolutionary vanguard. Newton, *Colonising Activities of the English Puritans*, 2 – 5, 314 – 330.

¹¹ See Beer, "Cromwell's Policy," 596, for a succinct review of the terms of the act and its diplomatic ramifications. Significantly, this was the first time that England and its overseas possessions had been tied together into a single transatlantic trading unit. David Armitage, "The Cromwellian Protectorate and the Languages of Empire," *The Historical Journal* 35.3 (1992): 535.

¹² John F. Battick, "Cromwell's Diplomatic Blunder: The Relationship between the Western Design of 1654 – 55 and the French Alliance of 1657," *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 5.4 (1973): 283 – 285.

¹³ Menna Prestwich, "Diplomacy and Trade in the Protectorate," *The Journal of Modern History* 22.2 (1950): 108. This entire diplomatic sequence is covered in detail in Venning, *Cromwellian Foreign Policy*, 38 – 70.

the Lord Protector's philosophy, but he had also inherited a less religiously-inflected antipathy to Spain akin to that which had characterized the age of Raleigh and Drake.¹⁴ Cromwell's economic ideology was similarly Elizabethan. The wealth to be gained from commerce was increasingly in evidence, but the Lord Protector persisted in adhering to staunch mercantilist policy. Control of the mines of Spanish America would furnish England with the bullion that Cromwell sorely needed to provide for the continued financial solvency of the Commonwealth.¹⁵ In his rhetoric, the "Elizabethan ideal of a self-financing war" was "given the assurance of providence" by virtue of its prosecution against proponents of heterodoxy.¹⁶

Here again the influence of Thomas Gage was manifest. In the opening epistle to his polemical 1648 travelogue, the erstwhile Dominican wrote that the Spanish in the Indies were "contented to lose the honor of that wealth and felicity they have there since purchased by their great endeavors, so they may enjoy the safety of retaining what they have formerly gotten."¹⁷ Gage paired this secular declension narrative, believable because of his long experience in the Americas, with a multifaceted religious argument that melded seamlessly with Cromwell's pseudo-messianic vision of ascendant Protestant empire.¹⁸ The Western Design was founded upon considerations owing to the balance of power, religiosity, and economics, but was in each

¹⁴ Beer, "Cromwell's Policy," 604. Cromwell specifically fomented the "revival" of Drake by recirculating texts printed during previous generations' wars with Spain. Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 99.

¹⁵ Beer, "Cromwell's Policy," 608; Prestwich, "Diplomacy and Trade," 108.

¹⁶ Armitage, "The Cromwellian Protectorate," 536. See also Battick, "Cromwell's Diplomatic Blunder," 294, with respect to Cromwell's fallacious notion of war as a profit-making venture.

¹⁷ Gage, *The English American*, 6.

¹⁸ The religious points deployed by Gage included not only simple anti-Catholic antagonism, but the illegitimacy of papally-sanctioned claims of dominion (as he reiterated on Jamaica) and the need to protect people of African and indigenous descent from the purveyors of a false faith. Pestana, *Conquest of Jamaica*, 7. Cromwell's vision can be characterized as the belief that "the English revolution, and the breed of Calvinism which underpinned it, must have been intended for universal exportation." Pagden, *Lords of all the World*, 74.

instance colored by the Lord Protector's incomplete or dogmatic understanding of the prevailing circumstances.¹⁹

But many of these faults were evident only in hindsight, and the Design moved forward with much enthusiasm among the revolutionary elite. The broad strokes of the plan were simple. A massive fleet would transport 7,000 men and all necessary supplies to the West Indies.²⁰ This voyage would take place between December and May to avoid hurricane season.²¹ Sir William Penn, father of the future founder of Pennsylvania of the same name, was given command of the navy, and Robert Venables, a veteran of the conquest of Ireland, would lead English forces on land.²² Senior army officers included Andrew Carter, the final governor of Providence Island, and Lewis Morris, a colonial colonel who had first come to the Caribbean as an indentured servant on Providence and sailed with William Jackson during the 1640s.²³

Recruitment and supply proved a challenge for so logistically complex an undertaking. Although only half of the soldiers for the Design were to be assembled in England, meeting even this reduced threshold was difficult. Many of the men who joined the fleet were inexperienced, of known bad character, or both – Venables remarked wryly that his fellow officers “generally gave us the most abject of their Companies, and if any man offered himself he was struck.”²⁴ Shipbuilding in preparation for and prizes captured during the Anglo-Dutch War had left

¹⁹ Frank Strong, “The Causes of Cromwell’s West Indian Expedition,” *WMQ* 4.2 (1899): 228.

²⁰ There was also a European component to the Western Design. A piratical endeavor was concurrently underway in the Mediterranean, where a second fleet had been sent to harass Spanish shipping closer to home. Armitage, “The Cromwellian Protectorate,” 538.

²¹ The English were likely particularly wary of storms because Barbados had been struck by a serious hurricane in the fall of 1653. Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society*, 16.

²² Like Raleigh before him, much of Venables’s formative military experience came while suppressing rebellion in Ireland. He played a key role during the reconquest of Drogheda in 1649 and the counterinsurgency campaign that followed. Also like Raleigh, Venables hoped to receive land in Ireland in recompense for his service, but this aim was complicated by the Design. Venables, *The Narrative of General Venables*, 2 – 3. For more on Irish resistance throughout the early stages of the English colonial project, see Nicholas Canny, *Making Ireland British 1580 – 1650* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

²³ Pestana, *Conquest of Jamaica*, 15 – 23.

²⁴ Venables, *Narrative*, 5.

Cromwell with a surplus of ships, but fitting out more than three dozen vessels was extremely expensive and corners were cut. And once this tremendous force had been marshalled, seeing to its sustenance became the hardest part of all.²⁵ Preparations on this scale were difficult to disguise, but Cromwell took pains to ensure that the target of the Design remained a secret. Speculation ranged from conceivable – Hispaniola – to wildly inaccurate – France. Consensus had yet to be established by the time that the hastily assembled English fleet sailed from Portsmouth in late December 1654.²⁶

After an uneventful Atlantic crossing, the ships put in at Barbados a month later. There they expected to take on additional men and supplies, but found the Barbadians, who acquired all of their food from trade, entirely unwilling to share staples. Relations with the most influential colonists were particularly problematic because a generation of young, quasi-noble Royalists had crossed to Barbados to seek their fortune follow Charles’s execution.²⁷ Venables was received coolly by the island’s assembly as a result but tried to avoid conscripting the leading citizens’ restive indentured servants nonetheless, limiting the pool of available recruits. Hopes of securing armaments were equally fruitless. Much of the island had already been deforested, leaving only inferior quality wood for his carpenters to shape into pikes.²⁸ Firearms sent to Barbados ahead of the fleet had already been dispersed among the populace, and only the least desirable found their way back to Venables’s armory. Friction between the seamen and landmen emerged as the foot

²⁵ Even before the fleet departed, there were repeated complaints concerning the quality of the provisions. General Venables later alleged that the officer in charge of arranging supplies for the Design had been bribed to accept lower quality goods. *Ibid.*, 4 – 5.

²⁶ Pestana, *Conquest of Jamaica*, 24 – 34.

²⁷ These ambitious Cavaliers had thought to make a fresh start away from the chaos and (literally) puritanical control of Cromwell’s regime in England. More than a few eventually achieved their goal of fame and fortune in the New World, among them Thomas Modyford, whose rise would ironically reach its apex on Jamaica. Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line*, 131 – 132.

²⁸ Despite Venables’s intentions to the contrary, many servants and indebted freeman did succeed in “escaping” via the expedient of joining the Design. The general grumbled that “Tom Tinker or Tom a Bedlam in England marches with better Weapons” than those collected on Barbados. Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted*, 53 – 54.

soldiers of the Design chafed at their rapidly worsening prospects.²⁹ Embezzlement was rampant – Venables cites an exemplary case in which a cargo of confiscated “elephant’s teeth” vanished into the ether.³⁰ There was no obvious fix for the resulting shortages, which continued to mount as time went on. With no choice but to forge on and “depend on Providence for the rest,” the fleet departed Barbados on March 31 after more than two months on the island.³¹

Their next stop was St. Christopher’s, which had been repopulated by Englishmen since the Spanish victory there in 1630. News there was initially good – an advance party had secured the service of several knowledgeable pilots, including Kempo Sybada, who had begun his career in the Caribbean on Providence, as well as a gunner named Christopher Cox who purported to have served a dozen years on Hispaniola, finally revealed to be the first target of the Design.³² But any optimism that these additions might have engendered was quickly tempered by the escalating ill will between the army and navy. The catalyst, as it was so often in the seventeenth-century Caribbean, was money. Venables desired that his men receive a share of the pillage, as they always had during the recent fighting on the British Isles, but Penn would not hear of it since they had received orders to the contrary from Cromwell.³³ In a gesture reminiscent of Francisco Díaz Pimienta’s advocacy for his troops prior to the invasion of Providence, Venables pledged a portion of his own pay to ensure the fair compensation – and attendant loyalty – of the

²⁹ Henry Whistler, who served on the naval side under Penn, referred to Barbados as “the Dunghill whereon England doth cast forth its rubbish.” But in the same breath he described the island’s natural beauty and a diverse population of English, French, Dutch, Scotch, Irish, Spanish Jew, indigenous, and African islanders. This was the rule rather than the exception on a maritime periphery defined by mobility and permeable imperial boundaries. “Extracts from Henry Whistler’s Journal of the West India Expedition,” in Venables, *Narrative*, 146.

³⁰ Presumably ivory imported by the Dutch East India Company. Venables, *Narrative*, 8 – 11. Dutch shipping was seized at Barbados as per the Navigation Act, a move that did not endear the Design to Barbadians who had blithely continued to trade “illegally” since 1651. Pestana, *Conquest of Jamaica*, 49 – 50.

³¹ William Penn, quoted in Pestana, *Conquest of Jamaica*, 56.

³² Venables, *Narrative*, 19. Pestana, *Conquest of Jamaica*, 58 – 59. Here again Cox’s long residence on a Spanish island epitomizes the entangled lives of “citizens of the Caribbean.”

³³ Although the soldiers also expected to receive a salary, their economic prospects were really not so different from privateers, who frequently served under terms of “no purchase, no pay.” Latimer, *Buccaneers of the Caribbean*, 92.

men.³⁴ The disunity continued when it came time to draw up a concrete plan to capture Santo Domingo. Venables advised a direct assault on the harbor but the maritime officers demurred, fearing a protective boom. A council of war made the fateful decision to land at the mouth of the Rio Haina, around ten miles to the southwest of the principal port.³⁵

That the English even made it to Hispaniola was a minor miracle. Preparations for the Design had been so muddled as to defy belief at every stage of the process. Their inadequacy and disorganization were particularly jarring under the auspices of the New Model Army, which had fought so effectively during the English Civil War.³⁶ But conducting the business of quotidian life, much less organizing a massive war effort, was far different in the Caribbean than it had been in England. The Design was flawed from its conception, shaped by Cromwell's misguided notion, encouraged by Gage, that the Spanish empire had been rendered helpless by a century of decadence. No matter how large a military force the Protector might have assembled, conquering the New World was never going to be the rote affair that he envisioned.

This fundamental misconception was compounded by the inherent difficulty in executing so large an undertaking at so distant a remove. While the destruction of Providence was recalled as rhetorical support for the Design, lessons from the logistical failings of the Providence Island Company were overlooked in its formulation. The result was predictable. With no experience in the Caribbean, those encharged with the fleet's supply could not anticipate the conditions that would be encountered there. Dependence on Barbados for materiel and manpower despite its estrangement by the recent efforts to throttle free trade underscored the disjuncture between

³⁴ Venables, *Narrative*, 14 – 18. The prospect of uncertain pay instead of potential plunder crushed the morale of the men, many of whom “would not have come out of England” if the Lord Protector had not “promised them [. . .] free plunder wheresoever they did go.” “Henry Whistler’s Journal,” 150.

³⁵ Venables, *Narrative*, 18 – 19.

³⁶ For more on the New Model Army, see Keith Roberts, *Cromwell’s War Machine: The New Model Army 1645 – 1660* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2009).

metropole and periphery. A misapprehended *raison d'être* and short-sighted preparations set the Design up to fail. This outcome would serve as a reminder that during the middle decades of the seventeenth century the entangled empires of England and Spain were united in their inability to coordinate decisive action in the Caribbean.

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Although England and Spain were nominally at peace, the citizens of Hispaniola were not surprised when a hostile fleet appeared off the coast, since “little reliance could be placed in [the English] nation, faithless to God and to its king.” Most of the defenders, who initially numbered no more than 500 in total, were quickly dispatched to the Rio Haina.³⁷ But the Spanish were puzzled when navigational difficulties caused the invaders to land instead at the port of Nizao, twenty-five miles southwest along the coast. The English began the forty-mile march to Santo Domingo through a “land burnt up with drought, so our Horses and Men fell down for thirst” – canteens were among the necessities in short supply, and the *vecinos* added to the miseries of the English by stopping up their wells.³⁸ It took Venables and his men four days to reach the Haina, by which time many were suffering from dysentery.³⁹ The delay had also given the Spanish the opportunity to call up reinforcements and thoroughly scout the forces arrayed against them.⁴⁰

³⁷ Manuel Gonzalez Pallano Tinoco, “Narrative of the invasion of La Española, Santo Domingo, which the English attempted, year 1655; and the demonstrations of their infidelity and iniquity,” in Wright, ed., “Spanish Narratives of the English Attack on Santo Domingo,” 2, 4.

³⁸ Ironically, Hispaniola had been chosen as the Design’s target in part because of its fertility and agricultural potential. Between 1560 and 1620, close to three quarters of all sugar shipped to Seville were produced on the island. By midcentury Hispaniola had begun to build a more diversified economy, bucking the Caribbean trend toward specialization. Wheat, *Atlantic*, 181 – 215. For more on the island’s early history, see Lynne A. Guitar, *Cultural Genesis: Relationships among Indians, Africans and Spaniards in Rural Hispaniola, First Half of the Sixteenth Century* (Dissertation: Vanderbilt University, 1998) and Frank Moya Pons, *Historia Colonial de Santo Domingo*, 3rd ed. (Santiago, Dominican Republic: Colección Estudios, 1977).

³⁹ Venables, *Narrative*, 20 – 21, 27.

⁴⁰ Gonzalez Pallano Tinoco, “Narrative of the invasion of La Española,” 5 – 8.

Early in the fighting, a small party of soldiers led by Venables was tricked into range of one of the Spanish forts. The General, “being one of the foremost, and seeing the enemy fall on so desperately with their Lances, he very nobly ran behind a tree.”⁴¹ The mounted lancers who compelled this disgraceful display played a leading role during the first days of the engagement. Many of these cavalymen were of African or mixed-race descent, and most typically subsisted by hunting feral cattle and boars in the Hispaniolan hinterland.⁴² This unorthodox training proved ideal for turning aside the ragged English advance, so much so that one Spanish officer came to prefer “a hundred lancers to a thousand firearms.”⁴³

Two feeble attempts were eventually made to take the port itself, with results typified by the cowardly actions of one officer who “took hold of them that were before him and thrust them aside, that he might make way for himself to be foremost in the retreat.” Following the second failed assault and after a total of three miserable weeks on the island, Venables concluded that further efforts on Hispaniola were futile. He “did therefore resolve to attempt Jamaica,” picking an ostensibly easy target by way of saving some measure of face. The attack on Santo Domingo had been a debacle. While the Spanish had suffered negligible casualties, the English had lost 1,000 men – as many to thirst, disease, and exposure as combat.⁴⁴ The defenders exulted after the Design’s shortcomings were exposed on Hispaniola.⁴⁵ Insufficient maritime expertise forced a distant landing, impelling an overland trek that crippled the health and courage of an unprepared cohort of soldiers. These failures made ignominious defeat inevitable. Venables hoped to salvage

⁴¹ “Henry Whistler’s Journal,” 154.

⁴² Their lifestyle was quite similar to the that of the *boucaniers* (buccaneers) of nearby Tortuga, whose diet consisted primarily of cattle meat grilled on a Taíno *boucan*. The buccaneers were not, however, skilled with horse or spear, and had in fact recently been defeated by Spanish forces in battle. Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*, 97 – 102.

⁴³ Gonzalez Pallano Tinoco, “Narrative of the invasion of La Española,” 25.

⁴⁴ Venables, *Narrative*, 33 – 34, xxx – xxxi.

⁴⁵ They crowed that a second attempt would not go well for anyone: “not well for them, because of how little they would profit by it; not well for us, for they bring nothing valuable for us to take away from them.” Gonzalez Pallano Tinoco, “Narrative of the invasion of La Española,” 42.

the enterprise by shifting his target from the jewel of the Spanish Caribbean to its backwater, but even in this reduced ambition he would be frustrated.

Just less than a week of sailing brought the English ships to Jamaica, where soldiers went ashore on the afternoon of May 20. Venables and his men met only token resistance because the Spanish expected that they would move on after extracting sufficient ransom. The Iberians were disabused of this notion when the General informed Juan Ramírez de Orellana's emissaries that the English "came not to pillage, but to plant." He requested the surrender of all armaments and defenses on the island. In exchange, he would spare the Jamaicans' lives and grant them free passage to New Spain. Slaves were among the few excepted from this provision; they were to be brought before Venables "to receive such favorable concessions as are intended to be made unto them touching their Liberty."⁴⁶ These terms were explicitly framed to mirror those that had been imposed upon the English on Providence in 1641.⁴⁷

Negotiations were complicated because Ramírez was quite ill, apparently suffering from an advanced case of syphilis. Venables demanded his presence nonetheless, while the Spanish protested that this was a ploy to exploit the governor's failing health to coerce him into agreeing to an unfavorable treaty.⁴⁸ But if this had been the General's intention, it was thwarted – even after Ramírez had been carried back to town on a litter and signed Venables's capitulation, the

⁴⁶ The caginess of the wording of this article is telling. During the subsequent struggle on Jamaica, both sides eagerly courted the loyalty of the island's African population through a series of mostly empty promises. The only group other than slaves who were not granted unconditional freedom were the defectors from William Jackson's 1642 expedition, whose treachery had presumably condemned them to death. Venables, *Narrative*, 37 – 39.

⁴⁷ Pestana, *Conquest of Jamaica*, 125. Remember as well that the destruction of the English colony on Providence was specifically invoked by Cromwell's justification for launching the Design. His argument, even at this late date, hinged upon the fact that that island first been settled on Christmas Eve 1629, prior to the reestablishment of peace between England and Spain in 1630. Kupperman, *Providence Island*, 351.

⁴⁸ Castilla, "The English Conquest of Jamaica," 10.

terms were summarily rejected by the Spanish citizenry who had dispersed into the interior.⁴⁹

This unforeseen development prompted the English to attempt to secure the island by force of arms in early June, but the slippery Jamaicans merely fled further from the coast as they had so many times before, carrying all of their movable valuables with them.⁵⁰

From here the Design uneasily entered a new phase. Although the conquest of Jamaica had yet to be consolidated, practical exigencies dictated that swords be discarded for plowshares. A thousand-man vanguard was dispatched to settle the plantations that surrounded Santiago de la Vega. There they planted beans, chickpeas, and other vegetables brought from England for their own subsistence as well as tobacco, perhaps to be exchanged for additional supplies elsewhere. Although many of the men took to farming at least as well as they had to soldiering, ignorance and inefficient old habits continued to hamstring their efforts. Spanish observers ridiculed the men-at-arms for branding livestock, “as though in ownership of them in England or Scotland,” and being completely incapable of assessing the ripeness of fruit.⁵¹

Disease and hunger ran rampant during the unsettled stalemate that followed, decimating the surviving Spanish population and English occupiers alike.⁵² In late June Venables wrote that some two thousand men were sick and unable to work.⁵³ To make matters worse, there were not

⁴⁹ The Spaniards agreed that “they would rather die in the bush than see their daughters and wives in the power of the heretics.” This despite the fact, ironic given later events, that Francisco de Proenza and Cristóbal Arnaldo Isasi urged their countrymen to surrender and evacuate. *Ibid.*, 12 – 13.

⁵⁰ “Letters Concerning the English Expedition into the Spanish West Indies in 1655,” in Venables, *Narrative*, 137 – 138. A 1688 English history of Jamaica would reimagine these anticlimactic negotiations for the island’s future. It pitted Venables against a female Spanish governor whose scheming gave her countrymen time to use “Magique Art” to spirit away their wealth and seal Jamaica’s gold and silver mines. James Robertson, “Re-Writing the English Conquest of Jamaica in the Late Seventeenth Century,” *The English Historical Review* 117 (2002): 813 – 839. This made for a much better story than the events as they actually happened, and speaks to the continued currency of the fantastic in the late eighteenth-century Caribbean.

⁵¹ Castilla, “The English Conquest of Jamaica,” 15.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵³ The English most likely suffered from malaria and dysentery. They arrived just in time for mosquito breeding season, killed and ate the cattle that would otherwise have been the insects’ first targets, and crowded the low-lying coasts to avoid the unsecured interior – contributing factors all to a potential malaria epidemic. Malaria suppresses the immune system, increasing its chance of being fatal in combination with a common campaigning disease like

sufficient agricultural implements to keep those who remained relatively fit occupied.⁵⁴ By early July, the Jamaicans estimated that more than a thousand invaders had died on the island – very few from wounds sustained in combat.⁵⁵ When a party of Spaniards surrendered after Venables departed for England several weeks later, they were welcomed as equals.⁵⁶ The shared struggle to survive superseded any animosity that had existed between the erstwhile belligerents.

The invasion of Jamaica had proceeded by the numbers yet arrived at a destination that neither side had anticipated. There was no script for the annexation of a major Caribbean island by a hostile power. And although the intention of the Design had been to establish a beachhead for the conquest of Spanish America, planning extended only to the capture of such a foothold. Gage's assurance that natural riches of the New World could provision a large force indefinitely with little effort had misled Cromwell as well. To this point in the seventeenth century the pace of change in the Spanish Caribbean had been slow, bottlenecked by communication lag and constrained by bureaucracy. This lethargic equilibrium had held Jamaica in its thrall during the interval bookended by Newport's raid and Venables's invasion, but was upset by the magnitude of the potential ramifications of the loss of the island. Whether or not administrators on either side of the Atlantic would have preferred to permit the English their dubious prize, something had to be done. An island that had been part of the Spanish empire since 1494 could not be ceded without a fight. All that remained to be decided was how this campaign would be prosecuted, and what its aim would be. The answers that these questions received through 1670 dictated the rhythm and tenor of events in the Caribbean during the century that followed.

dysentery. J. R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620 – 1914* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 102 – 104.

⁵⁴ Venables, *Narrative*, 48 – 49.

⁵⁵ Castilla, "The English Conquest of Jamaica," 13.

⁵⁶ "Letters Concerning the English Expedition," 141.

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News of the English attempt on Santo Domingo made its way to Santiago de Cuba several days after the invaders landed. Its bearers had fled Hispaniola while affairs there still hung in the balance, hiding in the mangroves to avoid detection before making the 500-mile voyage by canoe.⁵⁷ Cubans who feared their island would be next if Hispaniola fell must have been relieved to hear that the interlopers had been repulsed. But less favorable tidings would soon arrive. In late July a courier packet brought word that Jamaica had been captured. The account recorded an attack by forces under the command of “Prince Robert” and the unopposed occupation of the island that resulted. Rumor had it that the English intended to return to Santo Domingo. Jamaica alone would be a tremendous coup as a logistical base from which to prey on the treasure fleet or – as the Design intended – to take the fight to New Spain. Santiago de Cuba’s governor hastily relayed the dispatch to Spain and urged that the matter be dealt with equally expeditiously.⁵⁸

A vessel carrying seventy Jamaicans reached Campeche toward the end of September. Governor Ramírez had originally been among their number but succumbed to his illness en route and was buried at sea. These refugees had been among the holdouts in the interior, but when the privation there became too much they were compelled to descend and request quarter. This was granted, but the English were none too generous in supplying them for their voyage from the island.⁵⁹ One man claimed to have had a conversation with an English officer before departing. He reported that the unnamed officer had asked him about the defenses of Puertobelo, Riohacha,

⁵⁷ AGI, SD, leg. 178B, “Cartas e Informes del Gobernador de Santiago de Cuba Pedro Bayona sobre el Socorro de Jamaica,” Pedro de Bayona Villanueva, Cuba, 29 mayo 1655.

⁵⁸ Ibid., “Sobre los disignios [sic] del ingles decir sobre aquella plaza y declaracion de la toma de jamayca,” Pedro de Bayona Villanueva, 27 julio 1655.

⁵⁹ Ibid., “Declaracion de Juan Estevan Franc,” Merida, 20 septiembre 1655.

and Isla Margarita in hopes of identifying the easiest prey. When the *vecino* complained that the English had unlawfully invaded during a time of peace, the officer responded with a curious set of justifications.⁶⁰ The Jamaican was aware that Venables had left the island and averred that the general was to be executed in England for his failings. He concluded with his own assertion of Jamaica's importance, and implored the king to extirpate the English presence there as soon as possible.⁶¹

That notion might have heartened the soldiers who survived to brave the first Caribbean winter on the island. Their situation somehow continued to grow worse although only half of the 8,000 who had made landfall in June remained by November. The men had long despaired of receiving their pay, but in the interim they had ceased to receive rations as well and were entirely left to shift for themselves. All of the livestock in the vicinity of Santiago de la Vega had been eaten, driving the soldiers to consume their own dogs. When a new regiment arrived on Jamaica, one veteran pitied them since "all their imaginary mountains of gold are turned into dross."⁶² This was as apt an epitaph for the Design as any, and indeed for English efforts in the Caribbean throughout the first half of the seventeenth century. Ration distribution records confirm that there were only slightly more than 3,000 men-at-arms left on the island by March 1656. Among the dead was Thomas Gage, in the end a victim of his own arcane machinations.⁶³

⁶⁰ One was commercial: Philip's refusal to open Spanish America to foreign trade. Another was legal: Spain's unwillingness to judge Englishmen residing on the peninsula by the English legal system despite the fact that Spaniards resident in England were granted the inverse privilege. The third was political: the Spanish monarch had granted sanctuary to three Royalists who had assassinated the English ambassador to Spain. Here the officer referred to Anthony Ascham, an outspoken proponent of republican government who had been murdered in 1650. Ascham's violent death and the unwillingness of Spanish authorities to prosecute the perpetrators had featured prominently in anti-Spanish propaganda for several years and appeared among the justifications cited by Cromwell in initiating hostilities against Spain. Venning, *Cromwellian Foreign Policy*, 39 – 40, 109.

⁶¹ AGI, SD, leg. 178B, "Relacion de lo que contiene la declaracion inclusa de Antonio Montero de Silveira acerca del estado en que estavan la armada del ingles y las cosas de la isla de xamaica, en 29 de Agosto de 1655 que salio de aquella isla," Merida, 11 septiembre 1655.

⁶² "Letters Concerning the English Expedition," 141 – 142.

⁶³ Pestana, *Conquest of Jamaica*, 158.

But even as the English continued to die in droves on Jamaica, they attempted to press their advantage. Authorities in Cartagena sent word in April of the destruction of Santa Marta by ships from the island and lobbied for metropolitan intervention.⁶⁴ Their countrymen on Cuba had begun to despair of receiving help and looked to take matters into their own hands.⁶⁵ Meanwhile the Spaniards who remained on Jamaica had found their own unlikely allies. They were severely short of all necessary supplies and hemmed in by the English on one side and the mountains on the other. Just when it seemed that none would escape with their lives, “divine providence” arrived in the person of a former slave with a load of water. He had been living in a *palenque* deep in the interior and traversed the rugged terrain with ease.⁶⁶ Aid from Jamaica’s several maroon communities would be critical to the Spanish endeavor to retake the island.⁶⁷

Despite the dire conditions in which they lived, the remaining Jamaicans found ways to disrupt the English conquest-in-progress. Francisco de Proenza and Cristóbal Arnaldo Isasi took charge of the defense after the departure of Ramírez and the others who had formerly occupied the pinnacle of the island’s political hierarchy. Isasi initiated a guerilla campaign with a force of thirty Spaniards and fifteen Africans.⁶⁸ They took stragglers prisoner and extracted information

⁶⁴ AGI, SD, leg. 178A, “El Socorro que yntento hacer a Jamaica que motivos tubo para el y los efectos que a producido con el poco costo que a tenido el qual le puso a su credito,” Pedro Zapata, Cartagena, 24 abril 1656.

⁶⁵ AGI, SD, leg. 178B, “Se ofrece hazer la recuperacion de Jamaica con 800 hombres y va senalado el capitan,” Pedro de Bayona Villanueva, Cuba, 20 mayo 1656.

⁶⁶ Just as on Providence, escaped Africans adapted to life in Jamaica’s mountainous hinterlands with substantially less difficulty than did their feckless ex-masters. Ibid., “Carta de maestre de campo nombrado para la recuperación de la isla de Jamaica,” Francisco de Leiva Isasi, Oristan, Jamaica, 23 julio 1656. Three distinct maroon groups established themselves in the Design’s aftermath. The best known of these farmed Guanabacoa Vale, twenty miles to the northwest of Santiago de la Vega, and occupied the surveilling hills. Inhabitants of the more remote village of Los Vermejales worked most closely with the Spaniards. A third, less well-documented group settled to the south and west in the Mocho Mountains. Campbell, *Maroons of Jamaica*, 17 – 18.

⁶⁷ Kempo Sybada, the pilot who formerly served on Providence, encountered a lone mounted African in early 1656. The man explained that the members of his community intended to live apart from all Europeans without actively intervening in the struggle for control of Jamaica. Journal of Captain Kempo Sybada, cited in Pestana, *Conquest of Jamaica*, 196 – 197. Nonetheless they did collaborate, at least materially, with the Spanish during the first years of the occupation.

⁶⁸ Although the term “guerrilla” did not yet exist during the 1650s, the struggle for Jamaica conformed to the notion of guerrilla warfare that emerged during the nineteenth century. It was an asymmetric, irregular conflict that hinged upon mobility, attrition, and support of the local “populace” – in this case, the island’s maroons.

subsequently used to plan raids to raze unguarded plantations and ambush unsuspecting patrols. Isasi's defenders struck without warning and retreated into the woods before the English could respond in force. Their edge in mobility also allowed them to maintain lines of communication with Cuba via Jamaica's north coast and Cartagena from the south. The insurgents were quite successful in further lowering the invaders' morale, to the point that a trickle of Englishmen were driven to defect to the Spanish side and promptly shipped off the island.⁶⁹

For his services, the King appointed Isasi governor of Jamaica in October 1656.⁷⁰ In addition to confirming the appointment, Philip reiterated that reinforcements would be sent with firearms and ammunition as well as corn and cassava. Supplies and men alike were to be drawn from the surrounding islands, the reluctance of colonial administrators on these islands to deal with the English on Providence during the 1630s notwithstanding. The king congratulated Isasi on his "rigorous diversion," and recalled the defense of Santo Domingo to remind him that few could defeat many. He encouraged the newly-installed governor to keep up the good work; if he did so, more rewards befitting his conduct would certainly follow.⁷¹ This personal appeal little resembled the remoteness and condescension of the English officer corps. Philip's overture did not carry much more practical weight than Cromwell's empty promises, but it evoked a visceral response that kept Isasi and his men fighting in the face of horrendous odds.

Information was at a premium throughout this period of uncertainty. Even if the logistical challenges of coordinating the movement of soldiers and supplies around the Caribbean could be met, it would amount to nothing without accurate, current intelligence regarding the disposition

⁶⁹ AGI, SD, leg. 178B, Cristóbal Arnaldo Isasi a Pedro Zapata, Jamaica, 25 junio 1656.

⁷⁰ AGI, SD, leg. 178A, "Nombra sm por governador de la ysia xamayca y cavo de la gente de Guerra de ella a dⁿ cristoval arnaldo ysasi," Gregorio de Leguia, San Lorenzo, 25 octubre 1656.

⁷¹ Ibid., El rey a Cristóbal Arnaldo Isasi, San Lorenzo, 25 octubre 1656. A copy of the same letter is also filed in AGI, SD, leg. 1126.

of the enemy. Realizing this, the Spanish took advantage of every opportunity to get a better idea of what exactly the English were doing on Jamaica. One such opening presented itself in early 1657, when a merchant named Ambrosio González turned up in Bayamo in the wake of an ill-fated voyage. The master of a small ship, González had taken on a cargo of crops including tobacco on Cuba several months previously. He intended to sell the goods at Cartagena, but the vessel had been interdicted by a mixing crew of French and Dutch pirates off the north coast of Jamaica. González was offered quarter “under the word of the king of France” but taken to Santiago de la Vega as a prisoner. The pirates had planned to sell the merchant and his crew to the English, but after that scheme was thwarted – perhaps because there was no specie on the island with which to buy them – they deposited the Spaniards on the north coast and made their way back to Cuba.⁷²

During his brief time on Jamaica, González learned a lot. He heard about changes at the top of the English hierarchy – Venables had been replaced by his lieutenant colonel, Edward Doyley, following the former’s departure, but William Brayne had arrived to relieve Doyley around the same time that González was captured.⁷³ The merchant had surreptitiously surveyed the island’s defenses and naval strength, both of which he found substantial. González also reported that a thousand slaves had recently been imported from Nevis.⁷⁴ More encouragingly, he heard that London had recently sent word that a contingent of reinforcements promised by Cromwell would be delayed. Rumor had it that English merchants had rebuffed the Protector’s calls for support because his demands were too great.⁷⁵

⁷² AGI, SD, leg. 178B, Declaración de Ambrosio González, Bayamo, febrero 1657.

⁷³ Like Venables, Doyley had fought first in England, then in Ireland. Pestana, *Conquest of Jamaica*, 22. He had possessed no particular renown prior to the Design, but rose steadily through the ranks by dint of his competence and the deaths of many of the men who had initially outranked him.

⁷⁴ These Africans accompanied a smaller party of English settlers. See *Ibid.*, 219 – 220 for more regarding the emigrants from Nevis.

⁷⁵ Declaración de Ambrosio González.



Figure 5.1: This map of the English defenses at Santiago de la Vega was produced at around the same time that Ambrosio González spent time in the port. Note the fortifications on the strip of land extending into Cagway Bay, the future site of Port Royal. AGI, MP – Santo Domingo, 56, "Planta de las fortificaciones de Jamaica," c. 1657.

These hints of weakness must have been music to the ears of Cuban authorities, since preparations for the first concerted military effort to retake Jamaica were finally underway. The Duke of Alburquerque organized this undertaking in his capacity as the Viceroy of New Spain. He wrote to Isasi's renegades in March 1657, pointing out that "there is no better thing than to be born subjects of the King our father, but after that the most important is to have occasion to show

that which we can do in his service.”⁷⁶ But unlike the empty platitudes that had sailed back and forth across the Caribbean in the face of English encroachment during previous decades, these words were coupled with action. The Duke had sent several hundred men and money for their upkeep to Cuba, where they were to meet with additional forces and travel on to Jamaica.⁷⁷

The Cubans also followed through, and both groups were in Bayamo by May. They numbered close to 500 in total, and provisions had been made for both their supply and pay for three months.⁷⁸ By July the expeditionary force had made the crossing from Cuba to Jamaica and established itself in the mountains. They planned to fortify their position inland from St. Ann’s Bay near the center of the northern coast and use that stronghold as the base of operations for a prolonged insurgency.⁷⁹ But the English were as adept at keeping an eye on their adversary as the Spanish. Doyley, who retained command of military operations on the island, had received word of the new arrivals from a prisoner almost as soon as they made landfall. He was content to allow “Don Christopher Arnaldo Sasser” time to dig in, “that he might think himself secure enough to stand us, (that we might not perpetually be put to the toil of hunting them in the Woods) and yet so that he might not be able to give us any strong resistance.”⁸⁰

An advance party sent by Doyley captured a Portuguese mariner who had been engaged in transporting supplies to the entrenched Spaniards. He informed the English that some of the

⁷⁶ AGI, SD, leg. 178A, Duque de Albuquerque a los cabos, oficiales, vezinos, y naturales de la ysla de xamaica, México, 9 marzo 1657.

⁷⁷ Ibid., Duque de Albuquerque a Francisco de Salinas, México, 9 marzo 1657.

⁷⁸ Ibid., Blas Arnaldo Isasi a su majestad, Bayamo, 10 mayo 1677. Blas, a colonial administrator on Cuba, was Cristóbal Arnaldo Isasi’s brother. Their fraternal ties gave Blas special incentive to facilitate the recapture of Jamaica, as evidenced by his frequent correspondence with people in positions of power on either side of the Atlantic.

⁷⁹ Ibid., Cristóbal de Leiva Isasi al Duque de Albuquerque, Montes de Santa Ana, Jamaica, 8 julio 1657. The author of this letter was Cristóbal Arnaldo Isasi’s nephew. The cast of characters in the Caribbean at mid-century remained small and tightly-knit. Familial connections were important in building the interpersonal networks that dictated the ways and means of the struggle for hemispheric supremacy.

⁸⁰ Edward Doyley, *A Narrative of the Great Success God hath been pleased to give His Highness Force in Jamaica, against the King of Spains Forces; Together with a true Relation of the Spaniards losing their Plate-Fleet, As it was Communicated in a Letter from the Governour of Jamaica* (London: Henry Hills and John Field, 1658).

Iberians soldiers had attempted a munity due to the scarcity of provisions, compelling Isasi to come down out of the mountains and camp along the coast in the vicinity of the modern town of Ocho Rios. This intelligence spurred the occupiers into action. Doyley sailed from Cagway Bay in early November and put his men ashore several miles south of the Spanish encampment. An ambush slowed but did not stop their advance. The next line of defense was less conventional – several Spaniards attempted to distribute pamphlets that promised Doyley’s men quarter and transport if they would defect, but the unfortunate messengers were shot.⁸¹

The English completed their march and a pitched battle at the rudimentary Spanish fort ensued. Doyley’s soldiers secured victory by hacking through the stockade with hatchets and routed the surviving defenders. They captured a handful of Spanish officers in the aftermath of the fight. Among these was Francisco de Proenza, who Doyley subsequently shipped back to Europe for fear that he would find his way back to Jamaica if imprisoned on the near side of the Atlantic. Material spoils included a treasure trove of letters, the contents of which further encouraged Doyley that the Spanish resistance was failing.⁸² He gloated that after what would later be styled the Battle of Ocho Rios “the King of *Spain’s* Affairs do very much fail in these parts.”⁸³

It did not take long for news of the crippling defeat to make its way off the island. By the end of the month, Isasi reported the death of more than fifty men and the capture of half a dozen others, although he claimed that many more Englishmen had been killed, contravening Doyley’s

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Doyley specifically mentions a letter from Francisco de Leiva Isasi to one of his former slaves bemoaning the Spaniards’ lot as well as the notion that Pedro de Bayona was embezzling money intended for the payment of the Jamaican relief force. Blas Arnaldo Isasi would later indirectly corroborate the latter claim when he asserted that Bayona had falsely sent letters in his brother’s name. AGI, SD, leg. 178B, Blas de Ysasi Arnaldo al Rey, Cuba, 15 septiembre 1658. The existence of this letter also implies that the slave in question was literate, something that was fairly common in the Spanish Caribbean but would have been much rarer in England’s American colonies.

⁸³ Doyley, “Narrative of the Great Success in *Jamaica*.”

report. Blame for the reverse settled on the officers who had led the “mutiny” that had hastened the coming of the English. A captain named Juan de los Reyes was singled out for his bad conduct. His habitual restlessness was well known, but on this occasion Reyes had exceeded his reputation and committed the “worst crime” by refusing to obey his superiors.⁸⁴ The breakdown of the ties of loyalty and respect that bound the Spanish colonial hierarchy often had dire results. This model was outperformed by the professionally- rather than personally-inflected English command structure during the protracted struggle for Jamaica precisely because the latter was less dependent upon the individual merits of the men in charge.

Conversely, it was a minor miracle that the Spanish failure at Ocho Rios did not put an immediate end to the resistance on the island. That it did not was due in large part to the sheer obstinacy of Isasi and his small cadre of *naturales*, as well as the inability of the English to root out the remaining pockets of resistance on Jamaica. These included not only the Spaniards but the three maroon communities as well. These Africans tacitly sided with Isasi’s insurgents by refusing to formally align with the invaders. Failure to secure the maroons’ allegiance would prove critical to the undoing of the Spanish guerilla campaign by the end of the decade. During the initial two years of the English presence on Jamaica, only these former slaves had seen their fortunes rise. The invaders had found the conquest of a benighted backwater to be infinitely more complex than they could possibly have imagined, while the stalwart Jamaicans had learned that local knowledge and attention to duty alone were insufficient defenses against systemic apathy

⁸⁴ AGI, SD, leg. 178A, Pedro de Bayona Villanueva a su majestad, México, 21 marzo 1658. One of the chief complaints voiced by Reyes is detailed in a list of casualties predating the battle of Ocho Rios. Several dozen soldiers are listed as either ill or crippled, alluding to the squalor and hardship with which they had been met on Jamaica. AGI, SD, leg. 178B, “Lista de enfermos remitida por los capitanes Juan de los Reyes y Don Domingo de Silva,” Jamaica, 18 agosto 1657. Reyes fled the island after Ocho Rios, but Isasi’s charges caught up with him a year later in the Canary Islands. Philip ordered that the captain be taken into military custody and conveyed to Cádiz. AGI, SD, leg. 1126, El Rey al Duque de Medinaceli, Madrid, 9 julio 1658.

and a near-infinite supply of expendable soldiery. Unfortunately for Isasi and his compatriots, these lessons would only be confirmed in Spanish Jamaica's final act.

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The crushing defeat at Ocho Rios compelled the Council of the Indies to reconsider their strategy for retaking Jamaica. Sticking to Isasi's script regarding the underlying cause of that failure, their primary directive was to ensure the presence of exemplary military leadership on the island. Despite concerns as to whether Isasi himself fit these criteria given that his wartime experience only dated to 1655, the Council confirmed his governorship with the provision that a seasoned officer would be sent to Jamaica via the silver fleet. They reiterated their commitment to the island using language reminiscent of that which was concurrently being used to advocate for the fortification of Santa Catalina. For perhaps the first time, the Council recognized that Jamaica was valuable "neither for its wealth, nor for the profits that it has produced, but with respect the location that it occupies." Its rightful place was as a buffer and a bulwark, not an entrepôt.⁸⁵ Peninsular officials also conveniently concluded that "the quality of the means" of operations on and around the island were more important than the quantity of men involved in those operations.⁸⁶ This absolved them from expanding the effort on the royal dime.

Ultimately the Council of the Indies employed the usual expedient to double down rather than give up the fight. In the spring of 1658 the Council distributed a new round of letters to the Caribbean demanding support for Jamaica. They called on more governors to contribute as the

⁸⁵ The Council called to mind the Mediterranean island of Crete, held by the Republic of Venice as a bastion against the Ottoman Turks since 1212, by way of aspirational comparison. Ironically, the Ottomans would conquer Crete in 1669, even before Jamaica was formally ceded to the English. AGI, SD, leg. 178B, "Consulta del Consejo de Indias relativa al estado de la isla de Jamaica," Madrid, 12 marzo 1658.

⁸⁶ AGI, SD, leg. 178A, Marques de Villarrubia de Langre al Rey, 22 marzo 1658.

war effort expanded to match the gravity of the crisis.⁸⁷ But once again, the bulk of the forces came from New Spain.⁸⁸ As the most important man in Spanish America, the Viceroy seems to have considered the invasion of the island to be a personal affront. Unlike most of the officials a tier or two below him in the imperial hierarchy, he undertook every reasonable measure to effect a positive outcome on Jamaica. The Viceroy had opportunity to report good news even before the Mexican *tercio* reached the island. His troops skirmished at sea with three English frigates and emerged with a rare maritime victory for the beleaguered Spanish navy.⁸⁹ The downside of this encounter, which the Viceroy did not anticipate, was that it gave Doyley early warning of the reinforcements' arrival. The English commander would not allow this larger Spanish force as much time to establish itself as he had the previous year's less threatening contingent.

Several weeks after receiving word of the Mexicans' arrival in early June, Doyley and 750 hand-picked men sailed from Cagway Bay to the Spanish encampment at Río Nuevo, east of Ocho Rios along Jamaica's northern coast. Fortified in the heights on the far side of the river, the Iberians proved tough to dislodge. Doyley sent a drummer with a message for Isasi, offering him safe passage in exchange for surrender. The envoy was "very civilly treated," and returned to the English side with 25 pieces of eight and a jar of sweetmeats to boot, but Isasi predictably rejected a diplomatic resolution. For his part, Doyley was loathe to resort to violence but saw no other choice. Here again personal enmity between the rival commanders can be discounted; both were

⁸⁷ See AGI, SD, leg. 1126, El Rey al gobernador de Puerto Rico, Madrid, 21 abril 1658, for example. A newfound appreciation of Jamaica is evidenced by the fact that troops from Puerto Rico were to be given passage aboard ships from the treasure fleet. Ibid., f114r, El Rey al general de los galeones, Aranjuez, 12 mayo 1658.

⁸⁸ A comprehensive duty roster of the Mexican *tercio* lists 191 officers and 467 infantrymen. The exceedingly high ratio of the former to the latter recalls Francisco Díaz Pimienta's complaints of a bloated officer corps during the leadup to the conquest of Providence. AGI, SD, leg. 178B, "Relazion de los oficiales y soldados que las companias del tercio mexicano y de la nueva espana tiene," Río Nuevo, Jamaica, 27 mayo 1658.

⁸⁹ AGI, SD, leg. 178B, "Entro en jamayca el tercio de mexico que envoi de Socorro y que dava fortificado y del felix suceso que tuvo peleando con tres fragatas grandes del enemigo," Duque de Albuquerque, México, 21 junio 1658.

carrying out their duty to the best of their understanding and abilities. The English feinted at a frontal assault on the fort while Doyley led the main body of his force the long way around. This tactic caught the Spanish by surprise, and the attackers overran their fortifications after one of the fiercer pitched battles that had taken place in the Caribbean to that point. Doyley reported that several hundred Iberians had been killed, but only two dozen Englishmen. Nonetheless the tone of his dispatch was more muted than that of 1657, maybe because he had realized by now that the struggle for Jamaica would not be won in a day.⁹⁰

Isasi's relation of this engagement disagreed in several details. He claimed that the Spanish position had been assaulted by more than a thousand attackers. A party of ambushers that Doyley described as fleeing immediately "fought valiantly" in Isasi's report. And in the same line in which he mentioned his courteous treatment of the English drummer, the guerilla commander described the summary execution of forty prisoners. The rules of war on Jamaica were a curious mix of the savagery of conquest and the honor-bound protocol that would define the dynastic conflicts of the century and a half that followed. Isasi agreed with Doyley's tally of Spanish losses and was suspiciously silent on those of the enemy. His biggest admission came in the final section of this report. For the first time, the forlorn Jamaican governor stated explicitly that the reconquest of the island would be impossible except with the support of a "stout navy" – presumably the treasure fleet.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Edward Doyley, *A Brief Relation of a Victory, Obtained by Forces under the Command of Gen. Edward Doyley, Commander in chief of his Highnesse's Force in the Island of Jamaica* (Edinburgh: Christopher Higgins, 1659).

⁹¹ AGI, SD, leg. 178B, "Carta de Cristóbal Arnaldo Isasi, gobernador de la isla de Jamaica sobre los ataques de los ingleses a la isla," Jamaica, 19 julio 1658.

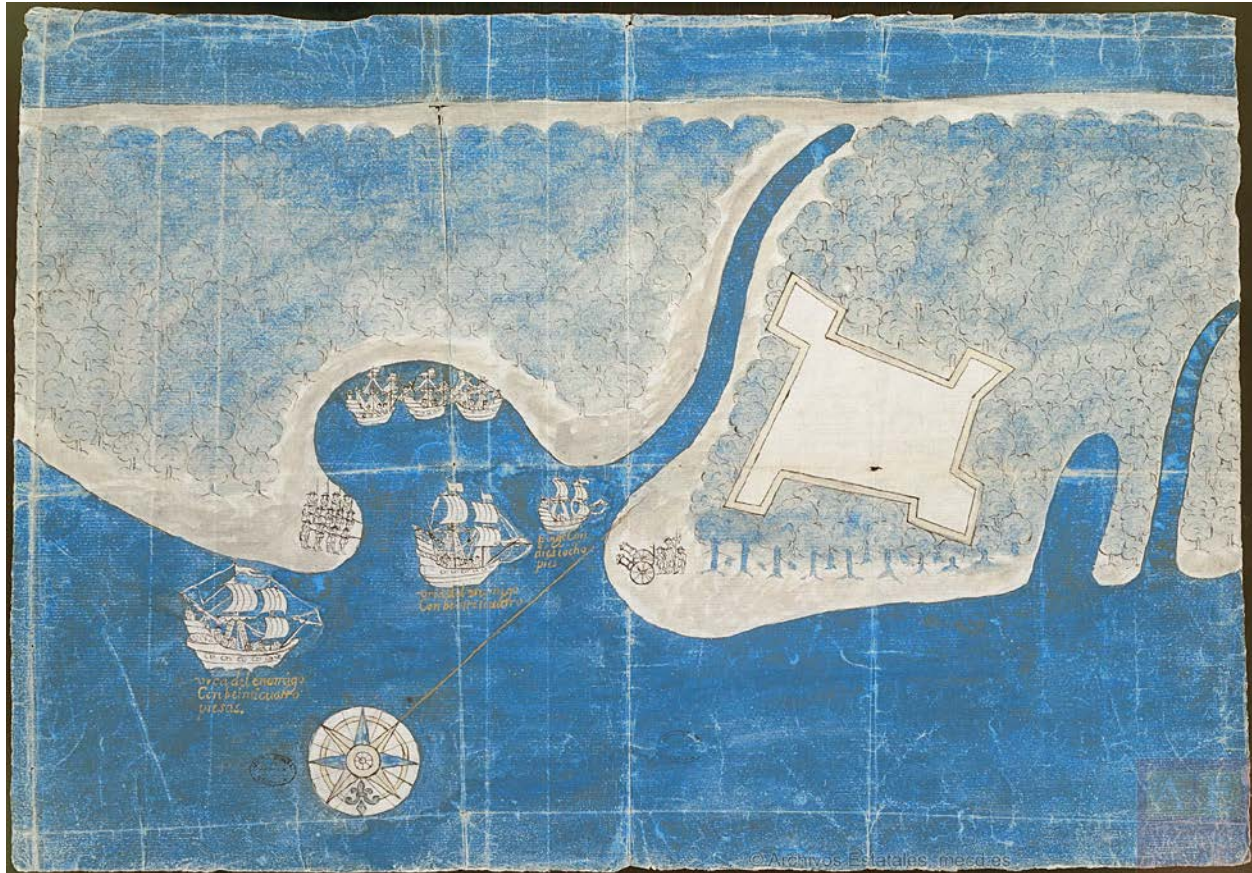


Figure 5.2: This map shows the disposition of English and Spanish troops prior to the Battle of Río Nuevo. Note how it indicates that Doyley intended a frontal assault, attesting to the miscalculation that would cost Isasi his last real chance to recapture Jamaica. The AGI incorrectly identifies the map as portraying St. Ann's Bay and the Río Negro, the latter of which is on the south side of the island. AGI, MP – Santo Domingo, 59, "Plano del puerto de Santa Ana (Jamaica)," c. 1658.

The Battle of Río Nuevo was not so much a turning point as a point of no return. Before the year was out Isasi sent most of the off-island troops who had survived the defeat home, reasoning that their numbers were insufficient to unseat the English and he could not supply them indefinitely. He planned to continue on with the men who had fought with him for three years, and to work cultivate closer ties with the maroons.⁹² Isasi asked for additional material aid, but enjoined the Cuban governor not to send him any more meat because fresh beef was still readily available on Jamaica. Instead, he desired salt, honey, and cassava – foodstuffs that were

⁹² *Ibid.*, "Refiere la causa porque remito a cuba la ynfanteria que quede la rota pasada," Cristóbal Arnaldo Isasi, Jamaica, 16 agosto 1658.

more difficult for his mobile irregulars to come by. A request for a carpenter to construct canoes reflected Isasi's changing priorities; maneuverability was more important than ever now that the goal was merely to maintain a Spanish foothold on the island. But constructive planning toward a tenable long-term presence on Jamaica could not extinguish Isasi's greatest fear. He sensed the Spaniards' hold on their former slaves was slipping, and tacitly recognized that the loss of the maroons' allegiance would sound the death knell for his cause.⁹³ In a last gasp effort to salvage the endeavor, Isasi sent his brother to Spain to advocate for his cause before the King.⁹⁴

Francisco made it across the Atlantic by spring, but inevitably faced an uphill battle once he arrived in court. The Council of the Indies received him promptly, but tellingly consulted the letters that he carried from the governors of the territories surrounding Jamaica before directly addressing Cristóbal's concerns.⁹⁵ As the Council dallied, the situation on the island continued to deteriorate. A group of "sick, naked, and destitute" Jamaicans fled to Cuba in September 1659. They begged Philip to secure the basic necessities of life – clothes, shoes, and ammunition – for those who they had left behind.⁹⁶ A month later the Mexican soldiers who remained on Jamaica described the miseries of their daily lives. Their mountain redoubt was veritably "uninhabitable" – it rained day and night, so much so that it was impossible to judge the passage of time. There

⁹³ Ibid., Cristóbal Arnaldo Isasi a Pedro de Morales, Jamaica, 11 enero 1659.

⁹⁴ Francisco de Leiva Isasi was to stress the urgency of resolving the situation on Jamaica to deny the English time to build up for an assault on the main. Isasi also urged him to impart the necessity of a maritime assault from the south side of the island rather than attempting a third invasion of the north. Ibid., "Instrucción del gobernador de Jamaica para Francisco de Leiva," Cristóbal Isasi Arnaldo, Jamaica, 16 agosto 1658.

⁹⁵ AGI, SD, leg. 178A, "Índice y relación de las cartas que Don Francisco de Leiva Isasi entrego," Consejo de las Indias, 27 abril 1659.

⁹⁶ AGI, SD, leg. 178B, "Sobre las descomodidades que pasan," Antonio de León y Leiva, Diego de Medina, et al., Jamaica, 16 setiembre 1659.

was nary “a drop of wine in the kingdom” and the returnees, like the indentured servants on Providence before them, complained of a monotonous diet.⁹⁷

The Council of War finally produced a definitive recommendation for Jamaica’s future toward the end of the year. They agreed with Isasi’s assessment that the only way to evict the English from the island would be to send a fleet from Spain, and went so far as to undertake to do so. But since this sailing would take some time to put together, in the interim all that could be done was stay the course and maintain the status quo. Most suggestively, the Council recognized the critical contributions that Africans had made to Jamaica’s defense. They advised the King to offer “liberty and protection” to the former slaves who had “behaved with loyalty and valor” to encourage them to help to restore the island, where they would subsequently be allowed to live in “tranquility, comfort, and rest.”⁹⁸ These exact shifts in policy could easily have changed the outcome of events on Jamaica if they had been implemented several years earlier. By gifting the English with time to begin to recover from the calamitous Design, however, Philip’s councilors had sealed the island’s fate. The gradual progression from denial to reluctant attention to sudden, tardy action in hopes of saving Spanish Jamaica precisely mirrored the earlier English failure to implement a plan with some chance of salvaging Providence. The European movers and shakers

⁹⁷ Ibid., “Los capitanes del tercio de Mexico sobre las descomodidades que pasan en aquella isla con la gente que ha quedado despues que derroto el tercio el enemigo,” Francisco Isquierdo, Joseph Rodriguez de Vera, and Francisco Mirafuentes y Haldiano, Jamaica, 3 noviembre 1659.

⁹⁸ Ibid., “Consulta de la Junta de Guerra en la que da cuenta del último estado de la isla de Jamaica,” 13 noviembre 1659. This report also included a specific concession of freedom and a pension for the widow of an African captain who had died at Río Nuevo, so that she might serve as an example to others whose loyalty might be wavering. The notion of offering liberty and privileges to fugitive slaves as a means of getting a leg up on rival imperial powers would continue to gain traction as the struggle for supremacy in the Caribbean heated up during the decades that followed. Linda Rupert explores the phenomenon of what she labels “transimperial marronage” in “‘Seeking the Water of Baptism’: Fugitive Slaves and Imperial Jurisdiction in the Early Modern Caribbean,” in *Legal Pluralism and Empires, 1500 – 1850*, ed. Lauren Benton and Richard J. Ross (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 199 – 231.

who guided the entangled imperial projects of Spain and England were more alike than different in their inability to react decisively to crises an ocean away.

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In June 1660, just more than five years after General Venables and his men had landed at Santiago de la Vega, Cristóbal Arnaldo Isasi sent a letter to Spain from Cuba. He and seventy-five others had fled Jamaica by canoe in May, leaving several dozen holdouts behind to continue the fight. It would be another decade before the island was formally ceded to England, but for all intents and purposes the Spanish resistance was over. Isasi's initial account of his final months on Jamaica obscured more than it revealed, focusing on the complaints that had defined the struggle: a hostile climate, insufficient supplies, and the unending ranks of the enemy.⁹⁹ A more accurate account arrived in Madrid by year's end. It described a final encounter in which several hundred Englishmen as well as a contingent of African archers attacked the surviving guerillas. The worst had finally come to pass – enough maroons had changed sides that Isasi conceded that his cause was lost.¹⁰⁰

The immediate cause of this crushing final blow had occurred during the previous winter. Fed up with the depredations of the Africans, who continued to pick off English stragglers who wandered into the backcountry, Dooley sent men into the interior to search them out. A patrol commanded by Edward Tyson succeeded in discovering one of the three principal *palenques* near the geographic center of Jamaica. The English soldiers brought the Africans to the table by threatening to destroy several hundred acres of cultivated fields in the lowlands. Their leader, known to Tyson as Juan de Bolas and to the Spanish as Juan Lubolo, agreed to side with the

⁹⁹ AGI, SD, leg. 178B, Cristóbal Arnaldo Isasi al Rey, Cuba, 6 junio 1660.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., Consejo de Indias, Madrid, 6 noviembre 1660.

English against Isasi and the other *palenques* in exchange for their freedom and land rights.¹⁰¹ Bolas and his people reduced the other maroon communities in short order, then led Tyson and his men to Isasi's mountain refuge.¹⁰² A half decade of bitter defiance was undone at a stroke. The irony of defeat at the hands of their former slaves cannot have been lost on the Spaniards, who could only bemoan their first major, permanent territorial loss in the New World.

The terms of the capitulation that Isasi agreed to were simple: quarter for every Spaniard who remained on the island as well as free passage to Cuba with what possessions they could carry.¹⁰³ Less clear was what would become of their mixed-race and African allies, both those who had fought at Isasi's side for the duration and the inhabitants of the two faithful *palenques*. A particular sticking point were Bolas's rivals from the adjacent community of Los Vermejales, recently accused of capturing and killing an English officer.¹⁰⁴ This issue was not immediately resolved, precluding a permanent settlement on Jamaica even after England and Spain formally made peace in September.¹⁰⁵ But by the spring of 1661, the indefatigable Cristóbal Arnaldo Isasi himself had apparently given up hope of reclaiming the island. Resigned to the futility of the

¹⁰¹ Pestana, *English Conquest of Jamaica*, 200 – 202. The ethnonym ascribed to Lubolo implies that he (or his ancestors) had come from northwestern Angola. The modern Bolo language is also known as Ngoya and Kibala and is closely related to Kimbundu.

¹⁰² By June 1660 Bolas and his men were receiving the same rations as English men-at-arms. The freedom of “Don Wall Bolo” and his followers was confirmed in the orders sent to Doyley after the Restoration. Bolas was officially appointed Colonel of a regiment of Africans in February 1663, but survivors from one of the *palenques* that he had earlier destroyed ambushed and murdered him less than a year later. His followers gradually disappeared from the historical record during the latter half of the century. David Buisseret and S. A. G. Taylor, “Juan de Bolas and His Pelinco,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 54.4 (2008): 95 – 102.

¹⁰³ AGI, SD, leg. 178B, “Capitulaciones realizadas entre los españoles y los ingleses tras el desalojo de la isla de Jamaica,” Cristóbal Arnaldo Isasi and Francisco de la Mora, Jamaica, 1660.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, “Carta del general yngles,” Edward Doyley, 24 marzo 1660.

¹⁰⁵ Doyley pledged to keep the peace in a February 1661 letter to the governor of Cuba. Jamaica's governor promised that any of his men who chose to continue to harass Spanish persons or property “would be declared rebels.” But Lord Windsor, who replaced Doyley during the following year, did not share this commitment, and Christopher Myngs sacked Santiago de Cuba with his blessing in August 1662. AGI, SD, leg. 178A, “Carta traducida en espanol del governador de xamayca en rrespuesta de la que le embio el senor governador don pedro de morales,” Edward Doyley, Jamaica, 22 febrero 1661.

cause that had consumed six years of his life, rather than advocate for another military attempt on Jamaica Isasi broached the issue of trade with the new English masters of his former home.¹⁰⁶

Isasi and his fellow survivors had little to say for themselves thereafter. It is tempting to think that some of them may have found satisfaction in a simple life on Cuba, but if the evidence of the soldiers and sailors who escaped Providence is any indication the enduring sting of failure drove many of them back into the violent vortex of cutthroat Caribbean competition. This effect would only have been magnified as Jamaica transformed overnight into a haven for Protestant privateers. As early as 1659, a Doyley-sponsored raid under the command of Christopher Myngs plundered a treasure trove of silver along the Venezuelan coast.¹⁰⁷ The Restoration of Charles II briefly put a damper on Jamaica's nascent piratical enterprise, but when the Spanish governors of the surrounding islands refused to open their ports to English commerce, Doyley's successor Lord Windsor sanctioned "trade by force." Myngs sacked Santiago de Cuba, where he defeated troops under Isasi's command, in October 1662. An even larger expedition assaulted Campeche in the spring of the following year, but Myngs was injured and forced to return to England.¹⁰⁸

Myngs was replaced by Edward Mansvelt, already encountered as the mastermind behind the attack on Spanish Santa Catalina several years later. Mansvelt quickly became a favorite of Thomas Modyford, Jamaica's governor during the latter half of the 1660s. Mansvelt scourged the Iberian Caribbean until his death shortly after the capture of Santa Catalina brought Henry Morgan to the fore. Morgan's partnership with Governor Modyford would become the stuff of buccaneering legend. Fearing that Spain had again set its sights on Jamaica as relations worsened in January 1668, Modyford authorized Morgan to sail to Cuba in search of intelligence.¹⁰⁹ This

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., Cristóbal Arnaldo Isasi a Blas Arnaldo Isasi, Cuba, 21 abril 1661.

¹⁰⁷ Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*, 106.

¹⁰⁸ Haring, *Buccaneers in the West Indies*, 104 – 108.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 144 – 145.

fact-finding mission inevitably escalated into a raid into the interior, culminating in the capture of Puerto Principe.¹¹⁰ That summer Morgan upped the ante with a brazen assault on Portobelo. Although he had far overstepped his commission, upon his return to Jamaica the Captain was received “with great honor and magnificence.”¹¹¹

After Modyford rewarded him with a new flagship, Morgan departed the island once more in October. He initially set his sights on Cartagena, but this design was thwarted when Modyford’s gift was destroyed in an accidental powder explosion. The privateers decided instead on Maracaibo, which they took with little opposition in mid-spring. But before the fleet could make its exit from the town’s namesake lake, a squadron of Spanish ships arrived to prevent their egress. Morgan’s outgunned contingent laid waste to the opposition using a cleverly-disguised fire ship, then escaped into the open Caribbean under cover of darkness.¹¹² The Captain met with a more ambivalent reception on Jamaica in the summer of 1669 than he had previously. Anglo-Spanish relations had trended away from war during his months at sea, and his hostile actions jeopardized the delicate negotiations.

Perhaps the news of Morgan’s most recent exploits did not reach the continent in time, because one of the final documents in the *legajos* dedicated to Jamaica describes the manner in which Modyford announced “peace” with Spain in June of the same year. Even as he lauded Morgan for destroying “the fleet that Spain intended against [Jamaica],” Modyford promised to revoke all outstanding commissions to prey on Spanish ports and shipping. A formal declaration of this shift in policy had been posted in several places on the island, with the explicit aid of a trio of officials that ironically included Morgan himself, not six weeks removed from his trip to

¹¹⁰ Known today as Camagüey.

¹¹¹ Exquemelin, *Buccaneers of America*, 140. A detailed account of Morgan’s activities during the first half of 1668 appears in *Ibid.*, 127 – 140.

¹¹² This voyage is detailed in *Ibid.*, 141 – 163.

Lake Maracaibo.¹¹³ The metropolitan declaration of peace did not stop Modyford from following this report with a rather more threatening personal letter to the Council of the Indies. Citing “the weakness of the forces of Spain in these parts, the few inhabitants, the lack of spirit, arms, and knowledge of War, the open opposition of some and the doubtful obedience of others” Jamaica’s governor implied that free trade could be imposed at his leisure if it was not freely granted.¹¹⁴ He may have been forced to maintain the appearance of bending to his monarch’s will, but when the chips were down Modyford continued the long tradition of shaping a Caribbean reality that was not governed by European policy.

Recognizing this, upon receipt of Modyford’s missive the Council proposed a different course of action to Queen Regent Mariana.¹¹⁵ They cited Morgan’s 1668 assault on Puertobelo as contravening any notion of peace between England and Spain in “those remote parts.” And the most recent reports, perhaps news of his deeds on the South American coast, showed no sign that hostilities were ceasing. The Council recommended that the Queen Regent order an invasion of Jamaica, so that Spanish forces might “return to take [the island] in the same manner that they took Santa Catalina two years ago.”¹¹⁶ This argument proved convincing, and Mariana ordered the governors of the Caribbean islands and coasts to proclaim war on the English in their corner of the world. She gave them permission to issue letters of reprisal, and Spanish privateers began to harass Jamaican shipping in the spring of 1670.¹¹⁷

Fighting fire with fire may have made sense on paper, but the Council’s recommendation depended on the archaic notion that Spain’s Caribbean navy could unilaterally enforce its will.

¹¹³ AGI, SD, leg. 178A, Thomas Modyford a Conde de Molina, Jamaica, 14 junio 1669.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., Thomas Modyford a Conde de Molina para enviar al Consejo de Indias, 15 junio 1669.

¹¹⁵ Charles II of Spain had succeeded his father upon the latter’s death in 1665, but his mother Mariana ruled as Queen Regent in Charles’s minority for the next decade.

¹¹⁶ This *memorial* is undated, but the supporting documentation locates it in mid-summer 1669, almost exactly two years after the 1667 recapture of Santa Catalina. Ibid., Consejo de Indias a Reina Regente.

¹¹⁷ Barbour, “Privateers and Pirates of the West Indies,” 559.

This might have been true in Raleigh's age, or even when Providence was wiped off the map, but it was a forlorn hope in the heyday of Morgan. As was his wont, Governor Modyford was quick to reinstate the Captain and his privateers. In December the Jamaican fleet recaptured Providence and ended the Spanish regime on that island for good. Morgan saved his most infamous feat for last. From Providence the privateers sailed on to Panama, where they navigated the Río Chagres before marching overland to Panama City on the Pacific coast. The English defeated a larger force and captured the settlement, which burned in the aftermath of the battle, in January 1671.¹¹⁸

The perils of interminable transatlantic communication were thrown into stark relief upon Morgan's return to Jamaica. The concerns that had led Modyford to repeatedly conclude that the island's best defense was a good offense were largely grounded in its uncertain status pending a formal peace treaty with Spain. But news of just such a long-hoped-for resolution had arrived in the privateers' absence. Sensing weakness in Mariana's willingness to authorize retribution in the Caribbean, Charles II of England had reopened negotiations in the fall of 1669. Diplomats from both empires agreed to terms just past the midpoint of the following year. The critical passage of the Treaty of Madrid gave Charles permanent possession of "all the lands, regions, islands, colonies, and dominions, situated in the West Indies or in any part of America, that the said King of Great Britain and his subjects at present hold and possess."¹¹⁹ This deliberately ambiguous wording legitimized the English presence in North America for the first time and

¹¹⁸ The governor of Panama had been ordered to burn the city if it was lost, but there is no definitive evidence that he was in fact the one who did so. Exquemelin suggests that Morgan himself was responsible, but this possibility is widely discounted. Peter Earle, *The Sack of Panamá: Sir Henry Morgan's Adventures on the Spanish Main* (New York: Viking, 1982), 223 and Exquemelin, *Buccaneers of America*, 197. Earle's monograph remains the most comprehensive account of Morgan's 1670 – 71 expedition.

¹¹⁹ The full text of the treaty is reproduced in Frances Gardiner Davenport, ed., *European Treaties bearing on the History of the United States and its Dependencies, Vol. II, 1650 – 1697* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution, 1929).

formally ceded Jamaica by implication. The Treaty explicitly did not open trade between the two powers in the Caribbean, but it did allow for English vessels to enter Spanish ports – and vice versa – as troublesome circumstances dictated, indirectly paving the way for commerce with the flimsiest of excuses.¹²⁰

This resolution was a tremendous victory for English endeavors in the New World. It represented the culmination of a century-long struggle to assert England's place as an American colonial power in its own right. The Western Design did not achieve the immediate, spectacular success that Cromwell initially envisioned, but with the Treaty of Madrid it retroactively became a critical step in the right direction.¹²¹ In the shorter term, however, it did put an end to Morgan's depredations. His adventure on the isthmus, which had taken place half a year after the treaty had taken effect, was a diplomatic crisis in the making. Both Morgan and Governor Modyford were arrested and sent back to England. The governor languished in the Tower for several years, while Morgan was knighted for his troubles, but both men had returned to Jamaica by 1675.¹²²

Even before the Treaty of Madrid officially made the island an English possession, the events of 1660s had made it clear that the era of Spanish dominance in the Caribbean had passed. Although the practical impact of Isasi's departure from Jamaica may have been minimal, it was a symbolic watershed. His defeat was Spain's in microcosm. Hounded by the English on land and sea, Isasi had no choice but to retreat; beset by enemies on all sides, the empire had no choice but to retrench. The immediate consequences of the loss of the island were obvious – the destruction

¹²⁰ The English were prepared to allow Iberian shipping free entry under any pretense whatsoever. Stein and Stein, *Silver, Trade, and War*, 64.

¹²¹ Pestana, *English Conquest of Jamaica*, 213.

¹²² Underscoring the difference between diplomatic rhetoric and the realities of imperial competition in the early modern Caribbean. Barbour, "Privateers and Pirates of the West Indies," 563.

left in the wake of Myngs, Morgan, and the rest of the Jamaican privateers. Those that followed during the ensuing decades were more difficult to perceive, but no less pernicious.

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The forces that would shape Jamaica's future were already at work prior to its formal cession. Civilian settlers had been immigrating to the island from the late 1650s, slowly building a civil society in parallel to the Design's military hierarchy. This process accelerated after the army was disbanded in 1662, and by 1664 Jamaica had all the legislative and judicial trappings of a typical English colony. Attracting ministers was as difficult as it had been on Providence, but by that same year a religious infrastructure was also implemented as parish names came into use. Thomas Modyford assumed the governorship of the island in 1664 as well, and close to a thousand fellow Barbadians joined him in the move. This influx brought the English population of Jamaica to approximately five thousand, still well short of the seven thousand who had landed in 1655. The first planters sowed sugar, cocoa, cotton, and tobacco, and harvested native crops including the *pimiento* – monoculture yet lay in the future.¹²³ But the illegality of trade with the most proximate ports temporarily stunted the island's commercial development, and compelled Modyford to lean heavily on Henry Morgan to turn a profit through other means.

Santiago de la Vega, creatively renamed Spanish Town, remained the headquarters of the army throughout Isasi's campaign of resistance. Although the footprint of the settlement changed only gradually during these early years, a conscious and comprehensive campaign of renaming transformed the cultural cityscape much more rapidly. Changes to the physical landscape were mostly confined to what was initially known as "Port Cagway," the strip of land that extended out into Cagway Bay from the east. Construction began under the leadership of Edward Doyley,

¹²³ Pestana, *Conquest of Jamaica*, 215 – 247.

who built his own home on the peninsula. The new settlement, which soon became known as Port Royal, expanded rapidly despite the fact that it was cut off from the rest of the island, without even a ready source of fresh water, primarily because of its accessibility for shipping.¹²⁴

By 1670, as many as 1,500 privateers operated out of Port Royal. The plunder that they brought back to Jamaica was expended in partaking of the Port's baser attractions, enriching a new merchant elite. These windfall profits caused Thomas Lynch, who succeeded Modyford as governor in 1671, to encounter substantial resistance in his efforts to transition the island toward an agrarian economy. Morgan's 1675 return cast the two visions for Jamaica's future into stark relief, engendering a power struggle that was resolved by a series of exemplary piracy trials. By the early 1680s even Morgan, who had forcefully interjected himself into polite society during two stints as acting governor, had reimagined himself as a planter. Sugar production expanded tenfold during the decade following the signing of the Treaty of Madrid. By the end of the next decade, Port Royal had begun to retreat from its former, recent glory as the bulk of Jamaica's wealth shifted toward the burgeoning plantation economy.¹²⁵ Between 1680 and the turn of the eighteenth century, Jamaica's white population dropped almost by half while the number of enslaved Africans more than doubled.¹²⁶ The island's transformation into a sugar entrepôt was

¹²⁴ Robertson, *Gone is the Ancient Glory*, 41 – 52.

¹²⁵ Nonetheless the port's population increased from 3,000 in 1680 to 4,000 in 1689, at which point it was the largest English town in the Caribbean. But Jamaica's economic development was in effect a zero-sum game: it was precisely the profits from privateering that enabled the island's sugar explosion after it was plowed into planting. Nuala Zahedieh, "Trade, Plunder, and Economic Development in Early English Jamaica, 1655 – 89," *The Economic History Review* 39.2 (1986): 205 – 222.

¹²⁶ One of the earliest descriptions of English Jamaica was produced by John Taylor, an itinerant mathematician who spent the better part of a year on the island in 1686 – 1687. Taylor's account offers an intriguing glimpse of a society in transition, where the cultural echoes of the Spanish regime still persisted even as the remnants of the more recent privateering boom were rapidly being replaced by the explosion of sugar production. David Buisseret, ed., *Jamaica in 1687: The Taylor Manuscript at the National Library of Jamaica* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2008).

cemented – and made physically manifest – when Port Royal was obliterated by an earthquake and the accompany tidal surge in 1692.¹²⁷

English Jamaica's sweet promise was realized over the course of the eighteenth century, during which it became one of the world's largest sugar producers.¹²⁸ By the early 1800s, the island's enslaved population had eclipsed 350,000 and annual sugar production was more than 100,000 tons.¹²⁹ No seventeenth-century observer could have predicted Jamaica's meteoric rise, but for Spain it was a considerably more pernicious outcome than any worst-case scenario that could have been envisioned in 1655 or 1670. The island became far more than a thorn in the side of Spanish America when it morphed from a privateering haven to the jewel of a new, English Caribbean. It would forever be a reminder of what could have been if Spain had acted decisively to harness Jamaica's agricultural potential. Economic success also severely impacted the former liberty of the maroons who had played so critical a role in securing the island for the English.¹³⁰ A series of rebellions preceded the Maroon Wars of the eighteenth century, after which periodic violence continued until the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire in 1834.¹³¹

¹²⁷ The narrative skeleton for this paragraph was drawn from Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 114 – 143.

¹²⁸ For more on the development of sugar cultivation in the Early Modern Atlantic and the economic systems and social structures that grew up around the commodity, see Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*; Richard Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624 – 1713* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972); Menard, *Sweet Negotiations*; and Schwartz ed., *Tropical Babels*.

¹²⁹ B. W. Higman, "Jamaican Port Towns in the Early Nineteenth Century," in *Atlantic Port Cities: Economy, Culture, and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650 – 1850*, ed. Franklin W. Knight and Peggy K. Liss (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 120.

¹³⁰ Throughout this process, the surviving maroons saw their rights and autonomy gradually diminish. Race relations on Jamaica were complicated by animosity between descendants of the seventeenth-century maroons and Africans subsequently brought to the island as slaves. Some of this friction dates to the differing allegiances of the maroon communities during Isasi's resistance. Orlando Patterson has framed the genesis of the Maroon Wars in this earlier context: "Slavery and Slave Revolts: A Socio-Historical Analysis of the First Maroon War, 1655 – 1740," *Social and Economic Studies* 19.3 (1970): 289 – 325. See Kenneth M. Bilby's work, particularly *True-Born Maroons* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2006), regarding the relation between modern maroon culture and this history.

¹³¹ Barbara Klamon Kopytoff, "The Early Political Development of Jamaican Maroon Societies," *WMQ* 35.2 (1978), 287 – 307 traces the development of Jamaica's maroon communities from the Western Design to the First Maroon War. She differentiates between Windward Maroons descended from the "Varmahaly" (Vermejales) contingent loyal to the Spaniards and Leeward Maroons dominated by participants in the earliest slave rebellions before 1700. Cudjoe, who would lead the resistance during the First Maroon War, was a member of the latter group; in his time

None of these long-term consequences were obvious from the deck of Henry Morgan's flagship, much less from Thomas Gage's pulpit as he preached the glories of Caribbean conquest to Oliver Cromwell. The results of the seventeenth-century power struggle on Jamaica were contingent on a myriad interrelated social, political, economic, environmental, and military factors that neither Englishman nor Spaniard had the slightest hope of disentangling as events on the island unfolded. Like Providence before it, Jamaica proved a theater in which local individual agency mattered more than attempted intervention from the metropole. In their turn the misdeeds of Governor Francisco Terril, the stubborn resistance of Cristóbal Arnaldo Isasi, and changeable means and ends that Henry Morgan employed to turn a profit left indelible marks on the colony's historical trajectory.

Cromwell's Design drew its Hispanophobic rhetoric from the Elizabethan privateers, but it would be the lower-case designs on settlement and plantation that forever remained a gleam in Raleigh's eye that later helped to realize the Lord Protector's vision of English ascendancy in the Caribbean. As the long arc from Guiana to Providence to Jamaica has indicated, little congruence between expectation and effect was nothing new for the English colonial vanguard. The trend was particularly marked in this case, as abject failure on Hispaniola was somehow transmuted into a spectacular economic success with the tincture of time. What seemed a miracle in London was a tragedy in Madrid, the exaggerated incompetence of the island's conquest outdone only by the staunch unwillingness of Spanish authorities to accept the reality of the crisis that confronted them. Where Santa Catalina had temporarily been saved by a proportionate intervention, nothing of the sort materialized for Jamaica until it was too late. Although it would have been outrageous to suggest this in the moment, the signing of the Treaty of Madrid sealed the fate not merely of

the heirs of the Vermejales maroons, who continued to violently resist the English, followed a female shaman known as Nanny.

one peripheral island, but the core of Spain's American empire as it existed prior to the advent of Northern European competition.

CONCLUSION

Part of Eligh Gould's intention in introducing the concept of entangled histories was to remind scholars of the early modern Atlantic that "even in moments of apparent self-sufficiency and triumph, the British and Anglo-American Atlantic world(s) remained deeply intertwined with Spain's Atlantic empire."¹ His analysis was largely grounded in a slightly later historical period than the one that this dissertation focuses on, but Gould's point of order applies perfectly to the sequence of events that culminated with the conquest of Jamaica. England secured entry into the Caribbean only with Spain's tacit approval, and the methods that the English employed to create an opening in the first place were the product of an iterative inter-imperial negotiation spanning the better part of a century.

There are a variety of reasons why the entanglement of Anglo-Spanish competition in the seventeenth-century Caribbean has not been adequately appreciated before now. Many relate to the temporal polarization and geographic bias of early modern Atlantic historiography outlined in the dissertation's introduction, but others operate on a more fundamental level. In introducing his new collection of scholarship describing Anglo-Iberian entanglement across time and space, Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra traces the scholarly consequences of archives "set up to elucidate and celebrate the history of single empires and nations."² This seemingly self-evident observation is not nearly as innocuous as it may initially appear. Even setting aside the possibility of deliberate misrepresentation that Cañizares-Esguerra alludes to, the fact remains that the normal function of the archival system upon which historians depend obscures connections that cross assumed legal and political jurisdictions or traditional social, cultural, or economic divisions.

¹ Gould, "Entangled Histories, Entangled Worlds," 785.

² Cañizares-Esguerra, ed., *Entangled Empires: The Anglo-Iberian Atlantic, 1500 – 1830*, 5.

The single most important intervention that I have tried to make with this dissertation is to demonstrate that these imperial entanglements were real and causally profound. But existence alone does not mean that they are easy to identify or describe – these sorts of relationships are often buried under the contours of national archives that take as a foundational tenet the sanctity of the very boundaries that entanglements transgress. The narrative traced through the preceding chapters features a previously unfamiliar Spanish perspective, but pairs this point of view with primary and secondary accounts from the English Atlantic world in an effort to make the ties that bound the two empires’ fates more legible and to work toward a more nuanced rendering of life in the seventeenth-century Caribbean.

But Gould himself has recently cautioned that “entangled histories are no more or less impervious to distortion than other forms of history.”³ Focusing on Anglo-Spanish competition on the maritime periphery privileges one set of connections over equally valid alternatives – Dutch merchants are a big part of this story too, as are Portuguese navigators and the indigenous people of the Caribbean. The project could have taken a multitude of different directions, some of which I hope to pursue as it continues to develop. This conclusion will take a closer look at several paths employed in earlier versions of the dissertation but later discarded.

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The historical events at the center of the dissertation have multiple dimensions. From the title chosen for the project onward I have referenced the imperial rivalry at the heart of the story, and geopolitical considerations play a pivotal role throughout the narrative arc that connects Antonio de Berrío to Cristóbal Arnaldo Isasi and Walter Raleigh to Henry Morgan. But there are other pieces to the seventeenth-century transformation of the Caribbean that are not emphasized

³ Gould, “Afterword,” in Cañizares-Esguerra, ed., *Entangled Empires: The Anglo-Iberian Atlantic, 1500 – 1830*, 256.

in the dissertation. Religious differences helped to pit Berrío and Raleigh, similar men beholden to antagonistic masters, against each other, then encouraged the scions of the Providence Island Company to search for fertile ground for an ideal Puritan colony on the far side of the Atlantic, and finally inspired Oliver Cromwell's messianic vision of a latter-day crusade prosecuted against Spanish America.⁴ The expansion of the Atlantic slave trade during the same period made the sort of large-scale plantation agriculture that remained a pipe dream in Raleigh and Berrío's time a reasonable aspiration during Providence's decade of existence and a reality not too long after Jamaica's conquest, even as the ballooning ratio of enslaved to free peoples in the Caribbean posed an increasing threat to the colonial establishment.⁵

Both of these frameworks for understanding intersect with a third that the dissertation has touched on only intermittently. Whether searching for El Dorado in the Orinoco, underwriting or interdicting Providence's privateers, or engaging in contraband trade on Jamaica, the factors that drew England and Spain into conflict in the Caribbean were often fundamentally economic. As Chapter 1 argues, both empires found themselves at a crossroads at the turn of the seventeenth century. Would – or could – the mines of the New World run dry? And were there more yet to be found to cover the expenses of American latecomers? When no such windfalls materialized, the members of the English colonial vanguard began to shift their focus to planting. Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate the incompleteness of this transition, and the reluctance that accompanied it, on Providence, culminating in a rapid reversion to seeking profit by more adversarial means as soon as the opportunity presented itself. Like the Providence colonists, in Chapter 4 the inhabitants of

⁴ Many excellent studies of religion in the early modern Atlantic exist, including Pestana, *Protestant Empire*; Mary Elizabeth Perry and Anne J. Cruz, eds., *Cultural Encounters: The Impact of the Inquisition in Spain and the New World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991); and Block, *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean*.

⁵ Major works pertaining to the Atlantic slave trade not cited elsewhere in the dissertation include David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).

Spanish Jamaica tried and failed to make an agricultural go of it during the early decades of the century. The English conquest of the island in Chapter 5 brought with it the fullest realization of a plunder-based economy that had yet appeared in the Caribbean but which proved a transient phase that was swiftly overwritten when sugar's commercial clout became clear. Only then was the choice that had stymied colonial enterprise for generations finally made as the innumerable contingencies that had left England in position to seize control of the Atlantic crystallized into the unassailable way forward.

This facet of the dissertation is part of a larger story that economic historians have begun to unpack as the notion of a global economy has been pushed further and further back in time. Whereas “expansion in empire and trade by western European countries” between 1500 and 1600 “continued patterns familiar since at least medieval times,” during the seventeenth century “what originally had been subsidiary interests to the Iberians turned into a major focus and attracted the attention of the mercantile communities in other western European countries.” From there, profits accumulating from the cultivation and trade of tobacco, tea, coffee, chocolate, and sugar “dominated global affairs for two hundred years.”⁶ This is not an exaggeration, but the processes that brought about a result so clear-cut in hindsight were messier than is apparent from the bird's-eye view of many economic histories. From this perspective, the dissertation functions as a series of interlinked microhistories describing how Europe's economic transformation took place in practice.

But even that formulation obscures the point slightly – I hope that these chapters actually speak to the notion that it was not “Europe's” transformation at all. The ideological impetus and

⁶ Carole Shammas, “The revolutionary impact of European demand for tropical goods,” in John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan, eds., *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 169. For more on chocolate and tobacco, see Norton, *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures*.

commercial expertise that catalyzed this paradigmatic shift may have come from the far side of the Atlantic, but the men and women who made it a reality lived in the Americas. And the heart, or at least the birthplace, of the economic order that they brought into being was the Caribbean. Decades of struggle to conquer the maritime periphery eventually bore more fruit, both literally and figuratively, than any denizen of the seventeenth-century Caribbean could have imagined. And in keeping with the dissertation's attention to entanglement, the changes that they helped bring about were inextricably linked to the ethnically and culturally diverse, legally and socially fluid environment in which they lived.

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There were several intermediate stages in my development of this dissertation before it reached its final form. Earlier versions of the project contained additional cases that were later dropped due to constraints of time and space as well as my growing conviction that I had found a tight, coherent narrative to frame my larger argument. Chief among these discarded exemplars was Spanish Florida, which was shaped by many of the same processes at work in the southern Caribbean during the seventeenth century despite the fact that it did not face the threat of English conquest during this period. Although Florida is not featured in the dissertation, it appears on the edges of my story, as when Nathaniel Butler and his Providence privateers released a crew of captured Iberians off the mainland coast en route to England.⁷

These connections and the entanglements that they engendered are not coincidental. Like Providence, Guiana, Jamaica, and the other marginal islands and ports that provide the setting for my narrative, Florida was located firmly on the maritime periphery of the Spanish empire. And Florida furnished the historical context that inspired Amy Turner Bushnell to come up with this

⁷ See Chapter 3.

framework in the first place! Imperial policy toward and the practical realities of life in Florida were strikingly similar to the contemporaneous state of affairs in the southern Caribbean. The principal difference lay in the proximity of a terrestrial hinterland with a surviving indigenous population. This afforded the Spaniards who populated the peninsula with options unavailable to the inhabitants of Jamaica or Cartagena.

When hostilities with the Dutch upset the finances of Florida's *presidios* and missions during the 1620s and 1630s, Spanish colonists expanded into the backcountry and coopted native labor to ensure their continued solvency.⁸ This expedient became a hindrance half a century later, when the presence of piratical interlopers in the Caribbean spiked at precisely the same time that hostile indigenous began to encroach on Florida's borders.⁹ Spain's inability to deal with both threats simultaneously compelled metropolitan authorities to retrench, strengthening Florida's fortified center while rolling back much of the colony's recent expansion. Ranching expanded as the population consolidated in St. Augustine and seasonal raids from English and French pirates made self-sufficiency a priority.¹⁰

During the three decades between the Eighty Years' War and the 1680s, fears regarding Florida's instability pervaded Spanish America. In the summer of 1658, even as the situation on Jamaica grew increasingly dire, correspondence from Cuba was temporarily preoccupied with new worries from the north. Word arrived that a group of indigenous who had been mistreated by Florida's governor planned to send their chief to England. Rumor had it that he would bring with him a treasure trove of gold and precious gems, seeking Cromwell's favor and aid in the

⁸ See Milanich, *Laboring in the Fields of the Lord*, 123 – 129 for a detailed account of this era in Florida's history. On the colony's sixteenth-century roots, see Eugene Lyon, *The Enterprise of Florida: Pedro Menéndez de Avilés and the Spanish Conquest of 1565 – 1568* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1990).

⁹ The synchronization of these assaults was not coincidental. The Yamasee Indians who spearheaded the attacks on Florida's northern margins were allied with the English. For more on these raids and the chain of events that they set into motion, see Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida*, 23 – 28.

¹⁰ Bushnell, *Situado and Sabana*, 15.

form of men, munitions, and artillery. If the native Floridians were able to secure this support, the Spanish expected that they would fortify themselves until such time as the English arrived in force and effected a similar outcome as they had on Jamaica.¹¹ These are exactly the same kind of nebulous fears that had plagued that island prior to the Western Design, except that now they had been legitimated by the Design's "success."¹²

Note also the parallels between the periodization of Florida's development during the seventeenth century and that of the Spanish Caribbean as tracked in the dissertation. The years prior to 1640 saw attempts to build a sturdy economic base, the middle decades of the century were defined by indecision and uncertainty in the face of burgeoning competition, and the post-1670 period featured unambiguous declension as Spain failed to meet the challenges posed by the changing Atlantic order. Incorporating Florida into the dissertation's narrative reveals that the dense networks of cause and effect that connected the coastlines of the southern Caribbean extended beyond the maritime circuit that they bounded.

There is a version of the project that embeds these case studies in a larger geographical frame encompassing the Caribbean in its entirety. Here Florida could be joined by the Lesser Antilles, which also make several cameo appearances in the preceding pages, as well as more explicit attention to the smaller ports of *Tierra Firme* from Riohacha to Cabo Gracias a Dios.¹³

Expanding the spatial scope of this account affords the opportunity to more fully explicate the

¹¹ The initial account of this episode came from an Irish soldier captured on Jamaica, perhaps in the aftermath of the Battle of Rio Nuevo. AGI, SD, leg. 178A, Cristóbal Arnaldo Isasi, Las Chorreras de la banda del norte, Jamaica, 3 agosto 1658. The news was passed up the administrative chain during the next few months, the tone in which it was discussed becoming more panicked with each repetition. See, for example, AGI, Santo Domingo, l. 178B, Juan de Tobar a su magestad, 15 septiembre 1658.

¹² It appears unlikely that this chief made it across the Atlantic (assuming that he was not entirely chimerical). No noteworthy native visitors to England between 1657 and 1670 appear in Alden T. Vaughan's comprehensive study of indigenous Americans in Britain. Vaughan, *Transatlantic Encounters: American Indians in Britain, 1500 – 1776* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 97 – 112.

¹³ Remember John C. Appleby's invocation of events on St. Kitts, Barbados, Nevis, Antigua, and Montserrat as a prelude to the conquest of Jamaica cited in my introduction.

context of events in the seventeenth-century Caribbean, but also risks complicating a narrative that draws explanatory power from its simplicity.

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If the dissertation's geography could be broadened, so too could its chronology be extended. The project as originally conceived concluded on the isthmus of Panama rather than Jamaica. At the tail end of the seventeenth century, Scottish adventurers attempted to establish a colony on the Gulf of Darién, in the same area where privateers from Providence claimed to have found silver six decades previously. Their troubled enterprise experienced many of the same growing pains as Providence had, but its audacious settlement on the Spanish main drew the attention of Iberian authorities much more rapidly and ensured its destruction in less than two years. The venture had major ramifications for future British history – fully a fifth of Scotland's wealth had been invested in the colony, and its failure severely weakened Scottish resistance to the Act of Union – but more interesting for my purposes are the many similarities between the “disaster at Darién” and the English efforts to establish a Caribbean foothold that preceded it.¹⁴

One of the fundamental misapprehensions of the Company of Scotland, the joint-stock company that launched the Darién colony, was to assume that the indigenous population of the isthmus “was a single tribal entity that was uniformly hostile to the Spanish.” This expectation recalled Walter Raleigh's ambition to foment rebellion among the natives of the Orinoco, whose dispersed social structure was in fact quite similar to that of the Panamanian Tule peoples. What the Scottish found instead were canny, knowledgeable local leaders who were willing and able to

¹⁴ The earliest modern secondary account of this episode can be found in Frank Cundall, *The Darien Venture* (New York: Hispanic Society of America, 1926).

play the representatives of competing imperial powers against each other at every turn.¹⁵ The critical contributions that the Tule would make toward repulsing the Northern European settlers parallels the negotiations for the allegiance of Jamaica's maroons and their starring role in the ultimate Spanish defeat on that island.

Just a few months after the Scots' arrival on the isthmus in November 1698, Spanish authorities in the Caribbean dispatched a force to dislodge the interlopers. More than a thousand soldiers march overland, through the jungle, during the rainy season. They arrived in poor spirits and worse condition, convincing their commander, the president of the Audiencia of Panamá, to retreat rather than risk suffering an ignominious defeat in a false start that echoed Cartagena's halting attempts to evict the overwhelmingly outnumbered English from Providence. But this failure on the part of the Spanish was mirrored by the inability of the Scottish colonial leadership to work together effectively in a clash of egos eerily reminiscent of events on Providence. The impact was equally damning in this case: the settlement was abandoned in June 1699 after less than a year of existence.¹⁶

But like Providence, Darién would have a second act. A relief expedition carrying two thousand Scots had sailed before news reached Europe that the first wave had fled. Their leaders proved even more fractious than those of the initial group; one faction that favored planting was pitted against another that envisioned a commercial settlement à la Providence's Mosquito Coast outpost. Mediators proposed the resettlement of several hundred dissenting colonists on Jamaica in an effort to resolve this dispute, but before this solution could be implemented the argument was quashed by the arrival of Spanish troops, this time by sea. The Scottish emerged victorious

¹⁵ Ignacio J. Gallup-Díaz, *The Door of the Seas and Key to the Universe: Indian Politics and Imperial Rivalry in the Darién, 1640 – 1750* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 116 – 122. This work offers the best account to date of the Spanish response to the Darién colony, but has less to say regarding the Scottish perspective.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 126 – 132.

from an opening skirmish, which was immediately reported as a “great victory” in keeping with the long tradition of dubious military dispatches from the southern Caribbean. When the main body of the Iberian force eschewed further battle and simply blockaded the fledgling colony, it was only a matter of time before the Scots were forced to surrender, which they did in March 1700.¹⁷ Darién’s legacy evokes a familiar sense of missed opportunity. It was “an undertaking that, if it had been successful, would surely have greatly altered the course of Caribbean history during the eighteenth century.”¹⁸

Many of themes traced in this dissertation are present in this isthmian coda, perhaps none more so than Spain’s continued ability to suppress Northern European activities in the Caribbean during an era when the empire is assumed to have been in steep decline.¹⁹ So too do mentions of indigenous agency, an indecisive or ineffective initial Spanish response to rival settlement, and British knowledge gaps and faulty logistics resemble events of the first half of the century. The southern Caribbean status quo did not change overnight in the wake of Jamaica’s conquest. Any starting or ending point that I could have chosen for this dissertation would to some extent have been arbitrary. The project’s overarching narrative is merely one part of the larger story of the development of the early modern Atlantic, a story that I plan to explore in greater breadth and depth as this project evolves from the dissertation.

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The pace of change in the Caribbean and wider Atlantic accelerated during the early 1700s. Like the uncertain interval after the unsuccessful seventeenth-century English efforts to

¹⁷ Ibid., 136 – 138.

¹⁸ Ward, *Imperial Panama*, 178. Curiously, and despite this assertion, the colony merits only passing mention in this account. Like Raleigh’s search for El Dorado and the fleeting English presence on Providence, it has generally been dismissed as a peripheral, idiosyncratic episode.

¹⁹ A Scottish historian made this point in an article intended as a corrective to conventional Anglocentric accounts of Darién’s failure. Christopher Storrs, “Disaster at Darien (1698-1700)? The Persistence of Spanish Imperial Power on the Eve of the Demise of the Spanish Hapsburgs,” *European Historical Quarterly* 29.1 (1999): 5 – 38.

penetrate South America, these years marked a transitional period as policy and praxis caught up with a new geopolitical reality. They featured the last hurrah of Caribbean piracy, a brief but spectacular era that produced many of the buccaneers whose names have proved most enduring in popular culture.²⁰ These pirates took advantage of some of the final moments of fluctuating instability in the Atlantic in the wake of the Glorious Revolution, immediately followed by King William's War and shortly thereafter by the War of Spanish Succession. When this last conflict was resolved by the Treaty of Utrecht, the terms of engagement for the decades that remained before the Age of Revolution were set.

These decades saw the expansion and intensification of the intercontinental commercial networks that became the principal avenue of entanglement in the Atlantic world as national boundaries and colonial social structures began to solidify. This is the era during which David Hancock and others have marked a "revolution in trade" characterized by "personal contacts, interactive conversations with consumers, intensive coordination of expanded enterprise, and aggressive marketing."²¹ Ledger books and counting houses, not harbors and shorelines, became the principal battlefields of the Caribbean. The emerging economic regime had consequences that extended beyond the purely financial – between 1700 and 1750, less than 15,000 whites immigrated to Jamaica, while more than 250,000 enslaved Africans were imported. During roughly the same period, the share of West Indian sugar produced on the island doubled.²²

²⁰ Including Ann Bonny, Blackbeard, and Henry Kidd in the Pacific. Global piracy from the 1680s through 1730 is summarized in Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*, 164 – 192.

²¹ Synonymous with the emergence of a genuinely "Atlantic" economy. Hancock, "'A revolution in the trade': wine distribution and the development of the infrastructure of the Atlantic market economy, 1703 – 1807," in McCusker and Morgan, eds., *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy*, 153. The research in this chapter was later expanded into a monograph: Hancock, *Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

²² Stanley L. Engerman, "Europe, the Lesser Antilles, and Economic Expansion, 1600 – 1800," in Paquette and Engerman, eds., *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion*, 158 – 159.

Britain built an Atlantic empire of unprecedented scale and complexity on a tripartite foundation of maritime supremacy, commercial innovation, and the horrors of the slave trade. This eighteenth-century British Empire is the one most frequently featured in the historiography of the Atlantic, a newly-unified proto nation state that set out confidently to claim a hemisphere after getting its own house in order and vanquishing its rivals. But this capital “E” Empire did not emerge out of thin air. It was the contingent product of an earlier historical sequence, a series of encounters on forgotten seas and shores that transmuted Elizabethan England and Hapsburg Spain into their eighteenth-century successors by fits and starts.

This dissertation has traced part of that historical sequence, following the focal point of Anglo-Spanish competition in the southern Caribbean from the Orinoco to Providence Island to Jamaica. I explicitly link these events together using Spanish archival sources that have not previously appeared in English-language literature. By incorporating perspectives from either side of the imperial divide in my analysis, I have attempted to convey the extent to which the trajectories of the English and Spanish empires were connected during the seventeenth century. England and Spain were entangled in many different ways: imperial influence flowed both north and south in the Atlantic, the asymmetrical power dynamics of the nations’ relationship shaped the outcome of events on the ground and warped how they were communicated to the metropole, and the larger processes that shaped the empires’ development during the period covered by the dissertation were inextricably intertwined.

My hopes in presenting these events in this manner have been on the one hand to draw attention to a historical context with major – and previously unrecognized – explanatory power, and on the other to continue to work toward a more expansive, inclusive model for studying the early modern Atlantic in all its nuance and complexity. The foundation for the British Empire’s

eighteenth-century triumph was laid on the maritime periphery of Spanish America during the preceding century. Each of the participants in this fluid and dynamic cycle of cooperation and conflict had some notion of their intended ends and the means that might achieve them, but none could have predicted the implications that their smaller struggles had for the Caribbean writ large. Only by seeking out and cross-referencing as many of these self-contained narratives as possible can historians begin to build a comprehensive account of a genuinely Atlantic space.

Just as the seventeenth-century Caribbean was not “Spanish,” its eighteenth-century inheritor was not “British;” both were instead a patchwork of intersecting and overlapping legal jurisdictions, economic zones, and cultural traditions. Any control that European administrators may have imagined themselves to have over the many facets of this contested theater was largely illusory. Geographic distance and the logistical challenges of transatlantic communication gave the inhabitants of the Americas the physical and intellectual space required to exert agency to a degree that would have been impossible closer to the metropolitan core. Their legacy is no easier to disentangle than the lives that they led. These men and women were simultaneously ambitious and craven, generous and cruel, worldly and ignorant. Together they fought to carve out a life on the unforgiving seas and shores of the Caribbean, and in so doing they set into motion a sequence of events that indelibly marked the future of a hemisphere.

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