10

The 'Hub of Empire': The Caribbean and Britain in the Seventeenth Century

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Eric Williams, the historian who became the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, described the West Indian islands as 'the hub of Empire'.[1] Certainly by the end of the seventeenth century commentators on Empire such as Charles Davenant, Josiah Child, and Dalby Thomas judged the West Indian islands to be Britain's most profitable overseas investment. Eighteenth-century analysts of colonial trade and economic growth developed this argument in relation to profitability in the sugar plantation economy. For Adam Smith, the place of sugar among colonial produce was clear: 'the profits of a sugar plantation in any of our West Indian colonies are generally much greater than those of any other cultivation that is known either in Europe or America'.[2] 'The Sugar colonies', noted Arthur Young, 'added above three million [pounds] a year to the wealth of Britain.'[3] In our own time, however, there has been widespread agreement that the sugar colonies were dismal social failures.[4]

In 1600 England's interests in these 'small scraps of land' seemed 'more an opposition program' characterized by erratic, but violent, assault upon Spanish settlements and trade than the projection of a clearly defined policy of colonization.[5] Raiding and plundering became the norm, and represented what seemed to be the extent of English capabilities, attracting considerable capital from the investing community. English merchants thus proved themselves ready to invest in long-distance projects, even in politically volatile areas, once the returns were good.

During the twenty years of war with Spain, 1585–1604, there was 'no peace beyond the line', and the value of prize money brought to England from the

[1] Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944; London, 1964), p. 52.

[2] Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776; New York, 1937), p. 538.

[3] Arthur Young, 'An Inquiry into the Situation of the Kingdom on the Conclusion of the Late Treaty', in *Annals of Agriculture and Other Useful Arts*, 14 vols. (London, 1784), I, p. 13.

[4] John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607–1789* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1985), pp. 144–45.

[5] K. G. Davies, *The North Atlantic World in the Seventeenth Century: Europe and the World in the Age of Expansion* (Minneapolis, 1974), p. 60.

Caribbean ranged between £100,000 and £200,000 per year.[6] Privateering, linked directly to contraband trades, continued to be important well into the century. It had an impact on everyday life in Jamaica (which came into English possession following Cromwell's Western Design of 1655–56 on Spanish possessions in the West Indies), especially as returns contributed to local financing of the agricultural economy.[7] The Elizabethan state, for tactical political reasons, had not wished publicly to support such Caribbean operations, but individual adventurers were confident that they had the means to solve any problem which might be encountered in the Americas, and they could call on financially experienced courtiers and gentlemen to organize and invest in these ventures.[8]

In these approaches to colonization, the English followed the Dutch, who had formulated ground-plans to trade and settle in the Caribbean. The Guiana coasts, located between Spanish settlements on the Orinoco and Portuguese possessions on the Amazon, attracted English as well as Dutch attention. In 1604, nine years after Ralegh's effort, Charles Leigh attempted a settlement on the Wiapoco. There were others: Harcourt's attempt (1609–13), Ralegh's (1617–18), and Roger North's (1619–21). An important outcome of these operations was the opportunity to survey the Windward and Leeward Islands, which the Spanish had left neglected and undefended.[9]

The Spanish had attached little economic value to the Lesser Antilles because the islands could not yield large quantities of precious metals, and the English who first became involved in individual islands also encountered determined opposition from the Kalinagos (Caribs) similar to that which had discouraged the Spaniards. The turning-point was Thomas Warner's visit to St Christopher (St Kitts) in 1622. Warner was a participant in North's Guiana project, and considered St Christopher ideally suited for the establishment of tobacco plantations. A group of mariners, led by John Powell, touched at Barbados in 1625 *en route* from the Guianas, and made similar observations. Warner and Powell returned to England to seek financial backing for a novel type of English colonizing activity (see Map 10.1).

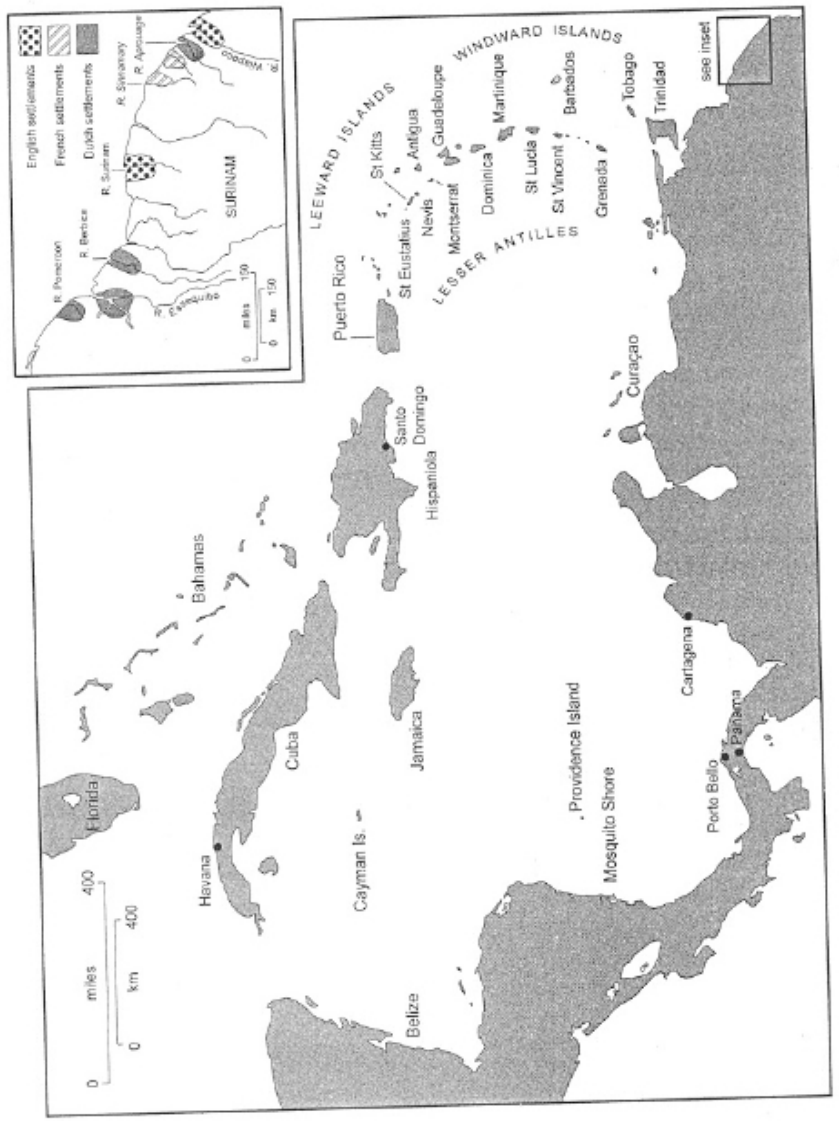
Failed attempts at a Guiana settlement marked the beginning of a new approach by England to Caribbean colonization. The financial collapse of the Virginia Company in 1624 had resulted in a management takeover by the Crown which

[6] McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, p. 147; see above, pp. 67–68.

[7] Nuala Zahedieh, 'Trade, Plunder, and Economic Development in Early English Jamaica', *Economic History Review*, XXXVIII (1986), pp. 205–22; 'The Merchants of Port Royal, Jamaica, and the Spanish Contraband Trade, 1655–1692', *William and Mary Quarterly* (hereafter *WMQ*), Third Series, XLIII (1986), pp. 570–93; '"A Frugal, Prudential and Hopeful Trade": Privateering in Jamaica, 1655–89', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, XVIII (1990), pp. 145–68.

[8] Robert M. Bliss, *Revolution and Empire: English Politics and the American Colonies in the Seventeenth Century* (Manchester, 1990), p. 9; Davies, *North Atlantic World*, p. 61.

[9] J. H. Parry and P. Sherlock, *A Short History of the West Indies*, 3rd edn. (London, 1971), p. 48.



MAP 10.1. The Caribbean

signalled a greater determination to convert commercial enterprises into permanent settlement. The furthering of agricultural settlements financed by joint-stock companies, syndicates, and individuals symbolized the beginning of a conceptual triumph over the long-standing tradition of piracy. At the same time, it brought to the centre of the colonizing mission powerful groups of nobles and gentry who saw this as a new arena in which to compete for royal patronage, and some became participants in a 'patent war' for control of overseas territories. For example, on 2 July 1625 James Hay, Earl of Carlisle, was issued a grant by Charles I of the 'Caribbean Islands', and on 25 February 1628 the Earl of Pembroke obtained a grant from the King for the same territories. A violent and bloody struggle ensued between settlement parties despatched to the islands by both nobles, and it was only further royal intervention which settled the conflict in favour of Carlisle.[10]

In the next decade the Caribbean islands experienced a veritable 'swarming of the English' as more settlers established themselves in the West Indies than in any single mainland colony. This was in spite of the political and constitutional chaos which resulted from clashes between rival patents. What survived these conflicts, significantly, were the three principles that constituted the legacy of the failed Virginia Company: the option of a permanently settled community; the production for export of agricultural crops; and the idea that propertied Englishmen in far-flung colonies had an inalienable right to self-government. The aggressive promotion and defence of this legacy made the islands a place which held out greater prospects of glamour, excitement, danger, and quick profit than any mainland colony.[11]

Given the opportunity, these earliest English colonial sponsors would probably have followed their Spanish enemies into establishing some sort of feudal system, by subjecting the aboriginal population and establishing themselves as lords living on tributes, as they preferred the search for gold and silver to agricultural production for the export trade.[12] By the 1620s these opportunities were no longer available. Hopes of easy gold and the myth of Ralegh's El Dorado had subsided. It was clear that successful colonization in the Caribbean would be based on agriculture and trade.

The English established colonies at St Christopher in 1624, Barbados in 1627, Nevis in 1628, and Montserrat and Antigua in 1632. Previous to the campaign of 1655–56, when Oliver Cromwell added Jamaica to the list of English possessions, these small islands were the backbone of England's seaborne Empire, and the

[10] Davies, *North Atlantic World*, pp. 60, 61.

[11] McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, p. 148.

[12] John H. Parry, 'The English in the New World', 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* (Liverpool, 1978), p. 2.

primary location of capital accumulation in the Americas. The economic importance of these islands far surpassed that of Puritan New England, but that is not to say that Puritans were not interested in the West Indies. Individual Puritans, including members of the prominent Winthrop and Downing families, spent some time in the West Indies, but collectively Puritans never attained the political power necessary to promote the West Indies as a location for New Jerusalem evangelism.[13] Even at Providence Island, off the coast of Nicaragua, where they financed a settlement and secured political control, the culture of piracy and smuggling, as well as cruel exploitation of unfree labour, transcended considerations of building a religious utopia and rendered their community indistinguishable from those of other European settlers in neighbouring islands.[14]

By 1640 the English had gained a demographic advantage in the Caribbean over other European nations. The islands attracted more settlers than mainland colonies up to 1660, which suggests that they were perceived as the destinations that held the best prospects for material and social advancement.[15] The white population grew rapidly up to about 1660 when it reached 47,000, constituting some 40 per cent of all the whites in Britain's transatlantic colonies. Gemery's estimates suggest that of the total of 378,000 white emigrants to America between 1630 and 1700, 223,000 (about 60 per cent) went to the colonies in the wider Caribbean.[16]

Economic depression and political turmoil of the 1620s and early 1630s, and the effective marketing of the colonies as places of opportunity for all classes, constituted a winning formula for pro-emigration agents. The population of Barbados in particular rose sharply during the 1630s, advancing sevenfold between 1635 and 1639. No other colony rivalled Barbados as a destination for settlers during this period. The West Indies also forged ahead of the mainland colonies in the expansion of economic activities. Investment and trade increased in direct relation to population growth, and West Indian capitalists were able to secure in the early years the greater share of labourers leaving both Ireland and Britain for America.

The organization of staple production—tobacco and cotton—in the formative years depended upon the labour of thousands of British indentured labourers.

[13] Jack P. Greene, *The Intellectual Construction of America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1993), p. 55.

[14] Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Providence Island, 1630–1641: The Other Puritan Colony* (Cambridge, 1993), chaps. 7 and 8.

[15] Davies, *North Atlantic World*, pp. 72–96.

[16] McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, p. 154; Henry A. Gemery, 'Emigration from the British Isles to the New World', *Research in Economic History*, V (1980), pp. 179–231; 'Markets for Migrants: English Indentured Servitude and Emigration in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', in P. C. Emmer, ed., *Colonialism and Migration: Indentured Labour before and after Slavery* (Dordrecht, 1986), pp. 33–54; Nicholas Canny, 'English Migration into and across the Atlantic during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', in Canny, ed., *Europeans on the Move: Studies on European Migration, 1500–1800* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 39–75, esp. 64.

Unlike the islands acquired by the Spanish in the Greater Antilles, the Lesser Antilles lacked a large indigenous population which could be reduced to servitude. In the absence of a native labour force such as had been exploited by the Spaniards in Mexico and Peru, the obvious alternative supply of workers was found through the importation of indentured servants. This meant—as it also did in the Chesapeake—that the producer who commanded most servants was the individual most likely to succeed.[17]

Promoters of Empire in the first half of the seventeenth century published many polemical works, largely on demographic issues. Two main themes can be identified in these writings: the need to develop a labour market in the colonies which would rid England (and also Ireland and Scotland) of potential trouble-makers; and the need to ensure colonial dependence upon the mother country. Both themes were central to the notion of England and her colonies as 'one great body'. Such arguments should be understood in relation to the pervasive and narrow English nationalism which informed political and economic thinking. Each labourer, it was argued, had a duty to work as part of his moral obligation to society, and if work was not available then the community had a right to find work for him.[18] These ideologies, together with the views of statisticians that the home country was greatly over-populated, provided the conceptual basis for the legitimation of colonial indentured labour, and as the requirement for labour became more acute with the introduction of sugar production in the West Indies during the 1640s, the question of labour supply for the colonies became the subject of debate even in the House of Lords. Here, the Lords noted how indentured servants were 'hailed with delight by planters who wanted cheap labour' in their feverish 'desire to make quick fortunes'.[19]

During the seventeenth century more than half of all white immigrants in the English colonies south of New England were indentured servants. In addition, nearly half of the total white immigration to the West Indian colonies during the century was by indenture. Jamaica, for example, attracted more servants than the Chesapeake in the 1680s and more than any other colony up to 1700.[20]

[17] Winthrop Jordan, 'Unthinking Decision: Enslavement of Negroes in America to 1700', in T. H. Breen, ed., *Shaping Southern Society: The Colonial Experience* (New York, 1976), p. 100; see above, pp. 176–79, and Edmund S. Morgan, 'The First American Boom: Virginia, 1618–30', *WMQ*, Third Series, XXVIII (1971), pp. 178–79.

[18] See E. Lipson, *The Economic History of England*, 3 vols. (London, 1943), III, p. 164; E. Furniss, *The Position of the Laborer in a System of Nationalism* (New York, 1957), pp. 15–40.

[19] Cited in Leo F. Stock, ed., *Proceedings and Debates of the British Parliament Respecting North America, 1542–1739*, 4 vols. (Washington, 1924), I, pp. 185–86; see above, pp. 19–20.

[20] David Galenson, *White Servitude in Colonial America: An Economic Analysis* (London, 1981), pp. 3–19; and Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves: Market Behavior in Early English America* (New York, 1986), p. 137.

TABLE 10.1. *Population of the English West Indies, 1655–1715*

Barbados			*Jamaica*			*Leeward Islands*		
Year	White	Black	Year	White	Black	Year	White	Black
1655	23,000	20,000	*1660*	3,000	500	*1660*	8,000	2,000
1673	21,309	33,184	*1661*	2,956	3,479	*1670*	8,000	3,000
1684	19,568	46,502	*1673*	7,768	9,504	*1678*	10,408	8,449
1696	—	42,000	*1690*	10,000	30,000	*1690*	10,000	15,000
1715	16,888	—	*1713*	7,000	55,000	*1708*	7,311	23,500

Sources: For Barbados for 1655 see Vincent T. Harlow, *History of Barbados, 1625–1685* (Oxford, 1926), p. 338; for 1673, *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series [CSPC], 1669–1674*, no. 1101; for 1684, B[ritish] L[ibrary] Sloane MSS, 2441; for 1696, CO 318/2, f. 115; and for 1715, CO 28/16. The rounded figures for Jamaica in 1690 and 1713 and the Leewards in 1660, 1670, and 1690 are Dunn's estimates: Richard Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves* (see below, n. 22) p. 312. For Jamaica in 1673 see *Journal of the House of Assembly of Jamaica, 1663–1826*, I, p. 20. The Leeward figures for 1678 and 1708 are from CO 1/42, f. 193–243, and *CSPC, 1706–1708*, nos. 1383 and 1396. For other population estimates see David Galenson, *Traders, Planters and Slaves: Market Behaviour in Early English America* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 4–5; John J. McCusker, 'The Rum Trade and the Balance of Payments of the Thirteen Continental Colonies, 1650–1775', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1970, pp. 691–1775; and Robert V. Wells, *The Population of the British Colonies in America Before 1776: A Survey of Census Data* (Princeton, 1975), pp. 195–96, 238–39.

It is frequently alleged that these white workers were misled or duped into emigrating to a place that proved hazardous to their health, but it has also to be borne in mind that many found in the indenture contract a credit mechanism by which they could borrow against the future returns of their labour. Servants transported to the colony repaid the cost of passage and resettlement to their sponsor with labour. It was, therefore, a flexible and mutually attractive instrument that provided access to the West Indies for people without capital. 'Everyone knows', stated the historian A. E. Smith in a pungent description, that the colonial world 'was a haven for the godly', 'a refuge for the oppressed', 'a challenge to the adventurous', and 'the last resort of scoundrels'.[21]

Barbados developed the largest labour market in the West Indies during the century. This was because it led the way into large-scale sugar production. The opportunity to switch from tobacco and cotton production was open to planters in Barbados because sugar prices on the European market rose in the 1640s on account of production dislocations caused by civil war in Portuguese Brazil, previously the principal supplier. The more venturesome of the British planters in Barbados, with considerable Dutch financial and technological support, moved in and captured a significant market share. By the early 1650s Barbados produced an annual crop valued at over £3 million and was described as the richest spot in

[21] A. E. Smith, *Colonists in Bondage: White Servitude and Convict Labor in America, 1607–1776* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1947), p. 5.

the New World; the island's value, in terms of trade and capital generation, was greater than that of all the other English colonies put together. Barbados had replaced Hispaniola as the 'sugar centre' of the Caribbean, and the French islands lagged behind the English even though their production of sugar also rose steadily over the century. Richard Ligon captured the nature of this economic explosion in terms of the planters' expectations. He related the case of his friend Colonel Thomas Modyford, son of the Mayor of Exeter, who arrived on the island in 1645. Modyford bought a plantation of 500 acres and provided it with a labour force of twenty-eight English servants and a larger number of slaves. He took 'a resolution to himself not to set face in England, till he had made his voyage and employment there worth him a hundred thousand pounds sterling; and all by this sugar plant'. Modyford's optimism was, indeed, justified; by 1647 he had made a fortune and was made Governor in 1660. In the 1660s he expanded his interests into newly acquired Jamaica and became Governor of that island in 1664. At his death, in 1679, he owned one of the largest plantations in the West Indies, with over 600 slaves and servants.[22]

Reports from the West Indies during the second half of the century indicate the steady advance of sugar cultivation, although sugar monoculture was certainly not the case in these islands. Contests for the best lands in Jamaica between sugar farmers, cash-crop producers, and cattlemen remained as intense as that between agriculturalists and contraband traders for control of official policy with respect to the colony's development. Piracy and contraband also remained attractive in Jamaica as a means of wealth accumulation, despite the ascendancy of the agricultural trades which the mercantilist intellectuals considered to be the only sustainable source of wealth. The cultivation of cacao, which had been pursued on Jamaica by the Spaniards, was persisted in by some English planters, and it was the profits made from cacao that made it possible for some of them to become involved with sugar production. Efforts were also made to cultivate sugar on the four Leeward islands of Antigua, Montserrat, Nevis, and St Christopher, but none of these became a major sugar producer in the seventeenth century despite the fact that the planters in all these areas were lured by the Barbados model. Less suitable agricultural terrain, and the high cost of constructing the mill, the boiling house, and the curing house that was necessary on every sugar plantation, go some way towards explaining the limited advance of sugar production into the Lesser Antilles. The more weighty disincentive, however, would have been the close location of these islands to the Caribbean settlements of other European powers. Their consequent exposure to attack by European rivals made them altogether

[22] Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (London, 1657), pp. 69, 86, 93–96; Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (London, 1973), pp. 68–69, 81–82, 154–55.

more risky places for the high capital investment that sugar required than Barbados and Jamaica. Instead of the monocrop production of sugar that came to characterize Barbados after the 1650s, the Lesser Antilles persisted with more mixed economic activity that included the production of indigo, tobacco, ginger, cotton, domesticated cattle, and fish as well as sugar.[23]

The reorganization of economic activity in Barbados and the Leewards is generally referred to as 'The Sugar Revolution'.[24] The cultivation of sugar cane on large plantations on Barbados steadily displaced the growing of tobacco, cotton, and indigo on smaller farms, and supplemented these activities on the other islands. Sugar planting, with its larger labour- and capital-equipment needs, stimulated demand for bigger units. Landowners enclosed on tenants, and small freeholders were bought out, and pushed off. As a result, land prices escalated and there was a rapid reduction in the size and output of non-sugar producers. In most islands some small-scale farmers continued to occupy prime lands, maintaining a cash-crop culture on the margins of plantations. But small farmers found it difficult to compete as tobacco and cotton prices fell and their operations often proved unprofitable. By the 1680s the 'sugar islands' had lost their reputation as hospitable places for propertyless European migrants, while the progress of sugar cultivation on the island of Barbados effected a more rapid and more total manipulation of the natural environment than occurred anywhere else in the Atlantic that came under English control during the course of the seventeenth century.[25]

Economic transformation had considerable implications for the social structure and political life of West Indian society. The emergence of a planter élite, considered the richest colonists in America, distinguished the 'sugar islands' and set them apart. In most colonies, successive generations of men from élite families dominated political institutions, legislatures, and judiciaries, and these were responsible for constructing mansions on the island of Barbados that matched those of comfortable English gentry families, as well as port towns and churches that gave a superficial English appearance to all these tropical islands. On the negative side, the more successful planters, especially on Barbados and Jamaica, used systems of exclusion such as property qualifications, membership of professional bodies,

[23] Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, esp. pp. 117–87; Jack P. Greene, 'Changing Identity in the British Caribbean: Barbados as a Case Study', in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden, eds., *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (Princeton, 1987), pp. 213–66; R.B., *The English Empire in America* (London, 1685), pp. 167–209.

[24] By 1700 the English West Indies were producing about 40% of Europe's sugar (of which Barbados 40%, Jamaica 30%, and the Leewards 30%). See below, pp. 410–11.

[25] The question of environmental change in Barbados is touched upon in Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, pp. 44–116; and for a point of comparison see William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England* (New York, 1983).

and possession of university degrees, which helped them to dominate colonial society at the expense of middling and smaller planters, as well as all non-whites. They also played prominent leadership roles in further colonial expansion. The sponsorship of Caribbean settlements in Jamaica, the Windwards, and the Guianas, as well as in Virginia and the Carolinas on the mainland, benefited in large measure from the migration and investments of Barbadian families.

Sugar meant slaves, and in the Lesser Antilles, as in Hispaniola and Brazil, it meant African slaves. Those acquainted with sugar production in Brazil would have known that the work regime was so severe that it would not be endured by any free labour force, and that planters had resorted to slaves imported from Africa. The work associated with sugar production was unusually burdensome because it involved a considerable manufacturing input on the plantation as well as harsh agricultural labour. Workers were required not only to clear the ground of lush natural vegetation and to sow, tend, and harvest the sugar cane in the tropical sun, but also immediately to crush the juice from the cane in a sugar mill, and then to boil the juice in cauldrons before it had time to ferment. Work on a sugar plantation was arduous and labour-intensive throughout the year, but was particularly onerous at harvest time when the sugar works operated incessantly, with the workers organized in shifts to keep the operation going.[26] Large profits in sugar during the mid-century meant that the more successful sugar planters could absorb the high labour cost associated with slavery and, as they rapidly dispensed with indentured servitude as unsuitable for sugar production, they established the islands as the greatest British colonial market for slaves. The capital and credit needed to revolutionize the market for unfree labour were available. English as well as Dutch merchants and financiers were eager to do business with sugar planters. By 1660 the African slave trade was the 'life line' of the Caribbean economy. In 1645, some two years after the beginning of sugar production, Barbados had only 5,680 slaves; in 1698 it had 42,000 slaves. Jamaica followed Barbados into 'sugar and slavery' towards the end of the century. In 1656 the colony had 1,410 slaves; in 1698 it had over 41,000.[27] The mortality of these slaves was high. Overwork, malnutrition, resistance, all contributed to this. The planters therefore needed an annual input of fresh slaves to keep up their stock. In 1688 it was estimated that Jamaica needed 10,000 slaves, the Leewards 6,000, and Barbados 4,000 to maintain existing stocks. The combination of the sugar trade and slave trade represents a dual economic system upon which the Caribbean depended.

Barbadian planters were to experience the pressing need to regularize the relations between slaves, servants, and masters. In 1661 legislators settled both

[26] Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, pp. 188–223.

[27] See Richard S. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623–1775* (Bridgetown, 1973), pp. 234–60; Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, pp. 224–63.

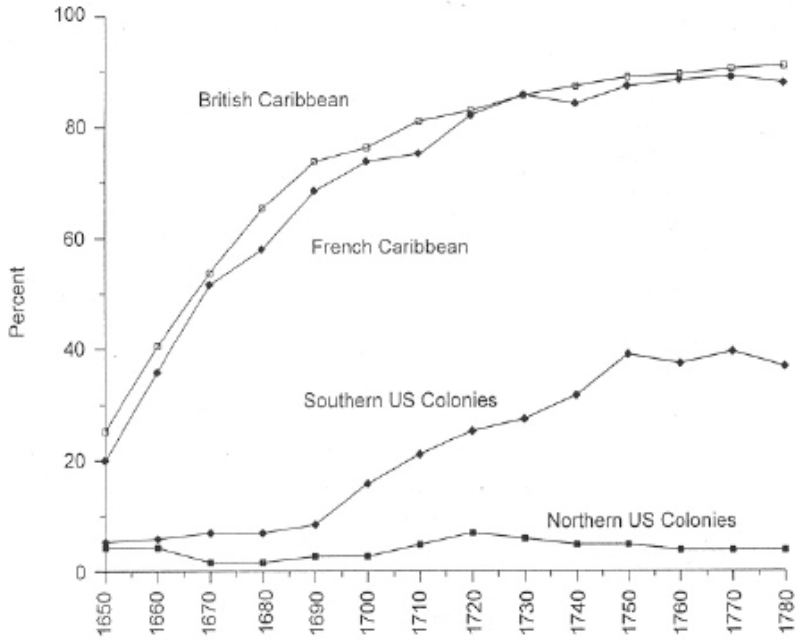


FIG. 10.1. *Blacks as a percentage of the total population in four regions*

Sources: Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of Negro Slavery* (Boston, 1974), p. 21.

matters with two separate codes. The slave code, 'An Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes', sanctioned rigid segregation.[28] It formed the legal basis of slave–master relations, and represented an attempt legally to constitute the social order. It was amended in 1676, 1682, and 1688. It maintained that masters were responsible for the feeding, sheltering, and clothing of slaves, who were described as 'heathenish', 'brutish', and 'dangerous'.[29]

Similar attitudes towards white servants were reflected in the ideas and language that shaped the 1661 Servant Code by which previous 'customs', 'Orders of Council', and 'Acts of the Assembly' were consolidated. Legislators stated explicitly that the purposes of the Code were to protect masters' investments in servants, facilitate their social and political suppression, and at the same time protect them, as chattels, from the excesses of brutal masters. Entitled 'An Act for the Good Governing of Servants, and Ordaining the Rights between Masters and Servants',

[28] Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, p. 246.

[29] Richard Hall, *Acts Passed in the Island of Barbados, 1643–1762* (London, 1764), No. 42, pp. 112–13.

the law was passed at the time when slaves and servants worked in gangs on the sugar estates and the racial division of labour was not yet a noticeable social development.[30] Planters believed that legislation was necessary to strengthen their hand while servants expressed dissatisfaction with social and working conditions by violent rebellion, running away, and seeking unilateral termination of their contracts. The discovery of planned servant revolts in 1634 and 1647, and the need to suppress bands of runaway slaves (known as Maroons) during the 1650s, informed the political and ideological contexts of the Code.

In 1670 the legislature at Montserrat explicitly stated that slaves and servants should be subject to the same coercive and regulatory instrument. This thinking was embodied in the 'Act for Restraining the Liberty of Negroes and to Prevent the Running Away of Christian Servants'. The protective approach to servant care, however, could be seen in an Act passed in the same year to prohibit 'the turning away of Christian servants in sickness by their masters'. The Lords of Trade and Plantations confronted the Jamaican legislature in 1676 after reading the draft of an 'Act for the Good Governing of Christian Servants'. They objected in particular to the use of the term 'servitude' on the grounds that it was understood as 'a mark of bondage and slavery'. The word 'service' was proposed to the Jamaicans, who were reminded by the Lords that 'servants were not slaves' but 'only apprentices for years'.[31]

The Legislative Council of the Leewards, constituted by a core of men who had made fortunes in Barbados, was greatly influenced by the Barbadian model. The legal organization of unfree labour on the islands' sugar plantations indicated the extent to which Barbadian planters had ushered in a legislative, managerial, and labour culture which was accepted as an ideal type. Sugar planters in Antigua were closest to Barbadians in terms of their entry into large-scale sugar plantation production, and were the first to produce a code for the governance of master–servant relations that spoke directly to local conditions. Their 1669 Act, unlike that of Jamaica in 1664, specified terms of service that reflected concern with the wider issues of community relations, economic growth, and po!'tical conflict. Legislatures on the mainland followed. Comprehensive master and servant codes were enacted, for example, in Maryland (1676, 1692, 1699, 1704, and 1715). Collectively, these legislative instruments constituted an edifice designed to manage interests seemingly in conflict—the property rights and class rule of masters and the social aspirations of propertyless migrants.[32]

[30] Manuscripts Laws of Barbados, C[olonial] O[ffice] 30/1 No. 30.

[31] 'An Act for Restraining the Liberties of Negroes and to Prevent the Running Away of Christian Slaves', *C[alendar of] S[tate] P[apers] C[olonial] [Series], 1669–74*, No. 372; see also *CSPC, 1669–74*, No. 374; *CSPC, 1675–76*, No. 927.

[32] Smith, *Colonists*, pp. 228–29.

English masters in the Caribbean were also suspicious of Irish servants who bulked large in their labour force, and legislatures targeted them for special consideration. In Barbados, following widespread suspicion of Irish involvement in the aborted slave revolt of 1692, planters adamantly refused to accept them as servants. Instead, between 1693 and 1696, they petitioned, in vain, for Scottish servants to strengthen their militia forces. In 1697, when the home authorities made an offer of Irish servants, the legislature made its position explicit: '[W]e desire no Irish rebels may be sent to us: for we want not labourers of that colour to work for us, but men in whom we may confide, to strengthen us.'[33] Nevis was first among the Leewards to take legislative action to limit the numbers and activities of Irish inhabitants. In 1701 the Legislative Council passed an Act to prevent 'papists' and 'reputed papists' from settling in the island and to bar those already settled from public office. This was repealed following criticism from London. Montserrat also debated similar 'Protestant Bills' aimed at excluding Irishmen from public service, including militia duties. The Barbadians, however, who had not passed legislation removing Irish civil liberties, merely imposed oaths of abjuration in order to vote or to hold public office.

The daily lives of servants on the estates, then, were regulated in ways not too dissimilar from those governing slaves. Servants during their indentures were at the absolute disposal of their masters. The use of legislation to regulate indentured labour shows that the planters viewed the status of an indentured servant as that of a chattel. The degree of 'unfreedom' between the slave and the servant, however, though important and reflected in differentiated material consumption and social expectations, did not preclude common references to servants as 'white slaves' in everyday language.[34]

Against this background, on the evening of 24 March 1659, two petitions, 'which leaped over the heads of about four score others', were presented to the House of Commons Grand Committee of Grievances on behalf of seventy-three political prisoners 'sold into slavery in Barbados' by the Cromwellian authorities after a disturbance at Salisbury in March 1654. One petition was tabled on behalf of M. Rivers and O. Foyle and seventy others; the other by Rowland Thomas, all sold in Barbados as the 'goods and chattel' of leading West Indian merchant Martin Noell—under the Lord Protector's instructions. The petition of Foyle and Rivers

[33] Minutes of the Barbados Council, 1697, *CSPC, 1696–97*, No. 1108; *Journal of the Council of Trade and Plantations*, 28 Dec. 1696, *CSPC, 1696–97*, No. 535. See also Hilary Beckles, 'A "Riotous and Unruly Lot": Irish Indentured Servants and Freemen in the English West Indies, 1644–1713', *WMQ*, Third Series, XLVII (1990), pp. 503–22, and L. M. Cullen, 'The Irish Diaspora of the Seventeenth and the Eighteenth Centuries', in Canny, ed., *Europeans on the Move*, pp. 112–49.

[34] C. S. Higham, *The Development of the Leeward Islands Under the Restoration, 1660–1668: A Study of the Foundations of the Old Colonial System* (Cambridge, 1921), p. 176; Smith, *Colonists*, p. 233. Hilary McD. Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627–1715* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1989), pp. 59–79.

was published as a pamphlet in 1659 to obtain popular support against the arbitrary shipping of the defenceless poor to the sugar colonies. For the first time politicians discussed the experiences of English labourers in the West Indies. The views of many back-benchers on black slavery, the embryonic concept of 'human rights', the limitations of party-political conflict, and the need for white solidarity at the colonial frontier were articulated. Parliamentarians responded to the evidence in different ways, and the debate gives glimpses into the views of politicians on enforced labour at this juncture of English colonization.[35]

The question being raised was whether it was proper that the Wars of the Three Kingdoms (1638–52) should have produced a flow of 'white slaves' to the 'sugar machine of the Indies'. Thomas Carlyle, in his biographical study of Oliver Cromwell, was to note that the very name of Barbados was transformed into an active verb, when to be 'Barbadosed' replaced the word 'transported' in popular usage. It was estimated that Barbados alone received and employed some 12,000 political prisoners, many of them Irish and Scots, between 1649 and 1655. What the petitioners wanted to know was, 'by what authority so great a breach is made upon the free people of England . . . by merchants that deal in slaves and souls of men?'

Martin Noell, who owned significant property in the islands, was called to give evidence concerning this trade. Noell was defensive, and constructed an apologetic image for West Indian servitude. He told the House of Commons: 'I abhor the thought of setting £100 upon any man's person. It is false and scandalous . . . the work is hard but . . . not so hard as is represented to you; it [Barbados] is a place as grateful to you for trade as any part of the world . . .' Parliament was not convinced by Noell's account. Most members took the view that they should be careful in dealing with Cavaliers, for in the final instance they were Englishmen, and one justification for the Wars of the Three Kingdoms in its English dimension was to defend the 'human rights' of all Englishmen. Discussion focused on 'the freeborn people of England'. Sir Henry Vane was firm in his convic ion that the issue of 'white slavery' transcended party politics, and was basically one of 'human rights' and individual liberty. Mr Boscaven placed before the Commons the underlying principle of ethnic relations within the Empire: 'I am as much against the Cavalier party as any man in these walls . . . but you have Paul's case before you. A Roman ought not to be beaten . . . or our lives will be as cheap as those of negroes.'

The debate marked a fundamental shift that was taking place in colonial economic interest and trends. Between 1659 and 1662 the Commons supported plans to sponsor an African trading company. This was established in 1663 as the

[35] M. Rivers and O. Foyle, *England's Slavery or Barbados Merchandize, Represented in a Petition to the High Court of Parliament* (London, 1659); the Parliamentary debate is recorded in Thomas Burton, MP, *Parliamentary Diary, 1656–59*, 8 vols. (London, 1828), IV, pp. 252–307, and Stock, ed., *Proceedings*, I, pp. 247–73.

'Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa'. When this company went bankrupt, the Commons supported plans to establish another company, which was formed in 1672 as the Royal African Company.[36]

In the 1660s significant changes took place in West Indian servant and slave markets. These changes were sufficient to give slave labour a clear price advantage over servant labour. The decade was marked by a powerful anti-emigration campaign, led by prominent mercantile theoreticians who moved from the previous position that had justified indenture servitude and argued instead that England was under-populated and that its potential for agricultural and commercial expansion lay in its having the largest possible store of labour. While demographers provided evidence of a downturn in the growth of population, it was evident that in many parts of England real wages were rising. Labourers and artisans, for the first time in the century, experienced significant increases in real wages over an extended period and held expectations about future improvements in living standards. Within this context workers seemed less keen to emigrate. The sugar colonies were criticized as drawing upon the domestic labour market at a level hostile to the national interest. Sir William Petty, for example, noted that the future power of England depended upon the size of its population, while Roger Coke insisted that 'a ruinous number of men daily flock to the plantations . . . to the weakening of the nation'.[37]

This campaign, supported by the state, had the effect of further diminishing emigration. The rise of South Carolina and the expansion of Virginia and Maryland placed West Indian planters in an uncompetitive position for attracting settlers. Colonial Assemblies responded to reduced levels of immigration by cutting the length of servitude by between 55 and 60 per cent. It was hoped that this would attract a larger number of settlers. But with market prices stabilized at around £12 for a healthy male servant, this reduction in effect meant the doubling of prices for servant labour. Against this background great steps were taken towards increasing the West African slave supply. In 1664 the Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa supplied slaves at prices between £14 and £22 per head. By 1675 the average price of slaves in the West Indies had fallen by 25–30 per cent, and the supply had increased by over 200 per cent.[38]

English planters quickly became experienced in slave organization, and their management policies were brutal. They kept slaves subordinated by an effective

[36] K. G. Davies, *The Royal African Company* (London, 1957).

[37] C. H. Hull, ed., *The Economic Writings of Sir William Petty*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1899), I, pp. 21, 34; R. Coke, *A Discourse on Trade* (London, 1670), pp. 12–13.

[38] See Hilary Beckles, 'The Economic Origins of Black Slavery in the British West Indies, 1640–1680: A Tentative Analysis of the Barbados Model', *Journal of Caribbean History* (1982), XVI, pp. 52–53; Hilary Beckles and Andrew Downes, 'The Economics of Transition to the Black Labor System in Barbados', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (1987), XVIII, pp. 225–47.

deployment of militia regiments, supported by government troops. Legal instruments were designed to regulate slaves' social behaviour, within and outside the production process, as well as to police their daily movements. For crimes of a public nature, such as rebellion, slaves were subject to capital punishment. In such cases, the island's Treasurer compensated slave-owners for their loss of capital. In addition, slaves were declared to be 'real estate' as opposed to mere chattel; this meant that slaves were legally tied to plantations, and could not easily be alienated from them in probate settlements. No legal provisions were made for the Christianization of slaves; they were generally regarded by the established Anglican church as intellectually unable to comprehend the concept of the faith and the Christian vision.

Slave Codes covered almost every area of the slave's social existence. They provided that no planter should give a slave permission to leave the estate without a signed ticket stating the time set for return. Any white person who found an authorized slave on his property without such a ticket and did not make an apprehension was liable to forfeit a sum of money to the Treasurer, some of which was paid to the informant.[39] Codes also stated that slaves were not lawfully allowed to 'beat drums, blow horns, or use other loud instruments', and their houses were to be 'diligently searched' from time to time. Any white who entertained a 'strange' Negro, upon conviction, was to forfeit a sum of money. A series of punishments was provided for slaves who traded in stolen goods, struck Christians, ran away, burnt sugar canes, or stole provisions. In addition, whites were liable to fines for improper policing of slaves, assisting them to escape, murdering them, or exposing them to seditious doctrines. However, slaves received some limited legal protection, as the laws recognized the need to 'guard them from the cruelties and insolence of themselves, and other ill-tempered people or owners'.[40]

Slaves were real estate and, therefore, could not own property—the basis of social mobility. Blacks were not permitted to give evidence in court against whites until the early nineteenth century, and whites rarely came to the legal assistance of blacks. If a master wilfully killed the slave of another, he was fined upon conviction. It was not until the nineteenth century that the murder of a slave by a white became a capital felony in the West Indies. On the other hand, slaves could be punished by death for striking or threatening a white person, or stealing property. These were the essential features of social relations with slaves established by the English in Barbados, Jamaica, and the Leeward Islands.

Within the Caribbean world, however, the Windward Islands remained a frontier area for the English. The success of the Kalinagos in holding on to a

[39] See Elsa Goveia, *The West Indian Slave Laws of the Eighteenth Century* (Bridgetown, 1970), pp. 16–34.

[40] Ibid.

significant portion of this territory, and their attacks on plantation settlements in the Leewards, fuelled the determination of the English to destroy them. By the mid-century English merchants, planters, and colonial officials agreed that the Kalinagos 'were a barbarous and cruel set of savages beyond reason or persuasion and must therefore be eliminated'. By this time, it was also clear that the slave-based plantation system demanded an 'absolute monopoly' of the Caribbean, and tolerated no 'alternative system'. Kalinago independence and self-reliance constituted a major contradiction to the internal logic of capitalist accumulation within the plantation economy. As a result, the plantocracy was determined to bring the contradiction to a speedy resolution by any means necessary.[41]

The Kalinagos had been able to resist the small-scale military expeditions that were sent against them in the 1630s and, having taken advantage of the differences that arose between the European powers during the 1650s and 1660s, they were able to provide assistance to the French and the Dutch on occasion in order to consolidate their own position against the English.[42] While this might have served their short-term purpose it ultimately steeled the English in their resolve to be rid of them, and successive English officials sought first to implant themselves within the territories held by the Kalinagos, then to enter into compacts with them, and finally (whenever the Kalinagos broke with their terms of submission) to strive for their expulsion by fair means or foul. The thrust of the onslaught which, at different times, drew upon the resources of London merchants, the English state, and the British settler population in the islands, was pursued intermittently between 1666 and 1700. It never achieved a complete success because the Kalinagos were able to cling on tenaciously in Dominica, where they were aided by the French, who feared that English settlement on that island would sever connections between Martinique and Guadeloupe in time of war. However, most of the islands—St Vincent, St Lucia, Tobago, and Grenada—were later brought into English possession.

The security issues, apart from fear of attack from other European powers, that preoccupied English settlers and colonial administrators throughout the seventeenth century were the control of unruly indentured servants and rebellious slaves, and the eradication of resisting natives. It is critical to take account of these issues because the pacification of these social groups had a considerable

[41] Gordon Lewis, *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought: The Historical Evolution of Caribbean Society in its Ideological Aspects, 1492–1980* (Kingston, 1983), pp. 104–05; Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, p. 246.

[42] Vere Langford Oliver, *The History of the Island of Antigua*, 3 vols. (London, 1984), I, pp. xix, xxv; Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, p. 87; Petition of Major John Scott to King, 1667, *CSPC, 1661–68*, No. 1788; Governor William Willoughby to King, 11 Feb. 1668, *CSPC, 1661–68*, No. 547; Henry Willoughby to William Willoughby, 15 June 1667, *CSPC, 1661–68*, No. 1498; David Watts, *The West Indies: Patterns to Development, Culture and Environmental Change since 1492* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 242–43.

influence upon the shaping of colonial policy and society. These conflicts, and the search for solutions, however, did not overshadow political controversies that emerged between the powerful, wealthy planter-merchant élite and government authority in London. Both tensions were endemic to West Indian society, and tended towards the destabilization of the colonial enterprise.

The English state, like its European counterparts, insisted upon the regulation of trade and settlement in order to create order from the uncertainty that resulted from military conquest. To this end, it developed elaborate administrative concepts and structures designed to shape and govern colonial relations. Over time these were adjusted to meet the peculiarities of local circumstances, but the objectives of ownership and control remained largely unchanged. In narrow terms, policies were designed to ensure that the hard-won resources of the Caribbean were not siphoned off by contesting colonial powers, and vigilance and authoritarianism surfaced as two obvious themes.

English settlements were usually financed and organized by private enterprise—the settlement of Jamaica was exceptional because it originated, in 1655–56, in the seizure of the island from Spain by Cromwell's Republican army, and the colony was therefore established as a state enterprise. The general economic principle of early English colonization, though, was private enterprise, and representative government took shape within the framework of constitutional royal authority.[43] English law and customs made clear provision for individual colonies to be granted or leased by the monarch to prominent people. These individuals were designated Lords Proprietor and were given royal authority to appoint colonial Governors to manage the affairs of colonies. Colonists, then, were under the indirect jurisdiction of the Crown since, theoretically at least, the proprietor or his Governor could be removed by royal authority. Governors were given rights to allocate colonial lands and appoint officials on behalf of the proprietors. In most colonies proprietors also gave them authority to interpret the law. Governors, therefore, had extensive powers in colonial affairs.

The granting of territories by the English Crown was part of the feudal legacy of the seventeenth century. Once grants were confirmed, grantees were free to do as they wished with the land. Colonists were required to pay dues on land obtained from Governors who collected them on the proprietor's behalf. Since land was initially held at the proprietor's pleasure, colonists quickly began to press for legally recognized rights to freehold ownership. By the mid-seventeenth century this concession was granted by proprietors to colonists, and private property rights in land became an important feature of English colonization.

[43] Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, esp. chaps. 2–3; Vincent T. Harlow, *A History of Barbados, 1625–1685* (Oxford, 1926), pp. 48–97.

It was during the mid-seventeenth century that the English state, like that of the French, considered the control of colonies to be slack, and took measures to strengthen its authority and bring colonists under more direct metropolitan rule, such as the Spanish crown had enjoyed from the early sixteenth century. Economic policies were proposed and reflected mercantile doctrine that explained the achievement of national wealth and power in terms of the nation's exclusive control over its colonial trades. National interest was, therefore, conceived in terms of the exclusion of foreigners, and the establishment of strict legal control over the economic activities of colonies.

The Cromwellian government took the first step in 1650, restricting the trade in sugar by legally excluding foreign merchants from all West Indian commerce. The first of the Navigation Acts was passed in 1651. It provided that, as a rule, colonial goods could be imported to the mother country, to Ireland, or to other colonies only by English or colonial- owned and –manned ships. This Act was clearly directed against the Dutch, who were now declared economic enemies by the Cromwellian state. In 1660 Charles II expanded restrictive trade laws and navigation regulations, in addition to terminating proprietary rule of grantees. The 1660 Navigation Act sought to ensure that valuable colonial products were first imported to England before they could be re-exported to foreign countries. This law applied to the principal West Indian crops—sugar, tobacco, cotton-wool, ginger, and indigo. The following year Parliament passed the Tariff Act, which provided English colonial sugar with preferential treatment in English markets; a duty of 1*s.* 5*d.* per hundredweight was imposed on English sugar compared with 35*s.* 10*d.* on foreign sugar. Collectively, navigation laws, including the Staple Act of 1663, sought to protect and expand the vital customs revenues on sugar and other colonial produce. The collection of these revenues provided a critical justification for colonial activity. They enabled the state to project nationalist grandeur and command a political advantage at a time of competitive imperialist expansion.

Between 1650 and 1665, then, a policy aimed at bringing the plantations more completely under the domination of the state was relentlessly pursued. Newly created offices were subsequently empowered to police the application of economic policies, and to secure the compliance of colonial administrators. In 1675 a committee, under the control of the Lords of Trade and Plantations, was formed with the objective of imposing Crown rule on all colonies, directing their trade, and creating the English 'exclusif'. These formal restrictive structures, which were also designed to facilitate the commercial links between mainland and island colonies, could not fully prevent illicit intercolonial trade nor discourage colonists from seeking greater political autonomy. Free traders and interlopers succeeded in undermining monopoly companies in particular, most of which collapsed into bankruptcy and disorganization. As a result, the English abandoned some monopoly policies. In 1698 they opened the slave trade to all suppliers. While colonists sought free trade in slaves and other colonial imports, they none the less insisted upon the preservation of a protected metropolitan market for their produce.

Generally, English colonists obtained a high degree of internal autonomy and came close to establishing an acceptable political and constitutional arrangement with the metropolitan government. This was partly due to the proprietorial nature of the early colonial government and the extent to which private enterprise was the dominant motive force of colonization. Such a legal and economic framework was conducive to the development of a democratic spirit among property-holders. It was to be expected, therefore, that the planter élite would show themselves determined to enjoy the political rights and freedoms which wealthy Englishmen already enjoyed within the metropolitan political culture.

Following the lead of the Virginians and colonists at Bermuda, the Barbadians took the initiative among West Indian sugar planters in 1639 and established an elected Assembly to represent local interests and defend them against incursions from England. Parishioner freeholders won the right to elect representatives to the Assembly, which was vested with powers to initiate and legislate money bills and control taxation. The Barbadian model was developed elsewhere in the English Caribbean, so that by mid-century the principle of representative government had been assumed by the planting élite. Though Governors and their Councils maintained the right to veto and oppose the Assembly, Assemblymen reacted strongly to such actions and could prove truculent. Indeed, the tradition of Assemblymen treating Governors as figureheads developed in the seventeenth century.

The overriding principle within the English colonial political culture was the Assembly's right to rule with minimal interference from London. This political arrangement became known as the Old Representative System, and from its beginnings in the mid-century elected Assemblies sought to resist supervisory control by not voting money for projects and by insisting on the use of Committees and Boards to carry them through. Elected Assemblies with legislative and fiscal powers were regarded as a right which property conferred.

From the 1640s the plantocracy, strengthened by the massive accumulation of capital generated by the sugar industry, began to conceive its economic interests in class terms. In general it was not prepared to allow political disputes in England to undermine its authority and interests. The planters would not tolerate proprietary powers undermining their perceived right to manage colonial affairs in a manner that suited them. They were determined to ensure that the colonies enjoyed a maximum degree of self-government within a broader colonial structure. This meant the adoption of a neutral position over the conflict between King and Parliament. The colonies had prospered under a free-trade policy which facilitated trade with Dutch merchants, and they were prepared to pursue that line in spite of

English opposition. Indeed, it was evident during the 1640s that some prominent planters, in Barbados at least, would rather push for home rule and independence than relinquish their freedom of trade and their rights to self-government. In this period no colony was as forthright as Barbados in confronting the power of Parliament in order to preserve its economic autonomy.[44]

News of the execution of Charles I by Parliament in January 1649 threw the West Indian plantocracy into disarray. They had managed to maintain a policy of non-interference for nearly a decade and had not split their communities with Cavalier–Roundhead conflict. No one was prepared to see the colonies' self-government subjected to rule by Imperial parliamentary decree. In Barbados, Royalist sympathizers expressed their opposition to parliamentary authority, and advocated that colonists should reject the mercantile principles of Cromwell and practise free trade as formerly. As Royalist opinion among the plantocracy moved in favour of 'independence' from the Commonwealth, few expressed the principle of the King's right to rule. Parliament considered the political stance of the Royalist planter faction offensive and resorted to a military operation to subdue the colony. Planters, both Roundheads and Cavaliers, were described by Parliament as insurrectionists who had to be crushed.

On 7 May 1650 the General Assembly of Barbados voted to receive Francis, Lord Willoughby, as Governor, a move which confirmed that Cavaliers had succeeded in breaking Roundhead political power. The Willoughby government wasted no time in deporting many Roundheads from the colony and in confiscating their properties. Parliament was distressed by these developments and despatched a fleet under the command of Sir George Asycue to subdue the colony. For three months Asycue blockaded Barbados as his force of 860 men lacked the military power to defeat the Royalists' militia. Finally, on 11 January 1652, the colonists, feeling the pressures of commercial isolation, agreed to accept the terms of Asycue's delegation.

Barbadians considered the terms of agreement favourable to themselves. They agreed to recognize the rule of Parliament and its nominated Governor in return for continued self-government, free trade, and a restoration of confiscated properties. With this agreement, planters got back to their task of producing sugar, even though it was clear to many that Parliament had no intention of honouring the agreement to allow them free trade with the Dutch. This agreement, known as the Charter of Barbados, represented for the planters formal recognition by England of their right to rule themselves in local affairs, and a confirmation that propertied Englishmen were entitled to the same political freedoms that they enjoyed at

[44] Jack P. Greene, *Peripheries and Centers: Constitutional Development in the Extended Polities of the British Empire and the United States, 1607–1788* (Athens, Ga., 1986), pp. 19, 25; also, 'Legislative Turnover in British America, 1696–1775: A Quantitative Analysis', *WMQ*, Third Series, XXXVIII (1981), pp. 442–63.

home. At the Restoration both Barbados and the Leewards made the same bargain with Charles II. In exchange for royal government and the continuation of land titles, the island Assemblies in 1664 consented to a 4.5 per cent duty on commodities exported from the isles.

Englishmen had entered the Caribbean rather tentatively, but by the beginning of the eighteenth century they were confident and in effective control. The first enemy, the Spanish, had early become reconciled to the English presence in the Lesser Antilles, and later surrendered Jamaica without much of a fight. The Dutch had consolidated a considerable commercial empire after 1621, when their West India Company was formed and 'parented' pioneering English settlers. By 1650 the English, now feeling secure and ambitious, bit the Dutch hand that had fed them, first in 1652–54 and then in a series of trade wars in 1665–67 and 1672–74. Turning to the French, the English assaulted settlers and harassed traders in the wars of 1666–67 and 1689–97. Finally, in 1713 they succeeded in crushi ng French resistance and captured the prime prize: the *Asiento* contract to supply slaves to the Spanish colonies.[45]

The English developed the islands as major economies in their own right, but also as part of the Atlantic trading system. The islands were valuable to the economic viability of the mainland colonies, with commodity trade between the two being of vital importance to English merchants. Trading connections in rum, foodstuffs, construction materials, sugar, and slaves contributed to the perception of the islands as the 'hub of Empire'. While English merchants had established global trading networks, the West Indies were central to their operations, and were represented as such in the first depictions of what came to be called 'the English [after 1707, the British] empire in America'.[46] The islands absorbed more slaves over time, and produced a more lucrative commodity than any other region in colonial America. The Atlantic system, as an economic order centred on the slave-plantation complex, was therefore revolutionized in the seventeenth century. The sugar estate was the hub of this network in the movements of labour, capital, and management. The West Indies thus occupied a special place in the development of what ultimately became the British Empire.

[45] See below, [Israel], pp. 423–44.

[46] P. F. Campbell, 'The Merchants and Traders of Barbados', *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society*, XXXIV (1972), No. 1, pp. 85–98; and XXXIV (1974), No. 2, pp. 166–86; R.B., *The English Empire in America*; John Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 2 vols. (London, 1708).

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