

**Building the Bridge: Labor and Colonial Governance in Seventeenth-Century Bridgetown,  
Barbados**

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# **Building the Bridge: Labor and Colonial Governance in Seventeenth-Century Bridgetown, Barbados**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2021

For much of the seventeenth-century, Bridgetown, Barbados was one of England's principal ports in the early modern Caribbean and wider Atlantic world. It was a dynamic center of colonial trade; the product of its location at the heart of an immensely wealth and vastly unequal sugar plantation slave society on Barbados. Despite the port's value and vital place in the history of England's first commercial empire in the Americas, Bridgetown's seventeenth-century social history remains relatively under-studied. This dissertation examines the ways its inhabitants, free and enslaved, navigated the maritime landscapes of the early modern Caribbean. A consideration of Bridgetown's seventeenth-century history reveals an unstable and fractious social, economic, political, and cultural landscape, the product of a shifting array of actors, institutions, and circumstances rather than seamless colonial development and imperial integration. Local struggles on Barbados, shaped by the fluid and feverish uncertainty of the seventeenth-century Caribbean, informed the actions of Bridgetown's inhabitants as they worked to carve out an urban space of mobility in a maritime world revolutionized by the dramatic expansion of sugar plantations, a vastly expanded transatlantic slave trade, and the rise of global capitalism in the early modern Caribbean. As English settlers grappled with the problems of imposing social and economic control over rapidly urbanizing spaces like Bridgetown, they relied on fragmented systems of colonial power. In fits and starts, English settlers acted through multiple institutions to govern

Bridgetown's fragmented social, cultural, and economic landscapes producing a system of governance that persisted into the eighteenth century as a central component in the colony's slave society. The realities of colonial power and governance in ports like Bridgetown were complicated by the divergent interests of colonists themselves, the aspirations of transient sailors and settlers, and the struggles of enslaved people to shape the cities and towns they lived in. By recovering these histories, this dissertation argues that the fragmented nature of colonial power systems, evident in Bridgetown's early history, enabled the creation and expansion of remarkably durable and adaptive, if not violent and repressive, Caribbean slave societies.

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## 1.0 Introduction

Samuel Copen's 1695 "A Prospect of Bridge Town, In Barbados", the earliest panoramic representation of an English colonial harbor in the Americas, captures Barbados's principal port town at a critical inflection point in the history of the early modern Caribbean.<sup>1</sup> Copen celebrated the port's wealth and the town's place in England's mercantile empire in the Caribbean founded on the twin pillars of plantation agriculture and transatlantic slave trade that flourished and expanded by the end of the seventeenth century with profound consequences for the entire region. Dozens of ships – many flying English flags - dominate the foreground, firing cannons in salute as they rest at anchor in a fortified Carlisle Bay. Moving closer to shore, wharfs and docks run along the water's edge, each section of the waterfront labeled with the name of a prominent colonial merchant. Moving inland, toward the panorama's background, the rest of the town is a blur of unidentified houses and churches. Beyond the ragged edges of the bustling port Copen lays out a sanitized bucolic scene. As a portrait, Copen's panoramic vision celebrates England's first commercial empire in the Americas, while obscuring the human histories animating this space and the ways its inhabitants, free and enslaved, navigated the maritime landscapes of the early modern Caribbean.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kristen Block, *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean: Religion, Colonial Competition, and the Politics of Profit* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 205.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Copen, "A Prospect of Bridge Town (In Barbados, 1695)" En695 C782 in John Carter Brown Archive of Early American Images. <https://jcb.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet/detail/JCB~1~1~1318~1670003:A-Prospect-of-Bridge-Town--in-Barba>.

Copen's prospect, like much written about Bridgetown's seventeenth-century history, shrinks the town's inhabitants until they are barely visible. The viewer must strain to distinguish abstract figures scuttling about the harbor in lighter-crafts, hauling dockside the bags and barrels of valuable goods and commodities that tied Barbados to an early modern world moved by maritime commerce.<sup>3</sup> Yet it was these people - some free, but mostly enslaved – who toiled, lived, and struggled in the port that shaped the island's history in profound and often underappreciated ways.

A consideration of the history behind this imagined waterfront scene reveals an unstable and fractious social, economic, political, and cultural landscape, the product of a shifting array of actors, institutions, and circumstances rather than Copen's fantasy of seamless colonial development and imperial integration. Local struggles on Barbados, shaped by the fluid and feverish uncertainty of the seventeenth-century Caribbean, informed the actions of Bridgetown's inhabitants as they worked to carve out an urban space of mobility in a maritime world revolutionized by the dramatic expansion of sugar plantations, a vastly expanded transatlantic slave trade, and the rise of global capitalism in the early modern Caribbean.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Pedro Welch's study remains the most comprehensive scholarship on Bridgetown's colonial history, it is predominantly focused on the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Pedro Welch, *Slave Society in the City: Bridgetown, Barbados: 1680-1834* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2003). Martyn Bowden provides a historical-geographic examination of Bridgetown's colonial development from its founding and compares it to Boston, in New England. Martyn Bowden, "Three Centuries of Bridgetown: An Historical Geography" in *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* volume XLIX (2003), 3-138.

<sup>4</sup> Carla Gardina Pestana, *The English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution, 1640-1661* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Wim Klooster, *The Dutch Moment: War, Trade and Settlement in the Seventeenth-Century Atlantic*

As English settlers grappled with the problems of imposing social and economic control over rapidly urbanizing spaces like Bridgetown, they relied on fragmented systems of colonial power. In fits and starts, English settlers acted through multiple institutions to govern Bridgetown's fragmented social, cultural, and economic landscapes producing a system of governance that persisted into the eighteenth century as a central component in the colony's slave society. While Copen's engraving projects order, wealth, and power, the realities of colonial power and governance in ports like Bridgetown were complicated by the divergent interests of colonists themselves, the aspirations of transient sailors and settlers, and the struggles of enslaved people to shape the cities and towns they lived in. By recovering these histories, this dissertation argues that the fragmented nature of colonial power systems, evident in Bridgetown's early history, enabled the creation and expansion of remarkably durable and adaptive, if not violent and repressive, Caribbean slave societies.

## **1.1 The Caribbean Context**

While the geographic boundaries of the circum-Caribbean are its archipelagic islands and the coasts of North and South America, it was the region's port towns and cities that gave the early

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*World* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2016); B W Higman, "The Sugar Revolution," *Economic History Review* 53, no. 2 (February 14, 2000): 213–36, Jenny Shaw, *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean: Irish, Africans, and the Construction of Difference* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2013).

modern Caribbean its coherence and character in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>5</sup> The islands of the Greater Antilles, the sites of cataclysmic contact in the early sixteenth century, were home to thousands of Spanish settlers and both free and enslaved African peoples who primarily concentrated around the region's port towns and cities by the end of the century.<sup>6</sup> These towns and cities situated throughout the Greater Antilles and the coastal Caribbean were centers of cultural contact, production, and exchange; facilitators of transatlantic trade and commerce; and spaces of social conflict and negotiation.<sup>7</sup> Years before the rise of the Caribbean plantation complex, as David Wheat has shown, these urban spaces of the Spanish Caribbean were critical to facilitating inter-regional trade in provisions that sustained the economies of the Spanish Caribbean as mining,

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<sup>5</sup> Maritime connections often feature in the geographic and historical definitions of the circum-Caribbean, B.W. Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 1-3; Stuart Schwartz, *A Sea of Storms: A History of Hurricanes in the Greater Caribbean from Columbus to Katrina* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015) ix -xxi; Bonham Richardson. *The Caribbean in the Wider World, 1492–1992: A Regional Geography*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Watts, David. *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture, and Environmental Change since 1492*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 1570-1640* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> In Pablo Gomez's study of experiential knowledge production in the circum-Caribbean, port towns are critical sites of production and exchange, Pablo Gomez, *The Experiential Caribbean: Creating Knowledge and Healing in the Early Modern Atlantic* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Alejandro De la Fuente, *Havana and the Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

sugar cultivation, and pearl fishing industries declined in the region.<sup>8</sup> Long considered ancillary to Spain's mainland empire, port towns and cities are now considered to have been a critical part of how new economies of provisioning and trade replaced earlier extractive economies.<sup>9</sup> The Atlantic economies of these port towns built solid foundations for the arrival of English, Dutch, and French settlement in the seventeenth-century.

Bridgetown's settlement in the late 1620s coincided with a period of growing entanglement between northern Europeans, including the English, Dutch and French, with the urban-maritime world of the early modern Spanish Caribbean.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the sixteenth century, English adventurers joined Dutch and French raiders in attempts to pilfer, profit, and trade with the Spanish. Spanish Caribbean ports became the focal points for this illicit inter-imperial trade in the late-sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.<sup>11</sup> But by the early seventeenth-century, English settlers had established footholds across the circum-Caribbean and the Atlantic coasts of North America.<sup>12</sup> In search of profit, they drew from Spanish, African, and indigenous agriculture

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<sup>8</sup> David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 1570-1640* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016)10-16; Molly Warsh, *American Baroque: Pearls and the Nature of Empire, 1492-1700* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018)

<sup>9</sup> For earlier narratives of Spanish decline in the circum-Caribbean see: Carl Sauer, *The Early Spanish Main*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

<sup>10</sup> Elijah Gould, "Entangled Histories, Entangled Worlds: The English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Peripher," *AHR* 112, 3 (2007) 764-86.

<sup>11</sup> Block, *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean: Religion, Colonial Competition, and the Politics of Profit* 9 .

<sup>12</sup> For general overviews of these processes of colonization see: Jack P. Greene. *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture*.,(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); J. H. Elliott *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830*.

throughout the circum-Caribbean to experiment in the production of a wide variety of crops.<sup>13</sup> The center of gravity in the circum-Caribbean shifted from the Spanish colonies of the Greater Antilles towards a more diverse and fluid set of imperial and colonial actors spread across the region. While the agricultural experiments and discovery of sugar are well-known processes, less well-known are the histories of the small towns and colonial outposts that facilitated colonial projects on islands like Barbados.

Across the circum-Caribbean, wherever French, Dutch, and English interlopers settled, new forts and outposts followed, anchoring a variety of colonial projects in actual territorial possession. By the second half of the seventeenth century, most of these settlements had experimented with and developed plantation economies devoted to agricultural commodity production. Yet this generation of port towns and communities remain sparsely studied with a few notable exceptions. As Linda Rupert has shown, between 1634 and 1674 the Dutch West India Company used the port of Curaçao as a naval base and shipping point for free trade in the region.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Anne Pérotin-Dumon's study of the French ports of Basse-Terre and Pointe-à-Pitre on

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New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); and for the English settlement on Bermuda, Michael Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) 11-63.

<sup>13</sup> For these experiments, their results, and roots in the circum-Caribbean see: Melissa Morris, "Spanish and Indigenous influences on Virginian Tobacco Cultivation," *Atlantic Environments and the American South* eds. Thomas Earle and D. Andrew Johnson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2020); Philip D. Morgan, "Virginia's Other Prototype" *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550-1624* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007) 342-380.

<sup>14</sup> Linda Rupert, *Creolization and Contraband: Curacao in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 17-42, 68-69.

Guadeloupe, recounts the towns' early history as a fort and Atlantic market under the rule of the first *Compagnie des Indes occidentales*.<sup>15</sup> Interest in the port towns of the seventeenth-century English Caribbean, however, remains predominantly focused around Port Royal, Jamaica, rather than Bridgetown to the south.<sup>16</sup> In stark contrast to this neglect, the seventeenth-century origins of Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Charleston are well known, well-established, and venerable components of literature on early America.<sup>17</sup> As Pérotin-Dumon notes, scholars who saw the plantation societies of the early modern Caribbean as dependent on European empire were less likely to see in Basse-Terre or Bridgetown anything more than shipping points for plantation commodities.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Anne Perotin-Dumon, *La Ville Aux Iles, La Ville Dans l'île: Basse-Terre et Pointe-a-Pitre, Gaudeloupe, 1650-1820* (Paris: Karthala, 2000), 47–88.

<sup>16</sup> Nuala Zahedieh, “The Merchants of Port Royal, Jamaica, and the Spanish Contraband Trade, 1655–1692.” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 43 (1986): 570–593; Michael Pawson, and David Buisseret. *Port Royal, Jamaica*. 2d ed. (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2000); Mulcahy, Matthew. “‘That Fatal Spot’: The Rise and Fall—and Rise and Fall Again—of Port Royal, Jamaica.” In *Investing in the Early Modern Built Environment: Europeans, Asians, Settlers and Indigenous Societies*. Edited by Carole Shammas (Leiden: Brill 2012) 191-218.

<sup>17</sup> Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1938); Christian Koot, *Empire at the Periphery: British Colonists, Anglo-Dutch Trade, and the Development of the British Atlantic, 1621–1713*. (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Jessica Roney. *Governed by a Spirit of Opposition: The Origins of American Political Practice in Colonial Philadelphia*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014); Emma Hart, *Building Charleston: Town and Society in the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Perotin-Dumon, *La Ville Aux Iles, La Ville Dans l'île: Basse-Terre et Pointe-a-Pitre, Gaudeloupe, 1650-1820*, 63–65.



The seventeenth-century rise of Barbados's plantation economy lends itself particularly well to narratives of imperial dependency and social failure that have obscured Bridgetown's complex social history. Drawing from Iberian traditions and knowledge of sugar production, Barbados's planters embraced monoculture far earlier than English settlers elsewhere in the circum-Caribbean. Producing crystallized sugar demanded proto-industrial processes, high volumes of capital investment, and precise labor discipline.<sup>19</sup> On Barbados, planters met these demands by creating new systems of bound labor for British indentured servants and enslaved Africans.<sup>20</sup> On the island's integrated plantations, planters pioneered a durable form of racial slavery adapted on Jamaica, the Leeward Islands, and eventually South Carolina.<sup>21</sup> By 1660, the majority of Barbados's population were enslaved, hardening categories of racial difference and demanding the ever-present threat of violence to maintain colonial power over a large enslaved population.<sup>22</sup> In such a context, much of the wealth derived from Barbados's plantations not only ended up in England, but depended on imperial protection and investment from London. By tracing the history of Bridgetown and its structures of colonial governance, this dissertation demonstrates

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<sup>19</sup> Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking, 1986); B.W. Higman, "The Sugar Revolution" *Economic History Review*, 53, 2, (2000) 213-236.

<sup>20</sup> For an analysis of this "New World" of labor see: Simon Newman, *A New World of Labor: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Jack P. Greene "Colonial South Carolina and the Caribbean Connection." *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 88.4 (1987): 192–210; David Barry Gaspar, "With a Rod of Iron: Barbados Slave Laws as a Model for Jamaica, South Carolina, and Antigua, 1661–1697." In *Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of Black People in Diaspora*. Edited by Darlene Clark Hine and Jacqueline McLeod, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). 343–366.

<sup>22</sup> Trevor G Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves : Plantation Societies in British America, 1650 - 1820, American Beginnings, 1500-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 53-97.

how the port did not merely reflect the steady march of the plantation complex or Barbados's dependence upon English empire, but rather, an inherent and persistent instability within what is often portrayed as one of the most stable slave societies of the English Caribbean.

## **1.2 Bridgetown, Barbados, and the Plantation Complex**

The longevity of Barbados's commitment to the sugar plantation complex projects a sense of stability onto Barbados's colonial system belied by Bridgetown's history of colonial governance. Adopting sugar and slavery as the colony's central social and economic systems, Barbados's planters remained committed to the model of the integrated plantation pioneered in the 1640s well into the early nineteenth century. Bridgetown's economy, social structures, and systems of colonial power in the seventeenth century never displayed the same consistency; offering a counterpoint to how scholarship on Barbados has interpreted Bridgetown simply as a shipping point and extension of the island's sugar plantations.

After experimenting in a range of crops in the 1630s, planters quickly embraced a monoculture that persisted well into the eighteenth-century.<sup>23</sup> On Barbados, fields of grassy sugar cane came to cover most of the island's 166 square miles. Deforestation and soil exhaustion followed, a challenge met by the island's planters armed with a spirit of innovation and maximizing

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<sup>23</sup> For these early experiments in colonial agriculture on Barbados see: Larry Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted: The English Colonization of Barbados, 1627-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Russell R Menard, *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006).

profits in a sugar market prone to volatility and fluctuation.<sup>24</sup> By the mid-eighteenth-century, Barbados's planters had earned a reputation for deft management as the integrated plantation model they pioneered took hold and flourished to the north in the Leeward Islands and Jamaica.<sup>25</sup> In contrast to this model of monoculture, in the seventeenth-century, Bridgetown's inhabitants worked and survived through a range of economic and maritime labor. Over the course of the seventeenth century, the building industry and local maritime labor took on greater significance and importance to the port's economy alongside the Atlantic trade that formed the center of the town's economic life.

Likewise, while the island's plantations became more rigidly defined by the hierarchies of racial slavery in the mid-seventeenth century, Bridgetown grew in social and cultural complexity. Over the course of the 1640s and 1650s, Barbados's planters met the growing demands of the

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<sup>24</sup> Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973); Justin Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment in the British Atlantic; 1750-1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Ryan Dennis McGuinness, "'They Can Now Digest Strong Meats': Two Decades of Expansion, Adaptation, Innovation, and Maturation on Barbados, 1680-1700," Phd Dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2016); David Watts, *Man's Influence on the Vegetation of Barbados, 1627 to 1800* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1966).

<sup>25</sup> For the early movement of sugar cultivation into the rest of English Caribbean see: Richard Ormrod, "The Evolution of Soil Management Practices in Early Jamaican Sugar Planting," *Journal of Historical Geography* 5.2 (1979): 157–170; Justin Roberts, "Surrendering Surinam: The Barbadian Diaspora and the Expansion of the English Sugar Frontier, 1650–1675," *William and Mary Quarterly* 73.2 (April 2016): 225–256. For the limits of this seventeenth-century expansion of sugar cultivation in the Lesser Antilles see: Tessa Murphy, "Kalinago Colonizers: Indigenous People and the Settlement of the Lesser Antilles" *The Torrid Zone: Caribbean Colonization and Cultural Interaction in the Long Seventeenth Century* ed. L.H. Roper (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2018) 17–30.

sugar plantation complex by replacing white Irish and English indentured servants with enslaved African labor.<sup>26</sup> In the colony's legal systems, racial categories hardened ensuring the principles of inheritable chattel slavery over enslaved peoples drawn from across West Africa.<sup>27</sup> As Jenny Shaw and Larry Gragg have shown, planters' religious bias against Irish settlers as well as Quakers continued to play a prominent role in Barbados's settler society well into the seventeenth century.<sup>28</sup> Over the course of the seventeenth-century, as racial categories hardened across Barbados's plantations, Bridgetown grew in social and cultural complexity. In addition to the thousands of captives from the Bight of Biafra, Senegambia, the Gold Coast, and West Central Africa moved by slave trades through Bridgetown, the port was home to multiple converging Atlantic

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<sup>26</sup> The classic interpretation of this transition remains Beckles work, while recent archaeological work by Douglas Armstrong and Matthew Reilly have uncovered the material record of this transition on Barbados's early plantations. Hilary Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715* /, 1st ed. (University of Tennessee Press, 1989); Douglas V Armstrong and Matthew C Reilly, "The Archaeology of Settler Farms and Early Plantation Life in Seventeenth-Century Barbados," *Slavery & Abolition* 35, no. 3 (February 2014): 399–417.

<sup>27</sup> In addition to more recent work by Burnard and Newman, Jennifer Morgan's analysis of gender and race in seventeenth-century Barbados and South Carolina is critical to understanding the hardening of social categories on the island's sugar plantations in this period. Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves : Plantation Societies in British America, 1650 - 1820*; Newman, *A New World of Labor: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic*; Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Shaw, *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean: Irish, Africans, and the Construction of Difference*; Larry Dale Gragg, *The Quaker Community on Barbados: Challenging the Culture of the Planter Class* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009).

diasporas.<sup>29</sup> In the 1650s and 1660s, Quaker and Sephardi diasporas established durable communities in Bridgetown. Simultaneously, former indentured servants and poorer whites increasingly turned to the port, its streets and markets as spaces of survival beyond the plantation system of colonial militia. In Bridgetown, the port's motley inhabitants presented an alternative space on Barbados to the rigid social hierarchies of the island's sugar plantations.

Planter's embrace of slave labor in the entangled colonial world of the early modern circum-Caribbean demanded metropolitan support and protection. The wealth and value of the island's trade from the 1640s onward easily convinced authorities in London the need to lay claim to the colony's wealth within an emergent mercantilist empire. After a brief flirtation with autonomy during the upheaval of the English Revolution, planters clung to their ties with England, developing, by the eighteenth century a colonial culture that saw in its settler society a "Little England."<sup>30</sup> In the seventeenth-century, Barbados contributed more to England's colonial trade than elsewhere in the Atlantic world, a fact not missed on contemporaries like Francis Willoughby, Barbados's governor in the 1660s, who called the island "that fair jewell in your Majesty's

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<sup>29</sup> On Bridgetown's rise as a critical market in transatlantic and intercolonial slave trades see: Gregory O'Malley, *Final Passages: Intercolonial Slave Trade of British America, 1619-1807* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

<sup>30</sup> For an overview of this moment of autonomy and subsequent embrace of English empire by planters as well as their growing ability to articulate their rights as subjects within an English Atlantic world see: Pestana, *The English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution, 1640-1661*; For these changes in the colony's identity as a "Little England" see: Jack P Greene, "Changing Identity in the British Caribbean: Barbados as a Case Study," in *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1987).

Crown.”<sup>31</sup> When compared to the Port Royal in the seventeenth-century and Kingston in the eighteenth century with their robust contraband trades, seventeenth century Bridgetown and Barbados appears fully integrated with an English mercantilist system by the end of the 1650s.<sup>32</sup> The colonial structures governing Bridgetown, however, remained in flux and fragmented throughout the seventeenth century.

Moments of crisis in Barbados’s colonial society consolidated colonial power in Bridgetown, focusing the colony’s attention on policing the mobility of enslaved people through the port above all other considerations. The result was a particular geography of colonial power in Bridgetown designed to control and limit enslaved mobility within the town’s urban-maritime spaces.<sup>33</sup> Organized chronologically, this dissertation traces the emergence of this colonial landscape over the course of the seventeenth-century from the earliest days of Bridgetown’s settlement to the early decades of the eighteenth-century as Jamaica and the Leeward Island’s began to eclipse Barbados as the center of sugar production and colonial power in the region.

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<sup>31</sup> David Eltis, “New Estimates of Exports from Barbados and Jamaica, 1665-1701,” *WMQ* 3rd series, no. 52 (1995).

<sup>32</sup> For contraband trades from Jamaica, particularly with Cuba see: Nuala Zahedieh, “The Merchants of Port Royal, Jamaica, and the Spanish Contraband Trade, 1655–1692.” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 43 (1986): 570–593; Elena Schneider, *The Occupation of Havana: War, Trade, and Slavery in the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Casey Schmitt “Virtue in Corruption: Privateers, Smugglers, and the Shape of Empire in the Eighteenth-Century Caribbean” *Early American Studies*, vol. 13 (1) p 80-110; Ernesto Bassi, *An Agueous Territory: Sailors Geographies and New Granada’s Transimperial Greater Caribbean World*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> Marisa Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016) 30-45.

In the eighteenth-century, the center of gravity in the early modern Caribbean shifted towards the north, settling in the English and French colonies of Jamaica and Saint Domingue. While Barbados is frequently credited with pioneering the integrated sugar plantation, these colonies represented the apogee of the early modern Caribbean plantation complex.<sup>34</sup> While the sugar plantation complex was the source of these societies' wealth, the ports of Jamaica, Saint Domingue, and Cuba played crucial roles in the transformative dramas of the age of revolutions. From port to port, across and within imperial boundaries, rumors of revolution in France and slave revolt in Saint Domingue sparked a wave of uprisings throughout the circum-Caribbean that shook the region's plantation complex to its core.<sup>35</sup> In the struggles of seventeenth-century Bridgetown,

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<sup>34</sup> For an examination of these two colonies as the apogee of early modern Caribbean plantation societies see: Trevor Burnard and John Garrigus, *The Plantation Machine: Atlantic capitalism in French Saint-Domingue and British Jamaica*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); a crucial study of Jamaica at the height of its power: Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the world of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>35</sup> The pioneering work of Julius Scott on the important role of the region's port towns in spreading the rumors of revolution has been significantly enhanced by a new generation of scholarship on the region's ports during the age of revolutions, see: Jullius Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (London: Verso, 2018); Jesse Cromwell, *The Smugglers' World: Illicit Trade and Atlantic Communities in Eighteenth-Century Venezuela*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Ernesto Bassi, *An Agueous Territory: Sailors Geographies and New Granada's Transimperial Greater Caribbean World*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); for the larger role of port towns and the circulation of revolutionary knowledge and practice in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Atlantic world see: Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

we can begin to trace more fully the seventeenth-century roots of the urban-maritime world of the eighteenth-century Caribbean so crucial to the global age of revolutions.

### 1.3 Labor and Colonial Government

At the heart of this study of the struggles over Bridgetown and its urban-maritime spaces, are the themes of labor and urban colonial governance. The port towns and cities of the early modern Atlantic world brought together multiple labor systems within confined geographic spaces to move commodities through an expanding global economy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>36</sup> Bridgetown, as this dissertation shows, was no exception, providing a valuable case-study on early American labor systems in the circum-Caribbean. Studying Bridgetown's seventeenth-century labor history presents unique challenges. While sugar plantations demanded and produced significant paper trails in the form of ledgers and correspondence between managers and plantation-owners, private records from Bridgetown merchants dating from the seventeenth-century are exceptionally rare.<sup>37</sup> Wills and deeds held in Barbados's archives, however, provide

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<sup>36</sup> For overviews on the labor history of early modern Atlantic port towns and cities see: Pepijn Brandon, Niklas Frykman, and Pernille Røge, "Free and Unfree Labor in Atlantic and Indian Ocean Cities (Seventeenth-Nineteenth Centuries) *International Review of Social History* 64 (2019) 1-18; Seth Rockman "Work in the cities of colonial British North America" *Journal of Urban History* Vol 33. 6. (2007) 1021-1032.

<sup>37</sup> A notable exception is the account book of Richard Poor: S D Smith, *Slavery, Family, and Gentry Capitalism in the British Atlantic: The World of the Lascelles, 1648-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).



valuable insights into the town's social composition and evolving labor systems in the seventeenth-century.

The existence of multiple labor systems and the town's diverse social composition in the eighteenth-century provoked an evolving set of institutional responses to governing the port and its motely inhabitants. As Barbados's principal port and colonial capital since the 1630s, the town hosted several key institutions governing the colony; the island's colonial assembly, the governor's council, and the residence of the governor. But while these institutions had their homes in Bridgetown, governance of the port remained fragmented between an array of colonial institutions that included the parish government of St. Michael's parish. While the records produced by these institutions were sent to London to the Lords of Trade and Foreign Plantations, the minutes of the parish were crucial to uncovering how urban colonial governance was shared and organized in Bridgetown. Evidence derived from these parochial and colonial records form the backbone of this dissertation providing a window into the social histories of Bridgetown's seventeenth-century waterfront town.

The first three chapters of this dissertation are chronologically organized, following Bridgetown's settlement from the late 1620s to the first decade of the eighteenth-century. Each chapter in these chapters takes a different thematic focus. For Chapter one, this thematic focus is governance and imperial integration during the upheaval of the English Revolution of the 1640s and 1650s. Chapter two addresses the social and cultural diversity of Bridgetown's inhabitants from the late 1650s to the 1690s, with a focus on sailors, poorer white settlers, Quakers and Sephardim. Chapter three addresses the role of slavery in the development of the port's governance and labor systems with an emphasis on the informal social geographies that emerged over the course of the second half of the seventeenth-century. Chapter four extends the dissertation's

chronology farther into the eighteenth century, but is thematically focused on Bridgetown's builders and the island's building industry during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

## 2.0 Making Bridgetown English: The Port and Colonial Governance in Early Seventeenth-Century Barbados

For seaport towns throughout the seventeenth-century Atlantic world, water dominated life and shaped urban foundations, including Bridgetown's origins.<sup>38</sup> The port's earliest years of settlement in the 1630s, indeed the very name the town would take, were shaped by these indigenous geographies and the futility of early English attempts to effectively direct Barbados's settlement from across the Atlantic Ocean. Early English colonists' choice to settle on Carlisle Bay proceeded from the sheltered harbor's calm waters on southwestern coast of the island, the same geographic features used by indigenous Kalinago settlers generations before.<sup>39</sup> The history of the port's place-name preserved this early connection to the region's indigenous patterns of maritime exploitation and settlement. The sea also played a crucial role limiting this early settlement. Founded in 1629 to defend the Earl of Carlisle's proprietary claim to Barbados, Bridgetown remained largely undeveloped until the 1640s with little commercial, public, or colonial infrastructure to speak of. The port's slow development had as much to do with the limits the distance of the Atlantic Ocean posed on English imperial governance in the 1630s as the vagaries and struggles of the island's nascent plantation economy.

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<sup>38</sup> Gary B Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 3.

<sup>39</sup> Ana Catarina Abrantes Garcia, "New Ports of the New World: Angra, Funchal, Port Royal, and Bridgetown," *International Journal of Maritime History* Vol 29(I) (2017) 155-174.

When about 70 English settlers sponsored by the Earl of Carlisle arrived in Carlisle Bay in 1628, they found evidence on Barbados of a long-settled indigenous maritime world pre-dating the fifteenth-century European arrival in the Caribbean.<sup>40</sup> This evidence, however, was not immediately apparent. When the English settlers arrived, the ground around Carlisle Bay consisted of rolling sand dunes, mangrove trees, and salt-tolerant plants. Brackish swamps indicated regular coastal flooding, particularly during the hurricane and rainy seasons that stretched between August and January. Torrential rains frequently swelled the small river flowing into the bay and fed a mangrove swamp that covered most of the low-lying ground around the coast.<sup>41</sup> The calm waters of Carlisle Bay promised sound moorings for European ships to resupply the settlers but immediately inland the swamp and flooding made for unpromising ground upon which to cultivate colonial America's staple crops. The constant flooding and torrential rains, however, sometimes washed out enough of the sandy soil to unearth pottery shards, small but unmistakable tokens of the Kalinago peoples of the eastern Caribbean who had settled and exploited the calm waters of the sheltered bay for centuries.

Although archaeologists and anthropologists continue to debate the timing and means of indigenous settlement throughout the Caribbean, migration into the Lesser Antilles began as early as 2000BCE. Located 62 miles from Martinique, the nearest island, migrants from the South American mainland settled Barbados much later than the rest of the Lesser Antilles, around

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<sup>40</sup> Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted: The English Colonization of Barbados, 1627-1660*, 33.

<sup>41</sup> Frederick H Smith and Karl Watson, "Urbanity, Sociability, and Commercial Exchange in the Barbados Sugar Trade: A Comparative Colonial Archaeological Perspective on Bridgetown, Barbados in the Seventeenth Century," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 13, no. 1 (June 7, 2009): 63–79, <http://www.jstor.org.pitt.idm.oclc.org/stable/20853182>.

350CE.<sup>42</sup> Evidence for this indigenous settlement remains abundant. To date, archaeological excavations in Bridgetown have recovered over 1,000 ceramic shards from Amerindian pottery and shell tools suggesting indigenous peoples extensively exploited the bay and its marine resources centuries before European arrival disrupted the region's patterns of indigenous settlement. The indigenous people who frequented the island's bays and made the island their home were part of Kalinago-speaking culture that spanned the eastern Caribbean and had its origins in several waves of migrations from the coast of Venezuela. Despite this presence, Barbados represented the periphery of an indigenous Caribbean world defined by inter-island maritime mobility.

By the time English settlers arrived in Carlisle Bay in 1628, Iberian conquest had fundamentally transformed the indigenous Caribbean. With the demographic collapse of Taino and Arawak peoples of the Greater Antilles, Iberian colonists conducted slave raids in the Lesser Antilles to replace rapidly declining populations of enslaved Taino people working on *encomiendas* in Cuba and Hispaniola.<sup>43</sup> With the arrival of the Spanish, indigenous Barbadian communities likely joined other Kalinago-speaking people for safety on the islands of St. Vincent, Dominica, and St. Lucia where Carib communities remain today. While permanent indigenous settlement on Barbados ceased in the sixteenth century, seventeenth-century observers speculated that indigenous people continued to use the island:

Natives of the leeward Islands, that were at a distance of site, coming hither in their *Cannoas*, and *Periagos* and finding such Game to hunt... and stayed sometimes a month

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<sup>42</sup> Frederick H Smith, "Volatile Spirits: The Historical Archaeology of Alcohol and Drinking in the Caribbean." PhD diss. University of Florida, 2001" (2001) 425-428.

<sup>43</sup> Rouse, Tainos, 150-155.

together, and so returned again at pleasure leaving behind them certain tokens of their being there, which were Pots, of several sizes, in which they boyled their meat, made of clay.<sup>44</sup>

Memory of this indigenous connection formed a part of early English attempts to claim territorial possession over Barbados.<sup>45</sup> Bridgetown's earliest settlers discovered a wealth of material and cultural artifacts produced by Barbados's indigenous population near the dunes and swampland around Carlisle Bay.<sup>46</sup> Finding indigenous artifacts clustered around the swamp, they called the river trickling into the harbor the "Indian river".<sup>47</sup> When the settlers built a basic wooden bridge or footpath to span the swampy ground and river, they called it the Indian River Bridge or simply the Indian Bridge. As their small settlement grew around the harbor in the 1630s, deeds begin to identify properties by their proximity to the bridge, employing the phrase, "neare the Indyan Bridge." In 1629, the governor of this early settlement, Sir William Tufton, divided the

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<sup>44</sup> Ligon *A True History of Barbados*, 23.

<sup>45</sup> Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>46</sup> Barbados's indigenous inhabitants were the seasonally mobile Kalinago (Carib) people who occupied the eastern Caribbean islands and Venezuelan coast since the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century. During early Spanish incursions in the region in the 16<sup>th</sup> century much of these populations avoided Spanish enslavers by settling deeper into what is today Venezuela and consolidating communities in islands like St Lucia, St Vincent, Dominica, Grenada, and Tobago. For discussion of the mobility and circulation of Amerindians in the Caribbean see Philip Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters: Europeans and Island Caribs, 1492-176* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992); Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>47</sup> Frederick H Smith and Karl Watson, "Urbanity, Sociability, and Commercial Exchange in the Barbados Sugar Trade: A Comparative Colonial Archaeological Perspective on Bridgetown, Barbados in the Seventeenth Century," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 13, no. 1 (June 7, 2009): 63–79..

island into 9 parishes, denominating the parish surrounding Carlisle Bay St Michael, and in the colony's administrative and legal documents, colonial officials called the port St. Michael's town. Yet settlers and visitors to the island continued to favor "the Indyan Bridge." The place-name persisted, morphing into Bridgetown, and out-lasting colonial officials' use of St Michael's Town -- an important part of how settlers used evidence of previous indigenous settlement to justify colonial possession.

Although English interlopers in the Spanish Caribbean used islands like Barbados to replenish ship's stocks and provisions in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, English colonial presence on Barbados did not begin until the late 1620s. Early chronicles of the island's settlement credit a London ship's captain and merchant, John Powell, with erecting a cross and inscribing the name of James I on Barbados in 1625 on his way back to England. Powell, like a generation of northern European interlopers before him, sailed past Barbados after trading with Portuguese settlers in northern Brazil. When he returned to London, Powell described Barbados to his patron, the Anglo-Dutch Sir William Courteen. Encouraged by the prospects of settling the island, Courteen successfully requested a patent from the English crown to settle the island. Two years later, in 1627, Powell returned to Barbados with three ships outfitted from London with "Men, Ammunition, Arms, and all kind of Necessaries fit for Planting and Fortifying" and under 200 primarily male English settlers. On the transatlantic voyage, Powell seized an Iberian ship as a prize and added ten enslaved Africans as captives to bring to Barbados. When he arrived on Barbados, Powell sailed again to the fledgling Dutch settlement in Guiana to gather crops to grow

for profit and subsistence on Barbados: potatoes, cassava, plantain, corn, cotton, tobacco, and sugar cane as well as thirty Arawak individuals to instruct the English in their cultivation.<sup>48</sup>

Hearing of the expedition, the Earl Carlisle, a loyal but heavily indebted courtier of James I and Charles I and already interested in the settlement on St Christopher's to the north, secured a charter giving him ownership of the province of Carlisle, which consisted of all the "Caribbee islands." In 1628, in pursuit of establishing the Earl of Carlisle's proprietary claim over Barbados, the English adventurer, Charles Wolverston arrived with 70 English settlers in Carlisle Bay. Faced with enforcing two competing claims to Barbados in London, the two settlements fell into a tense and uneasy co-existence, with one centered around a settlement called Jamestown and the other Bridgetown near Carlisle Bay.

This competition, born of confusion and disorganization in London, immediately militarized the island's earliest colonial landscape. Competing groups of English colonists used coastal settlements as strategic outposts to assert their respective claims. Some hoped to eventually launch privateering expeditions against Iberian colonies rather than further settlers' interests in land and cash-crop production. Most of the early settlers, predominantly young English men and indentured servants, expressed an interest in securing titles to land, an early modern marker of wealth and status, rather than build outposts of English or proprietary power. Colonial leaders in Virginia and Bermuda faced similar problems balancing the need of military defense over the settlers' general interest in land and autonomy.<sup>49</sup> Where in Virginia the presence of indigenous

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<sup>48</sup> Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted: The English Colonization of Barbados, 1627-1660*, 31.

<sup>49</sup> Emily Mann, "To Build and Fortify: Defensive Architecture in the Early Atlantic Colonies," in *Building the British Atlantic World: Spaces, Places, and Material Culture, 1600-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 31–52; Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh, *Many-Headed Hydra* (Boston, US: Beacon Press, 2000), 8–35.



people spurred colonial leaders to adopt martial law and military discipline, they felt no such need on the relatively isolated Barbados. Consequently, the lack of any immediate threat from Iberians or indigenous groups stunted colonial efforts to fully militarize the English settlements on Barbados.

Visitors to Barbados in these early days commented on how colonial agents had little control over settlers from their strongholds in Bridgetown. Observers saw this lack of military discipline as disorder undermining the colonial project. Sir Henry Colt represented one of these early adventurers and recorded Barbados's early social conditions. From the few days he spent on Barbados, Colt thought of the island's settlers as idle, drunken, young men whose self-interest threatened any effort to use such colonies as bases to launch attacks against Catholic-Iberian enemies.

A member of the Essex gentry, Colt represented a particularly militaristic strain of English migration to the early modern Caribbean, one focused primarily on establishing English outposts like Barbados as means to challenge Iberian control of the region. Driven by anti-Catholic and anti-Iberian animus, they saw the English colonial project as a venue for religious warfare and an opportunity to plunder the wealth of Spain's colonial possessions in the Americas, largely through supporting privateers. They differed dramatically from the bulk of settlers who joined these expeditions with expectations of land and its corresponding social status. Proximity to Iberian colonies and the continued presence of indigenous peoples who resisted European colonization meant that most colonies adopted a military posture. The earliest English settlers on Bermuda, for instance, built a string of fortifications on the tiny mid-Atlantic island, while the Earl of Warwick explicitly sponsored the settlement of Providence island off the coast of Nicaragua as a base for

raiding Iberian colonies.<sup>50</sup> For Colt and others, forts and disciplined settler-soldiers promised Protestant English glory as well as imperial order.

For English adventurers like Colt, the lack of a militarized colonial landscape reflected poorly on the island's social order and planters' discipline over their bound labor. Confirming his suspicions that the settlers were either lazy, drunk, or both, the grounds of their plantations seemed hastily cleared. "There stands a stubb of a tree..." Colt recalled, "all ye earth covered black with cinders nothing is clear." Completing the dismal picture, he found no effective administrative and defensive center where settlers gathered together for either commerce or military exercise. The landscape featured abandoned, half-built fortifications and partially-cleared plantations: "all things caryinge ye face of a desolate and disorderly shew to ye beholder."<sup>51</sup> Colt scolded the island's settlers:

Wher are your court of gards? Wher your assembly for armes? Whatt places have you of defence? Wher cann you make head? Your houses beinge soe far distant ye one from ye other, yt upon a suddayne occasion you cannot unite any strong forces to resist.

Expecting a militarized colonial landscape, Colt found an island largely populated by isolated, self-interested settlers clearing their own plantations along the coasts and paying little or no attention to the demands of a robust, militarized colonial project.

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<sup>50</sup> Emily Mann, "To Build and Fortify: Defensive Architecture in the Early Atlantic Colonies" in *Building the British Atlantic World* edited by Daniel Maudlin and Bernard Herman, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016) pgs 31-53. For Providence Island settlement see, Karen Kupperman, *Providence Island, 1630-1641: The Other Puritan Colony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>51</sup> Vincent Harlow, ed., *Colonizing Expeditions to the West Indies and Guiana, 1623-1667* (London, 1925) 54-103.

During the “Great Migration” of 1630s, most of the English migrants to the island came as indentured servants, lured by merchants, hired by the proprietor’s agents, or kidnapped from the streets of London or Bristol.<sup>52</sup> In 1635, only one out of every sixteen migrants from London to Barbados was female, confirming Colt’s impression of the island’s demography.<sup>53</sup> Drawn from the masses of English vagrants that swelled the populations of Britain’s largest towns and cities in the wake of economic collapse, famine, and enclosure, American colonies like Barbados, Bermuda, Virginia, and St Christopher offered a fairly good chance to acquire colonized land as a reward for surviving indentured servitude in dismal colonial conditions. In English-American colonies like Barbados, indentured servitude proved the surest way to recruit cheap labor.<sup>54</sup> In this early decade of settlement, most Barbadian settlers were servants or former servants hoping to survive their contracts, acquire ten acres of land, and join the colonial society as planters. Consequently, investment in commercial infrastructure beyond the island’s struggling plantations remained limited until the island’s commodity boom of the early 1640s.

Like indigenous Kalinago settlers before them, Bridgetown’s earliest English settlers chose to settle near Carlisle Bay for the harbor’s natural shelter. The distance of the Atlantic Ocean contributed to the settlement’s uncertain first years. In the competition for proprietary possession,

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<sup>52</sup> Alison Games, *Migration and the Origins of the English Atlantic World*, *Harvard Historical Studies* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999); and for the role of the 'Great Migration' of the 1630s on the development of English colonies throughout the Atlantic world see: Bernard Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York: Knopf Press, 1986).

<sup>53</sup> Menard, *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados*, 25–26.

<sup>54</sup> David W. Galenson, *White Servitude in Colonial America: An Economic Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

land, and governance, the settlement remained largely under-developed, lacking basic commercial infrastructure, meaningful fortifications, or a basic administrative center for the colony. By the end of the decade, however, there were signs on the island's plantations that the prospects of Barbados's early settlers had improved. Crops of cotton and tobacco were finding some success in Europe's markets, enticing the investment of both Dutch and English merchants in the island's colonial development.

## **2.1 Atlantic Merchants and the Commodity Boom**

In the 1630s and 1640s, Barbados's plantation economy began to flourish. However, the island had yet to settle on sugar cultivation as the primary staple crop from which English planters would reap the benefit. It was a time of uncertainty, experimentation, and great expectations for the planters and merchants investing in the island's nascent plantation economy. It was not yet clear which industry would emerge as the dominant economic force on the island, nor was it clear how spaces like Barbados would be governed. In this period of uncertainty, a variety of Dutch and English merchants were able to shape the emerging town around Carlisle Bay, improvising a set of solutions to commercial and practical problems in and around Bridgetown. These improvisations helped establish Bridgetown as an Atlantic port and emergent center of the transatlantic slave trade, while the significant presence of Dutch merchants in the port suggests the depth of the island's early entanglement with the Dutch Atlantic world.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Between 1620 and 1670, Dutch merchants in the circum-Caribbean played a critical role in the expansion and entanglement of northern European settlements into the predominantly Spanish early modern Caribbean. Wim

Long identified as the source of sugar and African slavery on Barbados, recent scholarship has questioned the role of Dutch merchants in Barbados's commodity boom.<sup>56</sup> The town's earliest deeds, however, shows that Dutch merchants played more than a passing role in Barbados's commodity boom of the 1630s and 1640s. In this early, formative period, Dutch merchants owned and trade actual property in Bridgetown, indicating a significant stake in the port's early development. They helped build structures near the waterfront, contributing to more than the island's emergent transatlantic trade by taking part in the town's crucial early growth.

The expansion of the island's cotton, tobacco, and early sugar plantations demanded the extensive importation of labor and provisions, creating the need for merchant-factors to establish themselves in spaces like Bridgetown. Forging relationships with both planters and ship's captains, local merchants began to act as crucial middlemen in the island's early transatlantic trade, establishing themselves near Carlisle Bay to better deal with newly arriving ships. In 1643, for example, Christopher Nevison, who owned a plot of land "in St Michaels near the Indian Bridge," acted as attorney to John Severne, commander of the 400-ton *Elias* of London.<sup>57</sup> Severne, a captain experienced in the early West Indies trade, commissioned Nevison to administer his business

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Klooster, *The Dutch Moment: War, Trade, and Settlement in the Seventeenth-Century Atlantic World* (Ithica: Cornell University, Press, 2016).

<sup>56</sup> Both Larry Gragg and Russell Menard have downplayed the role of the Dutch identifying that the majority of enslaved Africans brought to Barbados in its early years of settlement came from English ships and traders: Larry Gragg, "'To Procure Negroes': The English Slave Trade to Barbados, 1627–60." *Slavery & Abolition* 16.1 (1995): 65–84; Menard, Russell R. *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006).

<sup>57</sup> RB3/1/81, BDA.

interests in Barbados. Nevison agreed to sell the indentured servants, goods, and other merchandise Severne carried to the island. Beyond distributing and selling the indentured servants and other goods to the island's planters, he also agreed to collect payments (likely in the form of tobacco or cotton) and record debts owed to Severne. Nevison's presence in Bridgetown, allowed the merchant to act as a factor and agent for ship-owners like Severne, facilitating the island's trade during the commodity boom.

The commercial relationships shaping Bridgetown in this period were not confined to English transatlantic trade with Dutch and German merchants contributing to the island's commodity boom by providing planters sources of credit, provisions, and cheap labor. In December 1643, Samuel Clark promised to load onto the *St. John Baptist* from Hamburg "all the tobacco of Ares Hermenstopp from the *St. Mary*," about 4 hogsheads worth of Virginia tobacco. Local merchants like Clark acted from their position in Bridgetown as inter-colonial and inter-imperial traders and middlemen indicating the complex entanglements driving the island's commodity boom in the 1630s and 1640s. Some of these relationships had their origins in Europe. In 1644, George Rock, a Bristol surgeon, commissioned John Freisenborn on Barbados to load the *Armes of Holland* under the command of Peter Remerson with 300 rolls of tobacco. After a brief stop at the English colony in St Christopher, Remerson was then supposed to sail to Rotterdam and market Rock's tobacco to the Dutch.<sup>58</sup> More than just buyers of tobacco, the Dutch in the 1630s and 1640s were also sellers of slaves. Dutch colonial conquest and expansion in Brazil and the West African Gold Coast in the 1630s helped dislodge the Portuguese and open the

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<sup>58</sup> RB3/1/54, BDA.

transatlantic slave trade to other European traders and merchants.<sup>59</sup> As early leaders in the seventeenth-century expansion of the transatlantic slave trade, Dutch merchants tied to the West-Indische Compagnie (WIC) colonies in the Americas were well placed to supply growing but relatively isolated plantation colonies like Barbados. In the 1630s and early 1640s, Bridgetown's built environment and social geography came to reflect the complexity of the island's Atlantic trade.

Dutch merchants anchored their commercial interests in Barbados's plantation economy by purchasing property in Bridgetown and helping to build the town's early commercial infrastructure. In 1643, Cornelius Garbenson, a Dutch captain from Amsterdam, purchased a plot of land of his own in town. Likewise, Cornelius Hartgaas a Dutch captain from Medenblicke, a small seaport near the northern Dutch border, sold "all that little island by the Indian Bridge" to an English settler, Thomas Ratford.<sup>60</sup> In 1644, another Amsterdam merchant, Jacob Whyte bought a half-share of a storehouse in partnership with Thomas Brough, an English settler and merchant.<sup>61</sup> Brough expected Whyte to help defray the costs of maintaining the building's thatched roof. In return, Whyte had use of not only the building, but Brough's weights and seals, vital tools for merchants buying and trading the island's tobacco and cotton. Dutch merchants like Whyte, Hartgaas, and Garbenson held as much of a stake in the town's early development as the island's early settlers or London merchants.

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<sup>59</sup> Johannes M. Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade 1600-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 15–25.

<sup>60</sup> RB3/2/76-77, BDA.

<sup>61</sup> RB3/1/107, BDA.

In the context of the emergent Atlantic port, Bridgetown's storehouses came to serve critical functions in shaping the island's earliest systems of credit and debt. The complexity of the island's trade posed new problems for planters, merchants, and ship's captains alike. Merchants and planters in Bridgetown used the town's existing infrastructure to solve these problems. In 1642, Thomas Wall sold 31 acres to Henry Hammond and William Slove. Like other debts between planters, Wall expected Hammond and Slove to pay their debts in future crops destined for European markets. To this end, the deed of sale ordered the two planters to pay their debt to Wall through a third party, the planter and merchant James Holdipp or at "a convenient store house near the Indian Bridge."<sup>62</sup> Likewise, in 1646 James Marshait owed Owen Daniel, Edward Brown, and Robert Solace a significant amount of tobacco. Acknowledging his debts, Marshait signed an agreement to pay the three in "current receipts or else Tobacco in role in his owne store house."<sup>63</sup> Given the importance of storehouses to the way local systems of credit and debt operated in Barbados during the commodity boom, it's unsurprising that merchants scrambled for ownership and control of land as close to the waterfront as possible.

Bridgetown's growth within the context of the island's early commodity boom provided opportunities for a range of historical actors to buy property in the town. These figures were not exclusively merchants, but rather carried on a variety of professions and trades. While planters exchanged plots measured in acreage -- some estates consisted of 100 acres by the mid-1640s -- Bridgetown's propertied classes measured plots of land in feet. A barber-surgeon, Philip Roe, for example, bought "three score square feet containing Thomas Bagnall's former house" in

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<sup>62</sup> RB3/1/143-144, BDA.

<sup>63</sup> RB3/2/18, , BDA.



Bridgetown to carry on a business in the early West Indies trade.<sup>64</sup> A tailor, Henry Landors, bought a 20 square-foot parcel to provision settlers and merchants with clothes. Likewise, in 1643, Henry Cleaver leased 100 square feet “from the Cricke to the bridge” to Captain Jeremiah Hawe in a 21-year-lease. Cleaver amended the lease in 1646 to allow Hawe to build a house on the rented ground.<sup>65</sup> While merchants were not the only residents of Bridgetown early in the 1640s, transatlantic trade, predominantly in enslaved people, marked a central aspect of the town’s commercial life.

One of the central challenges Bridgetown’s merchants faced in the 1640s was controlling the movement of forced labor bound for the island’s plantations. Similar to the use of storehouses to resolve issues around credit and debt, merchants early on used infrastructure in Bridgetown to control the movement of bound labor from ships in Carlisle Bay to plantations in the island’s interior. In 1647, nineteen-year-old Joyes Rolins described how some of Bridgetown’s merchants bought and sold her contract between them in a matter of days after arrival in Carlisle Bay. In a deposition to the island’s government, Rolins recounted how after arriving in the “Good Shipp called ye *June*” under a contract in the “accompt” of Roger Pill, a local merchant named Clinkett ferried her over from ship to shore. Staying in Clinkett’s house for two days, Clinkett brought her “downe to the storehouses wch formerly was Mr Pars,” in Bridgetown. From there, a third Bridgetown merchant, Marshall, sold her to a planter, Morgan Davis.<sup>66</sup> In Bridgetown, Rolins experienced what other indentured servants described of the period described; a bewildering,

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<sup>64</sup> RB3/1/24, Recopied Deed Books, BDA.

<sup>65</sup> RB3/2/15, Recopied Deed Books, BDA.

<sup>66</sup> RB3/2/52-53, BDA.

seemingly arbitrary series of exchanges that moved indentured servants rapidly between merchants and planters. As the slave trade grew in the 1640s, Bridgetown's merchants also had access to enslaved African captives entering Barbados through Carlisle Bay.

From these early days of the commodity boom, Bridgetown's merchants participated in the transatlantic slave trade, giving them additional sources of cheap labor alongside the trade of indentured servants. In 1645, the *Mary of London* and its captain John Wadloe anchored in Carlisle Bay with a mixed cargo that included, among provisions and livestock, two indentured servants and 26 captives from West Africa. Wadloe exchanged the captives for tobacco, cotton, and ginger with planters as well as merchants. John Holmes bought ten captives, the largest single purchase, for £260 sterling in tobacco and ginger.<sup>67</sup> The contract they signed confirms Holmes's role as a middleman in the island's local slave trade. Holmes, according to the agreement, could not sell any of the enslaved people to another planter or merchant until Wadloe had the tobacco and ginger secure in the *Mary of London*'s hold. Merchants like Holmes, with their ties to the island's transatlantic slave trade, had easy access to enslaved labor either to sell to other planters or use in the town's growing urban-maritime economy.

## 2.2 Sugar and the Making of an Atlantic Market

If the captives aboard the *Mary of London* survived the first five years of their enslavement in Barbados, they would have witnessed a profound change in the island's economy and colonial society. These well-known changes in the late 1640s had a profound effect on Bridgetown. It

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<sup>67</sup> RB3/1/591-593, BDA.

cemented the town's role as an Atlantic port and introduced a new set of property-owners who helped direct the flow of wealth and trade towards London and out of the hands of the Anglo-Dutch merchants of the 1630s and 1640s. Although driven less by imperial ambition than personal and familial wealth and capital accumulation, these sugar planters and merchants helped make a Bridgetown shared between Dutch and English merchants just a little more English in the late-1640s.

Barbados's transition from a cotton and tobacco economy to a sugar producer is a well-studied evolution.<sup>68</sup> Less familiar are the changes this transition brought to Bridgetown. These changes are best told through the histories of the sugar planters and merchants who began to invest and lay claim to commercial space and infrastructure in Bridgetown in the 1640s. The names of the island's earliest sugar planters can be found among the deeds and property records in Bridgetown. For scholars of Barbados and the rise of its planter class, these are familiar names: James Holdip, James Drax, Constant Silvester, Thomas Modyford, Humphrey Walrond, and the Noell family.<sup>69</sup> The scale of their agricultural enterprises, investments in slave labor, and commercial connections rested on access and control over storehouses in Bridgetown.

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<sup>68</sup> The most thorough overviews of this process of experimentation in other agricultural activities see: Menard, *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados*; Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted: The English Colonization of Barbados, 1627-1660*.

<sup>69</sup> Dunn, Burnard, and Donoghue have all identified these figures as key players in the rise of Barbados's sugar plantation complex: Richard Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972); Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves: Plantation Societies in British America, 1650 - 1820*; John Donoghue, *Fire Under the Ashes: An Atlantic History of the English Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

While some of these sugar planters had been present on Barbados since the earliest days of settlement, their investment in Bridgetown only began after they had established their fortunes in the late-1640s. For example, both James Holdip and James Drax were among the island's first English settlers. Compared to the bulk of the island's earliest settlers caught up in the Great Migration of the 1630s, both Holdip and Drax came from positions of relative privilege, power, and social authority even before they had established phenomenal wealth as sugar planters. Holdip's involvement with Barbados began in the late 1620s as an agent of the proprietary government of the Earl of Carlisle. A London merchant, Holdip first travelled to Barbados to help collect the revenue owed to the Earl of Carlisle from the settlers and represent the interests of the merchant syndicate that invested in 10,000 acres of land around Bridgetown. By 1643, Holdip owned a significant amount of land on Barbados, planted sugar cane, and had access to the labor of numerous indentured servants. While Holdip initially arrived as an agent of the Earl of Carlisle and London merchants, by 1643, the island's planters selected Holdip to represent their interests to the embattled Charles I by attempting – unsuccessfully – to secure a Barbadian monopoly over English sugar markets.

Likewise, James Drax arrived on Barbados during the 1620s, translating his relative wealth into a position of power, authority and wealth in Barbados. According to his own account of his early settlement, Drax had little more than £300 sterling when he arrived on Barbados. Without a cleared plantation, Drax reportedly lived in caves and subsisted on hunting the island's wild hogs before laying down more permanent roots. By the end of the 1630s, however, Drax acquired great power and prestige in Barbados. In the 1630s, like his neighbors, he had experimented with growing tobacco, cotton, and ginger, purchasing at least 50 indentured servants before turning to the work of sugar production around 1640. His modest efforts as a planter in the 1630s translated

into early positions of authority. Drax served as a captain in the militia and sat on the Assembly and governor's Council, the island's earliest institutions of colonial power, in both the 1630s and 1650s. As an early proponent of sugar cultivation in the 1640s, Drax invested in the transatlantic slave trade. By 1654, he boasted an estate of 700 acres and 200 enslaved people.<sup>70</sup> From this position of wealth and power Drax would begin to invest in Bridgetown in the late-1640s and 1650s.

Drax's engagement with the transatlantic slave trade drove his investments in Bridgetown's storehouses in the 1650s. In the mid-1650s, Drax organized a series of slave trade voyages with Robert Hooper and Martin Bentley, sugar planters and merchants like himself. In March 1654, James Drax bought "One great storehouse lyeing and being in the Bridgetown," from Robert Hooper and Martin Bentley, both sugar magnates. In addition to the "One great storehouse," described as being "commonly knowne and called by the name of Vandesteere house," Hooper and Bentley sold Drax "one New store house which is built on the said land by the said Robert Hooper and Martin Bentley." Access to the slave trade was at the center of this exchange, with Drax releasing his share of two slave voyages to "the Coaste of Africa and thence bound hither" in exchange for the urban property. Drax apparently had shares in two separate vessels engaged in bringing African captives to Barbados: the "good ship the Samuell" captained by Samuel Cooke and the Pinnace *Hope* mastered by William Goodlord. Drax was to pay £454 sterling by October 31 of 1655, and deposit £54,480 in muscovado sugar in another of Bentley and Hooper's storehouses before March 31, 1655.<sup>71</sup> Drax's purchase of the "Vandesteere house" recorded an

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<sup>70</sup> Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted: The English Colonization of Barbados, 1627-1660*, pages 89, 99-100.

<sup>71</sup> RB3/2/629, BDA.

older social geography in Bridgetown as well as the processes through which English sugar planters replaced this older Anglo-Dutch port in the 1640s and 1650s.

Like Drax, Constant Silvester became an early adopter of sugar cultivation and translated his commercial enterprises and wealth from sugar planting into investment in Bridgetown. By the 1680s, the Silvester family ranked among the island's leading sugar planters, owning two plantations in the St. George valley, a center of sugar production on the island. By 1680, when the first census-takers recorded the island's wealth and enslaved population, 200 enslaved people worked on the Silvester family's multiple plantations. In 1652, Constant Silvester, his brother Nathaniel, Thomas Middleton, and Thomas Rouse purchased Shelter Island off the coast of Long Island near the Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam. Constant's brother used the New York plantation to supply the family's sugar operations in Barbados.<sup>72</sup> As sugar planters, the Silvester family, began investing in Bridgetown in this period transforming the composition of the town's propertied class.

Silvester's earliest investments in Barbados were in Bridgetown and its storehouses. When Constant Silvester arrived on Barbados in 1645, he bought a storehouse in Bridgetown from John Crispe, a successful carpenter who had plied his trade during the early years of the colony. Crispe's storehouse was ideally located, being 40 square feet, "near the seaside" with "free egress and regress from the seaside." The plot also contained "one storehouse thereupon erected of fifty foot in length and nineteen foot broad, with thirty foot land behind the sd storehouse."<sup>73</sup> Silvester

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<sup>72</sup>For Constant Silvester and the Silvester family's transatlantic operations see: Stephen Mrozowski, "Creole Materialities: Archaeological Explorations of Hybridized Realities on a North American Plantation" in *Journal of Historical Sociology*, (December 2009 16-39.

<sup>73</sup> RB3/2/68 BDA.

bought out the carpenter Crispe for his land's access to the sea and the conveniently located storehouse already there.

While families like the Silvesters emerged from an Anglo-Dutch mercantile world, the Noells were closely tied to emergent patterns of English imperial and colonial power in the Atlantic world that ultimately directed Bridgetown's trade toward London. When they became sugar planters in the 1640s, the Noell family's commercial interests stretched from Scotland and Ireland to New England and Virginia. The family's meteoric rise to power and political influence in England and the English Atlantic world began in the London neighborhood of old Jewry and expanded around the English commercial world. A scrivener by trade, Martin Noell acquired great political and commercial power during the tumultuous period of the English revolution, building his success on the foundation of investments in Barbados's sugar economy. By 1647, Martin Noell and members of his family-owned plantations in Barbados concentrated in the northern parish of St. Peters totaled around 510 acres. By the 1650s, he had expanded his investments to include commercial properties in Ireland and shares in the East India Company. Noell also boasted a sprawling salt manufacture works in London. His leading role in the salt manufacturing industry earned him the title "Great Salt Master of England." During Oliver Cromwell's rule, he became a member of Parliament, commissioner of naval prize goods, and sat on the government's Trade Committee. Noell and his family translated wealth from investments in Barbados's early sugar industry and global commercial connections into political power in England during the 1650s. While perhaps not the most impressive part of the Noell's enterprises, their holdings on Barbados included storehouses in Bridgetown.

In addition to their plantations in St. Peters, the Noells purchases land near Bridgetown with close access to the colonial government that met in town. In 1647, the Noells bought "part of

the plantation lately purchased from John Perrott” from Thomas Clarke for 12,000 pounds of tobacco. The land was “abuting and bounding upon the end of the Sessions house and windward on the fustick path” leading into and from town.<sup>74</sup> From their experiences elsewhere in the Atlantic world, the Noells were familiar with urban property and investment. In their investments in Wexford, a center of Ireland’s fishing industry, the family owned nearly 200 houses valued at £3697 sterling in the 1640s.<sup>75</sup> Additional records produced by the Noells in Barbados in the 1640s suggest that the storehouses the family owned played an important role to their plantation’s operations.

The Noells operated their sugar plantations as part of a sprawling family business, necessitating the periodic oversight of agents from London to oversee their accounts on the island. In 1648, William Henry, a Barbadian merchant, entered an instrument of protest in the island’s Secretary’s office in Bridgetown, on behalf of James Noell against Thomas Noell. William Henry, an agent of James Noell, accused Thomas Noell of mismanaging the estate on Barbados and using the profits from their plantation for his personal use. In his instrument of protest, William Henry accused Thomas Noell of not only embezzlement but also failing to include the new agent from England in the estate’s financial decisions. “Thomas Noell doth from hence send for and take ye receipt from ye store house wch are cash and employed them to his own proper use and advantage and accomplsh not with ye said Henry.”<sup>76</sup> The Noells, with their sprawling commercial enterprises

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<sup>74</sup> RB3/2/206-207 BDA.

<sup>75</sup> Donoghue, *Fire Under the Ashes: An Atlantic History of the English Revolution* 207-208.

<sup>76</sup> RB3/3/467-468 BDA.



and close ties to English power in London, found investment in Bridgetown a critical part of their operations on Barbados as sugar planters and merchants.

Not all the new planters coming to Barbados in the 1640s were as well affected to the revolutionary regime in London as the Noells, but they nevertheless shared investments in Bridgetown. Arriving in 1647 as an émigré from English Civil War, Thomas Modyford quickly translated his wealth into sugar planting. Advised by other leading planters of the 1640s, Modyford spent several months negotiating with other planters to purchase a sugar plantation, indentured servants, enslaved Africans and indigenous people following a newly established pattern for sugar-planting on Barbados. Loyalist migrants like Modyford, motivated to flee the upheaval of England's civil war and revolution, initially kept quietly to themselves in pursuit of profit, but eventually more radical royalist elements arrived.<sup>77</sup> Leading these more outspoken and disaffected royalists was Humphrey Walrond, who quickly invested in the island's sugar industry and engaged in the island's politics. A planter with a plantation along the island's coasts, Walrond found it necessary to provide his plantation with boats to transport goods and supply his table with freshly caught fish. Walrond, who had extensive holdings on the coast, owned a boat, a *Siene*, on which he sent servants and enslaved people out to catch fish as often as three times a week. With access to the sea and in possession of small coastal vessels, Walrond could easily load and transport wines and other goods from Bridgetown to his plantation. Despite the differences between figures like Modyford, Walrond, Drax, and the Noells, all these sugar planters shared common investments in Bridgetown in the late-1640s and early 1650s.

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<sup>77</sup> Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "Introduction," in *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), 1–35.

In the scale of their agricultural enterprises, investment in slave labor, and commercial connections, sugar planters like Holdip, Drax, Silvester, Modyford, Walrond and the Noells represented a clear departure from earlier generations of cotton and tobacco planters. The scale of their operations and scope of their commercial connections helped integrate Bridgetown into the broader currents of transatlantic and global commerce and mercantile capitalism in the second half of the 1640s. As these sugar planters amassed their fortunes on the backs of slave labor, the Bridgetown of Dutch and English merchants shipping a variety of colonial products disappeared. It was replaced by a bustling market importing greater number of goods from around the Atlantic oceanic basin, and increasingly focusing its export trade in sugar towards London.

While quantitative shipping data for mid-seventeenth-century Barbados are scarce, qualitative descriptions and archaeological evidence of the island's commerce hint at the growing scale and scope of Bridgetown's trade from around the Atlantic world at this moment that the town's elite property-owners became more uniformly English. The trade with Barbados had had a global dimension since the 1630s. Excavations throughout the island reveal French, Dutch, and English ceramics including plate brought from as far from the early modern Caribbean as Ming China. Such material evidence suggests a great degree of inter-colonial commerce in the early years of the 1630s. With the expansion of the sugar industry, the quantities of imported earthenware increased while the geographic scope of where these imports originated shrunk to a

certain degree. Trade with Barbados grew alongside the sugar industry but became more and more concentrated with the British Isles.<sup>78</sup>

The contemporary account of Richard Ligon complements this material record, offering a glimpse into the transatlantic commerce animating the port. He estimated that around 100 ships visited the island yearly to receive provisions from the island and carry sugar, cotton, tobacco, and ginger back to Europe. In return, these ships brought forced labor, livestock, manufactured goods, and workmen's tools.

The Commodities of these Ships bring to this Island, are *Servants* and *Slaves*, both men and women; *Horses*, *Cattle*, *Assinigoes*, *Camels*, *Utensils* for boiling Sugar as, *Coppers*, *Taches*, *Gouges*, and *Sockets*; all manner of working tools for Tradesmen, as, *Carpenters* *Joiners*, *Smiths*, *Masons*, *Mill-wrights*, *Wheel-wrights*, *Tinkers*, *Coopers*, &c. *Victuals* *Stuffs*, *Hats*, *Hose*, *Shoes*, *Gloves*, *Swords*, *Knives*, *Locks*, *Keys*, &c. *Victuals* of all kinds, that will endure the Sea, in so long a voyage. *Olives*, *Capers*, *Anchovies*, *salted Flesh* and *Fish*, *pickled Mackerels* and *Herrings*, *Wine* of all sorts, and the boon Beer, *d'Angleterre*.<sup>79</sup>

As the work of sugar production intensified on the island's large estates, imported food became a necessity for sustaining Barbados's working population and the luxuriant culinary habits of the elite. Ligon noted that many of these victuals came from a wide array of places in the Atlantic world, "*Holland*, from Old and New *England*, *Virginia*, and some from *Russia*" while planters imported wines from France and Madiera. With the rise of sugar, Bridgetown's commerce expanded and drew from a wider range of producers in the early modern Atlantic while the town's inhabitants increasingly came from among the English mercantile and planter elites.

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<sup>78</sup> Smith and Watson, "Urbanity, Sociability, and Commercial Exchange in the Barbados Sugar Trade: A Comparative Colonial Archaeological Perspective on Bridgetown, Barbados in the Seventeenth Century"; Armstrong and Reilly, "The Archaeology of Settler Farms and Early Plantation Life in Seventeenth-Century Barbados."

<sup>79</sup> Ligon, *A True History Barbados*, 40.

When Ligon arrived on Barbados in 1647, he witnessed and recorded a critical moment in England's imperial history. Two decades earlier, in 1627, English settlers had first arrived on Barbados seeking, like Ligon, to make their fortunes extracting wealth from tropical soil. At first, a volatile environment, restive workers, and the hostility of Iberian and indigenous neighbors seemed to threaten this project. It was during these pivotal decades that English settlers and their enslaved and indentured workers began planting and processing sugar cane into the coarse muscovado sugars sold throughout Europe at great profit to the planters. To English observers like Ligon, the success of this colonial project showed in the cultivation of the island's landscape as well as the scale of commerce evident in the island's ports. From the sea, Barbados's plantations appeared to Ligon and his shipmates "one above another: like several stories in stately buildings." They were a sign to the observers of the planters' ability to tame and take possession of an unfamiliar Caribbean landscape. And in Carlisle Bay, which harbored the island's principal town and port, Bridgetown, Ligon found "riding at Anchor, 22 good ships, with boats plying to and fro, with Sails and Oars ... so quick-stirring, and numerous, as I have seen it below the bridge at *London*." These ships evidenced the colony's commercial viability.<sup>80</sup>

By evoking London in Bridgetown, Ligon painted the town as an outpost of English imperial power. The port's early history, however, shows that making Bridgetown English was a far more complicated project than Ligon's description suggests. It was contested by the trans-imperial connections of its local merchants and challenged by the island's working people who connected Barbados to the revolutionary Atlantic world of the 1640s and 1650s. The arrival of a new generation of sugar planters transformed the composition of the town's principal property-

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<sup>80</sup> Richard Ligon, *A True History of Barbados*, (London, 1657), 21.

owners. By the late 1640s, the town's wealthiest inhabitants were powerful sugar planters and merchants like Drax and members of the Noell family rather than the Dutch merchants of a previous generation. The presence of English planters and merchants in Bridgetown did not, however, immediately translate into the seamless imposition of imperial political power and control over the town's Atlantic trade.

### **2.3 Bridgetown and the Navigation Acts**

On January 11, 1652, Francis Willoughby, Barbados's Royalist governor, surrendered the colony to the Parliamentary admiral Sir George Ascyue, marking the end of a brief military struggle and the beginning of an eight-year period of fraught negotiations over how London's agents would control the island's centers of trade and commerce. Departing Barbados months later, Ascyue left Daniel Searle, a London merchant, in charge of governing the island and keeping its factions of restive planters and large population of bound labor loyal to the interests of Protectorate England.

For Searle to enforce the newly passed Navigation Acts required not only new customs mechanisms and officers to enforce such acts, but a physical place from which Searle could control key aspects of the island's trade. To this end, one of Searle's earliest acts as governor was to expand the island's Secretary's Office and empower Barbados's Secretary to enforce the island's new commercial laws. Central to the new customs procedures was the issuance of tickets to trade with the island, gained by depositing a £1000 in sugar security with the colony's Secretary.<sup>81</sup> As a

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<sup>81</sup> Acts and Statutes of Barbados, 22.

repository for these “securities,” the Secretary’s office came to play a key role in the colony’s finances as well as customs enforcement.

The office of the secretary took on new and vital importance during Searle’s governorship as a crucial part of how Searle tried to establish imperial power through infrastructure in Bridgetown. Initially, Barbados’s Secretary had been a very minor office which had little more than the power to register and write “all matters and Acts of State,” predominantly the activities of the government and courts.<sup>82</sup> The island’s earliest Secretaries mostly preserved contracts and other deeds of sale and conveyance. In June 1655, Searle expanded the Secretary’s office, both physically and in the responsibilities the office assumed. Searle ordered the governor’s council “that ye Secretary’s Office be enlarged that the Charges thereof be paid out of ye Public Treasury,” as the Secretary came to take on new functions as an enforcer of the Navigation Acts and Bridgetown’s customs. With the physical expansion of the office where the island’s administrative and legal documentation was recorded, Searle recognized the need for greater administration to control the island’s economy and commerce. In addition to the preservation of public documents and the distribution of securities for ship’s captains and masters, Searle’s newly expanded Secretary’s office established standard measurements of the containers used in the island’s commerce and customs processes.

Efficient customs regulation and trade depended on standardizing measurements used in the commodities entering and existing Bridgetown’s ports, a project Searle placed in the Secretary’s Office. As discussed earlier, the Atlantic trade that shaped the port in the 1640s drew from the circum-Caribbean and Anglo-Dutch mercantile systems, likely introducing a multiplicity

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<sup>82</sup> RB3/1/4, BDA.

of units and containers in Bridgetown's trade during the early period of the port's growth.<sup>83</sup> Intending to crack down on the use of different scales and measurements for trade, Searle enacted a law to protect against "false Weights, Measures, and Numbers," meaning the multiplicity of measurements and standards used in the circum-Caribbean and transatlantic trades with the island. Passed in December 1652, this law required traders to Barbados as well as storehouse keepers to sell all commodities and merchandize according to English measurements and commercial specifications. To publicize the new measurements, the secretary would put up in the Secretary's Office a "Table of the true, and exact Weights, Measures, and Numbers used in the Commonwealth of England."<sup>84</sup> While the newly expanded Secretary's office tried to establish the new standards of English mercantilism in Bridgetown, Searle took steps to regulate the commerce taking place in privately-owned storehouses.

Not all customs enforcement resided within the Secretary's Office, with Searle assuming a large amount of responsibility for enforcing the Navigation Acts in Bridgetown. An act passed on October 7, 1652 laid out that "no Marchant, or Commander of any ship, shall presume to land any goods, or Trade with any man on this Island, before he hath been with the Governour."<sup>85</sup> In practice, Searle deputized officials to act on his behalf in this capacity, coming aboard ships that

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<sup>83</sup> RB3/1/107, Recopied Deed books, BDA.

<sup>84</sup> Acts and Statutes of Barbados 125-126.

<sup>85</sup> Acts and Statutes of Barbados, 21.

arrived in Carlisle Bay to greet the captains before they landed their goods. In turn, captains or ship's masters would visit and wait on the Governor and council shortly after their arrival in port.<sup>86</sup>

Searle's efforts to regulate trade went beyond enforcing customs through the Secretary's Office, extending into the town's storehouses. Among these early laws passed towards the end of 1652, Searle passed a law stipulating that "no person shall presume to keep any common Storehouse to receive the Countrey's goods" without first giving a ten-thousand pound in island-currency security. Like the securities given by ship's captains, the island's Secretary gathered and kept the securities given by storehouse keepers. Searle designed the law to prevent unscrupulous merchants and factors in Bridgetown from defrauding the island's planters. In return for "Countrey goods" received by the merchants, the merchants in turn were ordered to "give out receipts for the same," to ensure that merchants did not issue false receipts used to sue or defraud planters. In addition to losing the ten-thousand-pound security, the penalty for violating the law was severe. Any person convicted of handing out false receipts would pay double the amount defrauded to the victim, stand in the town's pillory for two hours and have both ears publicly severed. Governing Bridgetown's commerce meant not only creating new customs mechanisms, but also violently enforcing laws meant to protect the island's planters.

With Barbados's sugar industry dependent on the harsh exploitation of restive indentured servants, enslaved Africans, and indigenous people, Searle's early laws targeted maritime mobility. The customs mechanism of the tickets issued to visiting ship's captains and masters

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<sup>86</sup> Contemporary visitors to Barbados, like the Frenchman, Antoine Biet described this customs process a few years after it passed into colonial law., Antoine Biet, *Voyage de La France Equinoxiale En L'isle de Cayenne: Enterpris Par Les Francois En L'annee MDCLII* (Paris: Chez Francois Clouzier, 1664) 268-269.



doubled as a means for ensuring that bound labor stayed tied to Barbados's planters. Searle warned captains "not to transport any person of this Island, without a ticket under the Governours hand first obtained for his so doing," concentrating the power to control maritime mobility into his residence in Bridgetown. Along with acquiring a ticket from Searle, the new laws required passengers to enter their names in the Secretary's Office three weeks before departing. The Secretary kept these names posted in the office in Bridgetown for planters and merchants to check to see if debtors or servants were among the lists of would-be passengers. Searle coupled these laws with punishments for ship's captains that carried bound labor off Barbados. English ships discovered carrying passengers from Barbados without tickets forfeited their securities, with the harshest punishments reserved for those carrying off the island's enslaved.<sup>87</sup> Those helping an enslaved person flee the island by boat or ship "shall be adjudged a servant for seven years to the Owner of the said Negroes, any Law, Custom, or Usage to the contrary hereof notwithstanding." Searle's efforts to circumscribe maritime mobility depended on the involvement of the Secretary Office in Bridgetown.

## **2.4 Bridgetown, Plantation Labor, and the Western Design**

In 1654, the clerk of Barbados's assembly, John Jennings, published the acts and laws passed on Barbados since Searle's arrival. Published in London by the press owned by William Bentley, *The Acts and Statutes of Barbados* met the metropolitan demand for information about England's fastest growing and wealthiest plantation colony. Armed with knowledge of Searle's

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<sup>87</sup> Acts and Statutes of Barbados, 22- 24.

new laws, London merchants with access to the printed *Acts* might better navigate Bridgetown's new commercial and legal infrastructure. While London merchants read the newly passed laws of Barbados, in 1654 and 1655, English interest in the Caribbean reached a fever-pitch in Cromwell's protectorate regime. This interest resulted in England's first major military excursion into the region, and culminated in the English conquest of Jamaica but very nearly ended in disaster. Cromwell's Western Design depended on places like Barbados to supply the English fleet with arms, soldiers, and provisions.<sup>88</sup> The realities of colonial Barbados, however, never matched Cromwell's high expectations, and contributed to the struggles the expedition faced in the Caribbean. The arrival of the Western Design posed a distinct challenge of colonial governance for Searle, one that he largely met through expanding colonial infrastructure in Bridgetown.

Despite having created a complex set of laws and colonial infrastructures in the early 1650s to enforce customs and direct the island's trade to benefit English empire, Searle and his allies in England found the task of supplying arms to English soldiers on Barbados a near impossible task. Months before William Penn's fleet sailed from London, Martin Noell shipped around 1500 firearms to Bridgetown. Noell intended these arms to anticipate the arrival of the English fleet and supply its army. When the Penn fleet arrived, only 100 arms remained for the expedition, the rest having been taken up and distributed across the island to supply the colony's militia, completely by-passing any effort by Searle to control the flow of weapons through Bridgetown.

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<sup>88</sup> Block and Pestana's work on the Western Design emphasize this mismatch between expectation and reality as a central dynamic driving the trajectory of the English expeditions sent to the Caribbean. See: Kristen Block, *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean: Religion, Colonial Competition, and the Politics of Profit, Early American Places* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012); Pestana, *The English Conquest of Jamaica: Oliver Cromwell's Bid for Empire*.

Even with Searle's efforts to create new customs mechanisms and expansion of the Secretary's Office, Penn's fleet found Bridgetown a center of illicit trade with England's Dutch rivals. Arriving in Janaury 1655, Penn found and seized fourteen Dutch ship's anchored in Carlisle Bay. While the Dutch presence may have reflected poorly on Searle's actual ability to control and direct the island's trade from Bridgetown, the Dutch ships proved a windfall. Seizing the ships and cargoes, the expedition turned the Dutch trade into leverage to acquire much needed supplies and provisions as well as ships for the expedition. Such actions may have delivered the fleet an unexpected windfall, the disruption of Bridgetown's trade with the Dutch likely inflated the price of provisions, impounding the struggling expeditions problems in Barbados.

While Searle ended up doing little to successfully control Bridgetown's trade and direct the port's market to benefit the Western Design, the arrival of the English fleet encouraged greater efforts to control the island's population of bound plantation labor. The mid-1650s marked a critical point in Searle's efforts to limit the mobility and resistance of indentured servants, political prisoners, and enslaved peoples on Barbados. Searle concentrated much of these efforts in Bridgetown, cementing the port's early role in defending the social order of the plantation society.

In the 1650s, the composition of Barbados's plantation labor changed dramatically with the introduction of thousands of prisoners, who were enemies of Cromwell's regime in England. This sparked resistance and prompted colonial backlash. While indentured servitude had already begun to morph into a harsh labor system in the 1640s with the rise of the island's sugar plantations, the introduction of Irish prisoners and enslaved Africans created a volatile mix, leading at time to moments of joint resistance against English settlers. In these moments of resistance, Irish prisoners and enslaved Africans turned fugitive and hid themselves in the island's last remains of uncleared ground, likely along the island's hilly northeastern coast.

In November 1655, with the fast approach of Cromwell's Western Design, Searle and his government began to take steps to remove these nascent maroons from the relatively inaccessible parts of the island. Searle and his council received "Information given by Capt Richard Goodell and Mr John Jones as also by a letter from Lt. Col. John Higgenbotham that there are several Irish servants and Negroes out in Rebellion in ye Thicketts and thereabouts." For these planters and Searle, there was a direct connection between this fugitivity and the existence of inaccessible places in the interior, "ye Thicketts." In the short term, Searle ordered Higgenbotham to raise "any of the Companies of Henry Hawley's regiment" to search these places for the runaways. The militia's orders were to "cause them forthwith to be secured and to send them before the Governor and or some Justice of the Peace, to be dealt with according to Justice."<sup>89</sup> If they resisted, Searle directed Higgenbotham to "use his utmost Endeavour to suppress or destroy them." The immediate solution for Searle to the problem of their fugitivity was overt use of the militia and colonial violence to suppress their challenge to the plantation economy.

In the long term, however, Searle used newly passed "Highway Acts" to improve the island's roads and overall infrastructure. Such measures made forming maroon communities on the fringe of the plantation system more difficult. Often overlooked, in the context of the 1650s and the issues of fugitivity Searle faced around the island, these acts were a crucial part of Bridgetown's colonial history. In the 1650s, Searle fashioned a durable system for building new roads connecting Barbados's plantations to Bridgetown. The 1652 act, "for mending of the Highwayes, with an addition to the same," divided the island into five districts, and appointed members of the island's assembly, who were wealthy planters and merchants, to serve as committees to

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<sup>89</sup> Lucas Manuscripts, 161.

mend and make new highways. Each district encompassed multiple parishes and the committees had the ability to “alter and change any way for the good of the Countrey, and lay the way where it was not before, and make null or annihilate such ways as are not usefull.” These committees worked with “any sworn Surveyor in this Island” to lay out the new roads. Each committee would nominate and appoint Surveyors for each individual parish to oversee the work taking place within the parochial borders. Surveyors could “require” or compel the inhabitants of any parish to “fall their woods and clear the ways from wood, stumps, grass and weeds in their own ground and so to keep them,” establishing the surveyors as colonial officers. Once the new roads were built, the inhabitants of each parish were responsible for the upkeep and maintenance including providing the forced labor, resources, and tools needed to build and maintain the roads, a critical part in opening up previously inaccessible parts of the island.<sup>90</sup>

Linking Bridgetown to this new road system through the Highway Acts helped establish parish role in governing the port. Emphasizing the importance of Bridgetown, Searle established particular measures to deal with the port’s infrastructure in the newly passed Highway Acts. According to the preamble, Bridgetown “receiveth a great benefit by the trading thither,” and he held the town’s inhabitants responsible for much of the port’s upkeep. Searle ordered all inhabitants, owners of land or houses or anyone renting “Dwelling houses or Store-houses for one whole year” as well as storehouse keepers employed in town to be assessed and taxed separately within St Michael’s parish. The law required parishioners of St Michael to “make a sufficient Gravel-way home to the Gully where the Stone-bridge now stands and build a substantial Bridge

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<sup>90</sup> Acts and Statutes, 104-106.

upon it and keep the same Bridge and Way in good repair.”<sup>91</sup> Renewed after one year, this law laid the institutional foundations for St Michael parish and vestry taking responsibility for the port’s public infrastructure.

Empowered by the Highway Act, St Michael’s parish began exercising its authority over Bridgetown’s inhabitants in the 1650s. In September 1656, the parish ordered “That for every five acres ye each man doe possess he shall find one able working Servant for a day with sufficient Toolles for the performance of ye said worke according as ye surveyor in his general precincts shall order.” The bulk of the parish’s labor remained in the plantations on the outskirts of Bridgetown, but the town presented the parish with unique challenges to maintaining its public ways and spaces. To deal with keeping the town ordered and orderly, the vestry directed the inhabitants of “ye Towne of St. Michael,” to “mender his door according to the discretion of ye Surveyors.” Finally, the parish ordered that the surveyor’s tax each house separately to fund the construction of a new bridge and causeway.<sup>92</sup> In the 1650s, Searle’s Highway Acts established St Michael’s parish authority over Bridgetown and its public infrastructure.

Establishing parish control over Bridgetown’s public space, however, did not preclude Searle from continuing to intervene in the port and its public and commercial spaces. Following the establishment of the highway system, Searle took steps to ensure that the town’s “Landing place” remained clear and usable for ships trading with Bridgetown improving the island’s commerce.<sup>93</sup> In July 1655, Searle ordered a fine of £10,000 sugar currency for any person

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<sup>91</sup> Acts and Statutes, 106

<sup>92</sup> St Michael Vestry Minutes, 1655-1677, BMHS, 6.

<sup>93</sup> Lucas Manuscripts, 134.

obstructing the entrance to the Indian River by placing rocks “before the Barr at ye Indian Bridge town.” His orders described this practice as “very prejudicial to many the inhabitants of this town and others trading to this Island,” justifying the costs.<sup>94</sup> A month later, in August 1655, Searle issued another order banning merchants or planters from building on the town’s public land places. No persons were “to Erect or Cause to be Erected any house or houses upon the Landing place commonly called by the name of the Stepping Stones, at ye Indian Bridge Town.”<sup>95</sup> These interventions in Bridgetown focused on keeping the port accessible to trade and shipping.

Searle’s interventions in Bridgetown included efforts to control vagrancy, maritime mobility, and disorder as part of a broader move to impose social order in the mid-1650s. While forced labor on plantations made up the largest segment of Barbados’s unruly working-class population, Searle and the island’s planters also expressed concerns in the years before and after the Western Design about the mingling of vagrants and rowdy sailors in Bridgetown. Among Searle’s reforms of the mid-1650s, one law addressed the problem of “great number of loose, idle, and Vagrant persons, in & about this Island, who are of no certain employment, and have no constant residence, or place of abode.” Vagrants, according to the law’s pre-amble, cause “the disturbance of the peace and quiet.”<sup>96</sup> The law required a list of all such vagrants sent to the governor and for the island’s administration to put such people to work, “to the defence of this Island.” Likewise, in the months leading up to the arrival of the Penn fleet, Searle and his council dealt with “a Riot ... Committed by some hundreds of Seamen in ye Indian Bridge Towne.” On

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<sup>94</sup> Lucas Manuscripts, 132.

<sup>95</sup> Lucas Manuscripts, 134

<sup>96</sup> Acts and Statutes of Barbados, 131-132.

Barbados, this riot formed part of a larger problem of seamen frequenting taverns, racking up debts, disrupting the peace, and failing to pay their creditors among the island's merchants and planters.<sup>97</sup> In the 1650s, riotous sailors joined Irish rebels and African maroons in disturbing the deferential social order valued by not only planters, but the colonial officials tasked with welcoming English imperial soldiers.

While Searle addressed the problem of maroons in part through improving the island's infrastructure beyond Bridgetown, his government dealt with rioting sailors in port by building new structures of public confinement in the town. Searle's reaction to these rioting sailors focused specifically on building new disciplinary infrastructure in Bridgetown. After ordering the island's marshals to round up and take by force the suspected participants and leaders of the riot, he directed the Justices of the Peace and "Capt Edward Thorneborough to take speedy cause for ye causing a very strong and sufficient Cage, 16 foot square, with a pair of stocks in it and a Pillory on ye top thereof." Citing the insufficiency of the town's "Prison House," the newly built cage would hold the "many Disorderly Persons" in "some convenient place in ye Bridge town."<sup>98</sup> Unlike the town's prison, the cage was meant not only to be highly visible, public, and literally transparent, but also hold large groups collectively. In this respect, such infrastructure departed from other architectures of confinement common in other parts of the Atlantic world.

Searle's decision to build a cage in Bridgetown to publicly confine large groups of rioting sailors served as the culmination of a set of legal reforms designed to limit the mobility of maritime workers in the 1650s. As early as 1652, the government enacted a law to "prevent the frequenting

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<sup>97</sup> Acts and Statutes of Barbados, 132-133.

<sup>98</sup> Minutes of the Barbados Council, Lucas Manuscripts, BPL 44.



of Taverns and Ale-houses by Sea men.” Rowdy and prone to drunkenness, Searle and Barbados’s colonial authorities viewed sailors as disrupting the island’s precariously balanced social order, particularly when sailors tried to evade the payments of debts they incurred on shore. Given the town and island’s dependence on commerce, Searle tried to limit and circumscribe sailors’ mobility within the island. He imposed a curfew:

whatsoever Sea-man shall be found on shore after eight of the Clock at night, and shall not shew a Certificate for his so being on shore from the Master, or Owner whom he serves, or cannot give a good account thereof shall be apprehended by the next Constable or Officer, and conveyed to the common Goal.

Alongside laws against vagrancy, Searle’s efforts to impose order on Barbados in the 1650s required the control and immobilization of certain populations in Bridgetown. A year after the council ordered the construction of a Cage to incarcerate rioting sailors, in July 1655 the council finalized a £3000 sugar-currency contract with William Winthinton to repair the island’s prison.<sup>99</sup> The first half of Searle’s tenure represented a period in which the island’s colonial government tried to confine and immobilize debtors, vagrants, maroon communities, and rowdy sailors. The common thread running through Searle’s responses to these problems is a focus on infrastructure, particularly in Bridgetown.

While Searle tried to impose social order over Barbados and Bridgetown, the island and town remained diverse in ways that continued to trouble English visitors with imperial hopes and ambitions. Henry Whistler, who arrived on Barbados with the Penn fleet in 1655, described the island as “the dunghill whereon England doth cast forth its rubbish.”<sup>100</sup> In general, Whistler praised

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<sup>99</sup> Lucas Manuscripts, 133.

<sup>100</sup> Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh, *Many-Headed Hydra* (Boston, US: Beacon Press, 2000), 124.

the wealth of the island. He left Barbados impressed with the extent of trade and power of the planters who “doth live far better then ours doe in England.” Part of what troubled Whistler, however, was the dangerous mixture of non-English people, particularly in the island’s ports. Noting the island’s population he remarked, “This island is inhabited with all sorts, English, French, Dutch, Scotese, Irish Spaniards they being [Jews] with Ingones and Miserabell Negors borne to perpetual slavery.”<sup>101</sup> The account of Antoine Biet, a French priest visiting Barbados after a mission to the French settlements on the South American mainland, confirms Whistler’s impression of Bridgetown as a haven for non-English and non-Protestant elements of the island’s colonial society. Arriving in Carlisle Bay near Holy Week, Biet recalled how he encountered numerous Catholics during his time on the island. Some were English planters, but many more were Irish servants and prisoners. When Biet attempted to pray in privacy just outside of Bridgetown, he was accosted by an Irishman, who tried to communicate to the Frenchman in a broken Latinate patois that he was “Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman.” After the encounter, the Irish servant continued to visit Biet “during the eight or ten days that we stayed in the Town,” sometimes at his home, other times in the town’s taverns.<sup>102</sup> Alongside English Catholics and Irish servants, Biet made sure to note the presence and successes of French migrants in Bridgetown.

Biet and the group of French settlers he travelled to Barbados with were not the first Frenchmen to participate in Barbados’s sugar boom. To greet the missionary were French doctors and tailors, who apparently found success filling the niches in Bridgetown’s service economy. For

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<sup>101</sup> *Journal of Henry Whistler* Sloane MS 3926, British Library (1655).

<sup>102</sup> Biet arrived in Bridgetown in February 1654 with a group of French settlers attempting to create a settlement in Cayenne, near Surinam. The settlement failed and Biet and his party sought refuge in Barbados. Biet, 275-280.

example, Besse, a Paris-trained tailor, plied a good trade in Bridgetown and gave one of Biet's travel companions a job in his trade to earn £500 sugar currency to arrange a return voyage to France. Biet and his companions also became acquainted during their stay with Cesar du Mesnil, a "fort habile Chirurgien," who joined the waves of royalists fleeing to Barbados after having fought for Charles I during the civil wars in the late 1640s. Taking his fellow French settlers under his wing, Mesnil served as Biet's interlocutor with Barbados's colonial society during his stay on the island. Alongside culturally and religiously alien Irish and French Catholics, Bridgetown harbored waves of religious radicals and dissidents from England that emerged and circulated in the revolutionary English Atlantic of the 1650s.

A year after Biet's visits with Barbados's Catholics in Bridgetown, two Quaker missionaries on their way to Massachusetts arrived in Barbados. Ann Austin and Mary Fisher represented pioneers in the radical mission of mid-seventeenth century Quakers to bring the Society of Friends to England's colonies. Emerging in the radical religious milieu of revolutionary and Interregnum England, the Society of Friends (or Quakers as they came to be known) encouraged figures like Austin and Fisher to bring their levelling and pacifist theology to colonial societies like Barbados. Quakers joined other religious dissidents that circulated in the English Atlantic like the leveler Evans, who ran afoul of the island's authorities in the 1650s. Sentenced by a "court martial" to "stand on the pillory the next market day for an hour, and six months confinement," Evans's levelling proved more troubling to Searle's authority than Quaker meetings and evangelism.<sup>103</sup> Such religious dissidents contributed to making Bridgetown a particularly

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<sup>103</sup> Letter from VR to John Thurloe, Rawlindson Manuscripts, Bodlien, Weston Library, MS.A.37, fol 43-44.

volatile mix of peoples culturally alien or hostile to the traditionally English culture of the island's planter class.

Searle came down hardest on social dissidents while extending concessions and protections to cultural minorities who proved friendly to the town's commerce. In November 1654, Searle granted the petition of "several members of the Dutch nation" that asked to "convene and meet on the Sabbath day to worship god." The governor informed the petitioners that he could revoke these concessions if they disturbed public peace, a warning to the Dutch to keep their heads down in the coming months of increased English imperial presence on the island.<sup>104</sup> He went further in his concessions to non-English merchants in Bridgetown. In January 1655, the same month that the first ships from England arrived, Searle granted "several Jews and Hebrews inhabiting in and about this Island" open status in the colony declaring that they could "enjoy ye priviledges of Law and Statutes of the ye Commonwealth of England and of this Island relating to foreigners and strangers."<sup>105</sup>

When faced with the recalcitrance of levelers like Evans or openly hostile Irish indentured servants, Searle ordered public punishments in Bridgetown. When Cornelius Bryan, "an Irishman" who boasted in January 1656 "as he was eating meat in a Tray, that if there was as much English Blood in the Tray as there was meat, he would eat it," Searle responded with such public punishment. After hearing depositions about his "Mutinous Language," Searle ordered Bryan "have one and twenty lashes on the bare back, by the Common Hangman, before the Cage at ye

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<sup>104</sup> Lucas Manuscripts 67.

<sup>105</sup> Lucas Manuscripts., 87.

Indian Bridge.”<sup>106</sup> At the same meeting, the council considered the case of Daniel Wallsee who stood accused of “slandering of Justice, and scandalizing ye Inhabitants of this Island.” Again, Searle ordered Wallsee pilloried in front of the Cage for two hours. Faced with the contempt of English imperial authority expressed by figures like Evans, Wallsee and Bryan, Searle used Bridgetown as the site for demonstrating English ability to punish dissidents at the farthest reaches of empire.

Searle came to power on the heels of England’s earliest attempts to transform a sprawling network of colonial enclaves into a transatlantic empire. His tenure, especially during the first half of the 1650s, reflected a concerted project to put into practice this imperial vision articulated in London. There were limits to this project. Despite enacting a series of legal reforms, Searle still allowed merchants in Bridgetown to violate the Navigation Acts. The greater challenge to Searle’s colonial authority and project came from the island’s laboring people who formed maroon communities in the interior, frequented taverns, rioted in Bridgetown, cleaved to religious dissidence, and resisted English authority. Searle made concessions to those who did not outright threaten settler power. Those who openly resisted English authority faced punishment in Bridgetown’s newly built Cage, prisons, and pillories. Faced with the challenge of making Barbados English, Searle focused his efforts on improving Bridgetown and the island’s infrastructure to control commerce and impose social order.

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<sup>106</sup> Lucas Manuscripts, 186.

## 2.5 Conclusion

Just as the upheavals of the English revolution made their way to Carlisle Bay and Bridgetown, Bridgetown and Carlisle Bay helped bring revolutionary change back to London. Nearly a decade of making Barbadian plantations the dumping ground for politically and ethnically undesirable people in the British Isles had earned the island and its wealthy planters and merchants a reputation for cruelty, dishonesty, and tyranny incompatible with emergent ideals concerning the rights owed to English subjects emerging around liberty in England. In London and Bristol, the practice of kidnapping young children to serve as indentured servants abroad in the Americas became commonly known as being “Barbadoes’d.”<sup>107</sup> Pamphlets written in 1659 by Marcellus Rivers and Oxenbridge Foyle, who escaped servitude on Barbados, brought added scrutiny to the practices of merchants like Martin Noell, now a member of Parliament. The pamphlet they published, *Englands Slavery, or Barbados Merchandize*, told a harrowing tale of survival and redemption borne from the sea.

Reflecting the turn against merchants trading English poor to Barbados, Hugh Boscowen of Cornwall argued for the rights of Englishmen on plantation colonies like Barbados. If English servants lost the rights to trial or to petition Parliament for redress, “our lives will be as cheap as those negroes. They look upon them as their goods, horses, &c and rack them only to make their time out of them, and cherish them to perform their work.”<sup>108</sup> An enthusiastic embrace of the

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<sup>107</sup> Donoghue, *Fire Under the Ashes: An Atlantic History of the English Revolution*, 242.

<sup>108</sup> Michael Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen* (Philadelphia, US: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 2.

transatlantic slave trade as part of England's imperial political economy ended the unfettered access to England's poor and vulnerable that Barbados's planters enjoyed in the 1640s and 1650s.

Maritime mobility and connections in Bridgetown made Rivers and Foyles make these debates possible. Their pamphlet describes not only their capture, imprisonment in England, transportation, and toils in Barbados, but also how some of the petitioners mentioned in their pamphlet collected their writings and escaped Barbados by sea. Such an escape would have depended on making connections with the sailors that frequented Bridgetown's streets and taverns to find a group willing to hide stowaways amongst the cargo leaving Carlisle Bay and heading to London.<sup>109</sup> As a center for moving goods and people Bridgetown proved capable of circulating ideologies of Englishness that rejected the use of English men with a certain degree of social status as menial labor in the dismal conditions of Barbados's sugar plantations.

The fortunes made in sugar transformed Bridgetown and Barbados, drawing the attention of London merchants like Noell and godly authoritarians like Oliver Cromwell. They tried turning an Atlantic market into an outpost of English commercial and imperial power. Through their agent Searle they succeeded in part but Barbados's integration into an English empire was never as seamless, nor as complete by the end of the 1650s, as historians have tended to think. It was a messy process and one that continued into the second half of the seventeenth century as the labor needs of sugar production pushed the island's planters towards the transatlantic slave trade and Barbados became the model for slave-based plantation societies throughout the Americas. While Barbados's governors and administrators in London continued to struggle with integrating the island into an English imperial structure, the island's colonists confronted the challenges of making

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<sup>109</sup> Marcellus Rivers, *Englands slavery, or Barbados merchandize*, (London, 1659) 8.

race a meaningful social category of difference and hierarchy. Just as Searle's efforts to make Barbados English focused on Bridgetown, the project of making race and articulating difference had crucial intersections with port's development in the second half of the seventeenth century.



### 3.0 Strangers to the Plantation: Sailors, Quakers, Sephardim, and Poor Whites

In March 1667, dozens of English ships lay at anchor in Carlisle Bay, preparing to attack French forces occupying parts of the English Leeward Islands to the north of Barbados.<sup>110</sup> Inland, the island's militia searched, on foot and horse, for deserters: sailors avoiding naval service by hiding in port town taverns and in servants' quarters on the edges of the island's plantation. With the militia out in force searching for these absent seamen, planters wrote to the governor to complain of ship's captains harboring fugitives from their plantations. Planters in the island's colonial Assembly petitioned the governor, William Willoughby, to permit plantation masters "to make enquiry... for any lost servants or slaves."<sup>111</sup> The flight of sailors on the one hand, and the desertion of servants and enslaved people on the other, reminded the island's wealthiest planters that even as their principal port brought them immense wealth in Atlantic trade, it provided the island's bound labor anonymity and access to the sea that enabled mass fugitivity. Bridgetown, despite the efforts of the colonial government in the 1650s, remained in many senses an ungovernable space. Bridgetown in the late seventeenth century was a town characterized by social flux and diversity of inhabitants and economic activities, even as the sugar economy helped create a stark and violent racial order. The co-existence of the Barbadian sugar plantation of the seventeenth-century alongside spaces like Bridgetown created unresolved challenges to English efforts to impose a new colonial order.

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<sup>110</sup> "America and West Indies: March 1667," in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 5, 1661-1668*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1880), 451-459.

<sup>111</sup>TNA, CO31/1/101-117.

The existence of this complex urban-maritime space prompted new challenges of colonial governance not easily addressed within the context of an emergent slave society. In the 1660s, roughly 3,000 permanent inhabitants lived, worked, bargained, and bartered in Bridgetown's streets among a thousand or so structures and buildings clustered near the busy harbor of Carlisle Bay.<sup>112</sup> The expansion of an Atlantic port and the rise of the town's complex urbanity in the mid-seventeenth century emerged alongside the complete establishment of racial slavery on the island's integration plantations. Plantations, as a geographic space, contained land for sugar cane cultivation as well as the proto-industrial architectures and machinery necessary for processing sugars and sugar-cane products like molasses and rum, which demanded the imposition of precise work-discipline and gang labor. Empowered by Barbados's slave codes, planters governed plantations authoritatively, largely without interference from the colonial government. While the colonial government had, in the 1650s, attempted to control Bridgetown's commerce and create the semblance of loyalty and order to the emergent English empire, it took the second-half of the seventeenth-century for the colonial government to address the problem of governing the social and cultural complexity of settler society in Bridgetown.

In the 1660s, defining categories of race and articulating the boundaries of social and cultural difference became a central project of Barbados's colonial elites.<sup>113</sup> To Barbadian planters,

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<sup>112</sup> Pedro Welch, *Slave Society in the City: Bridgetown, Barbados, 1680-1834* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2003), 74.

<sup>113</sup> Unfree labor has historically taken many forms across time and space and appears fairly ubiquitous experience of peoples across the world. There are, however, crucial differences between what historians of slavery have called societies wit slaves, and slave societies. In societies with slaves, slavery is one labor system co-existing alongside a spectrum of free and unfree labor forms and systems. Slave socities, according to Berlin and others, slavery not only

enslaved people represented not only workers to create wealth on their plantations, but embodied property and capital. While early modern England had a long experience with many forms of forced and unfree labor, Barbadian colonists sought out new legal mechanisms to preserve their new-found wealth in African bodies.<sup>114</sup> In 1661, Barbados's assembly gathered together the island's laws concerning enslaved African peoples and laid out a series of arguments justifying perpetual and inheritable enslavement. The law's language expressed a racial ideology. The preamble to Barbados's 1661 slave code described African peoples, regardless of cultural and social origins, as "an heathenish brutish and uncertain dangerous pride of people to whom if surely in any thing we may extend the legislative power given us of punishmentary Laws for the benefit and good of this plantation."<sup>115</sup>

To tell the story of Barbados's colonial project of making race and re-defining social difference, scholars have turned mostly to the brutal world of the sugar plantation or the abstract realm of colonial and imperial law. From law codes, plantation inventories, shipping reports to material evidence, historians have tracked the transition on Barbados from mixed-labor systems

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forms the primary labor system but also the defining principal of that society. It's laws, culture, and organization revolves around the reproduction and resilience of slavery as an institution. In the context of the early modern English Atlantic, many colonies were societies with slaves, Barbados was one of the first English colonial societies to be a slave society in this sense. Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>114</sup> See for analysis of Barbados and the transformation of English labor systems: Newman, *A New World of Labor: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic*.

<sup>115</sup> "Barbados Act 1661: An act for the better ordering and governing of Negroes" in *Oxford Readers: Slavery* edited by Stanley Engerman, Seymour Drescher, and Robert Pacquette, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 104.

towards a total economic dependency on enslaved African labor.<sup>116</sup> Over the course of two decades in the middle of the seventeenth century, material conditions and legal provisions turned dramatically against African peoples on Barbados, transforming a form of unfree labor into a totalizing social system. The exploitation of the bodies and labor of enslaved people grew while planters extended legal protections and material benefits to people of recognizable European backgrounds.<sup>117</sup> Colonial elites re-purposed ideologies around cultural and ethnic difference to justify the exploitation of black people.

The traditional narrative of how the planter class engineered the project of making race and re-defining social difference privileges a particular set of colonial institutions and actors. First and foremost, this literature focuses on the actions of the island's wealthiest inhabitants, the planter class whose rise Richard Dunn authoritatively chronicled. Such narratives not only privilege the planter class as the principal and sole agents of this project, but also focus on the institutional avenues of the colonial assembly controlled by the planter class as the only corporate means

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<sup>116</sup> Edward B. Rugemer, "The Development of Mastery and Race in the Comprehensive Slave Codes of the Greater Caribbean during the Seventeenth Century," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (2013): 429.

<sup>117</sup> The rise of plantation slavery and the planter class is, of course, a well-established historiography, a sample of this literature that focuses on plantation developments as it relates to the rise of plantation slavery and race on Barbados, see: Richard Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972); Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Russell R Menard, *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006); B W Higman, "The Sugar Revolution," *Economic History Review* 53, no. 2 (February 14, 2000): 213–36.

through which settlers exercised power.<sup>118</sup> Studying the institutional responses to the challenges posed by maritime mobility, poverty and religious diversity within Bridgetown's settler society in the second-half of the seventeenth century, this chapter illustrates how the colonial government and planters shared power with the parish system in Bridgetown to establish the boundaries of race and difference in settler society. For much of the seventeenth century, colonial power remained fragmented in Bridgetown, only slowly consolidating during moments of acute crisis in Barbados.

### 3.1 The Cage

In 1657, St Michael's parish paid William Withington £605 Barbados-currency for "Iron worke and Carpenters worke... some timber for ye stockes with Carridge" to expand a simple structure in Bridgetown used to hold runaway servants and slaves.<sup>119</sup> In the decades that followed, this simple structure in the port came to be known as the Cage. Over the next century and a half, thousands of enslaved people suspected of being runaways from plantations found themselves at one point or another held for hours, weeks, or months in Bridgetown's Cage. When the parish paid Withington for his work, however, colonists used the structure indiscriminately as a holding cell

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<sup>118</sup> Shaw presents, in the case of early modern Barbados, an interesting addition to these narratives by tracing the rise of a dispossessed Irish indentured servant into the ranks of the planter class over the course of the seventeenth century. Shaw, *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean: Irish, Africans, and the Construction of Difference*.

<sup>119</sup> St. Michael's Vestry Minutes in the Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society Vo. XIV Nov. 1946-Feb 1947, Pages 123-139.

for all types of bound and unfree labor that worked Barbados's earliest sugar plantations. Until the early nineteenth century, some version of this crudely designed structure stood several hundred feet from Carlisle Bay's waterfront where thousands of sailors arrived in Bridgetown from around the Atlantic Ocean and circum-Caribbean annually, unaware of the Cage's original purpose to limit maritime mobility.

Built in August 1654, after colonial officers arrested hundreds of sailors rioting overnight in Bridgetown, the Cage's early history illustrates how sailors moved from the margins of the island's settler society to its center over the course of the seventeenth century. Faced with the task of immediately confining hundreds of rowdy men in a colony dependent on forced labor tied to plantations, the island's governor, Daniel Searle, quickly commissioned the structure while the governor's council sorted through the riot's aftermath. Searle's reaction to the riot of 1654 was emblematic of planter class's distrust of maritime labor as strangers and outsiders to the plantation system; masterless men without true landed interests. As such, sailors were subjected to colonial laws that regulated their movements and ability to interact with the island's settlers. Over the course of the seventeenth century, the colony's attitude and governance of this maritime community, largely concentrated in Bridgetown, changed and therefore reconfigured how colonial power worked in a port like Bridgetown.

Despite Barbados's origins in the early modern Atlantic world, studies of seventeenth-century Barbados oddly omit the history of the island's maritime labor concentrated in its port towns. Through the plantation's connections to the transatlantic slave trade, there is a robust literature on the conditions of the slave ship, patterns of the transatlantic and intercolonial slave trades to and from Barbados, and studies of the maritime communities that animated the island's

maritime trade.<sup>120</sup> However, little has been written on the lives of transatlantic and local maritime communities on Barbados. Bridgetown connected the worlds of the transatlantic sailor and the plantation society in the seventeenth century and it is here we can best trace the colonial government's changing relationship to this highly transient community of outsiders to slave society. Rather than remaining stable, as it is often portrayed, the attitudes of lander settler society towards maritime labor changed over time. Through the examination of colonial law and the actions of the colonial government over the course of the seventeenth-century, we can trace the slow adoption of these positive attitudes towards maritime communities on the island, a sharp departure from the distrust sailors in Bridgetown faced in the 1650s.

By the 1650s, planters depended on their absolute control over bound labor to operate profitable sugar plantations turning towards new labor system while the port continued to depend on traditional forms of English maritime labor. As Simon Newman and others have shown, Barbados's early planters transformed traditional British bound labor systems into something radically different, treating indentured English, Scottish, and Irish servants essentially as chattel in ways that laid the foundation for plantation slavery in the decades that followed.<sup>121</sup> The transatlantic sailors that made Bridgetown an Atlantic port held few common interests with the

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<sup>120</sup> For an overview of the literature on the slave trades to Barbados see: Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History*; Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*; Mustakeem, *Slavery at Sea: Terror, Sex, and Sickness in the Middle Passage*; O'Malley, *Final Passages: Intercolonial Slave Trade of British America, 1619-1807*. takeem, *Slavery at Sea: Terror, Sex, and Sickness in the Middle Passage* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2016).

<sup>121</sup> Simon Newman, *A New World of Labor: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013) 71-72.

island's planters or the merchants and ships' captains they worked for. When their ships stayed in Bridgetown, sailors were strangers within Barbados's plantation system and were treated as such in the 1650s. Through the island's earliest laws and statutes, the planters in control of the island's colonial government sought to limit their mobility on Barbados.

Within his first year as Barbados's governor, Daniel Searle, the London merchant Cromwell's regime appointed to the position in 1652, signed into law "An Act to prevent the frequenting of Taverns and Ale-houses by Sea-men." Citing the "several ships... much hindered and prejudiced, and great damage sustained," Searle imposed a curfew on sailors on Barbados. Any seaman found on shore after eight o'clock risked arrest and being dragged in front of the next available Justice of the Peace to pay a fine. The law instructed tavern keepers to close their doors to sailors out and about the island past curfew. Tavern-keepers, if caught, risked paying a £50 Barbados-currency fine. To enforce the law, the new act required sailors ashore after dark to present "a Certificate for his being ashore" to any constables or officers representing the colonial government.<sup>122</sup> In an island built upon and centered around sugar plantations and their bounded laborers, the colonial government sought to limit sailors' mobility and ability to interact with colonial society through their access to the port's numerous taverns and public houses.

Acts limiting sailors' mobility mimicked the island's statutes regulating indentured servitude and slavery in crucial ways. Statutes in the early 1650s empowered planters by restricting the mobility of enslaved people and indentured servants. Like the act barring sailors from visiting taverns after curfew, the colony fined settlers entertaining or harboring indentured servants or

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<sup>122</sup> Acts and Statutes of Barbados, 1654.



enslaved people.<sup>123</sup> Adding to these strictures, Searle's government restricted settlers from buying or selling goods to bound laborers in ways that echoed the fears the colonial government expressed about sailors frequenting taverns. Likewise, Searle and his council passed a law "to restrain the wanderings of Servants" and enslaved people by requiring these two groups of bound labor to carry "License in writing" or a "Masters or Mistress' Ticket" outside the plantation much in the same ways that past curfew sailors ashore needed a written ticket from their ship's captain.

Here, the similarities between the laws passed against the mobility of plantation labor and sailors' end. Laws against enslaved people and indentured servants empowered any settler to arrest, apprehend, and interrogate bound labor and question them to see if they had tickets to be about the island or in the town. Sailors, on the other hand, were not subject to arrest by any settler, but exclusively agents of the colonial state such as justices of the peace or constables. Despite these differences, planters and merchants placed sailors beyond the pale of settler society. A category of labor distinctive from free settler society and a potential threat against the island's landed interests.

In addition to limiting maritime mobility, planters passed laws under Searle's government which attempted to end sailors' and ship captains' practices of providing safe harbor to the island's numerous debtors. Like the mobility of bound labor in general, the colonial government addressed fears that ships visiting Bridgetown might provide safe harbor for insolvent settlers seeking to flee through the mechanisms of the assembly's laws and legislation. Weighing the necessity of preventing the escape of bound workers and debtors against the need to quickly unload imported goods, the colony's leaders passed an act that made ships' masters provide £1000 sterling as

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<sup>123</sup> Statutes of Barbados (1654) 26.

security against transporting “any Person of(f) this Island, without a Ticket,” an act designed predominantly for indebted settlers.<sup>124</sup> Much of planters’ fears about maritime labor in the 1650s emerged from planter struggles to control bound plantation labor. Addressing such fears of ships carrying servants and slaves off, Searle passed an act against “divers wicked Persons” who “lately attempted to steal away” enslaved people off the island. The planters and Searle blamed these unnamed persons using “specious pretense of promising them freedom” to lure them off the island aboard ships trading with the island.<sup>125</sup>

English settlers found foreign ships and sailors particularly threatening, with the assembly passing laws that penalized non-English trade with the island. Building on the laws that prevented ships from carrying off servants or slaves, the island’s assembly passed a law that made any ship of the same “nation” responsible and “make satisfaction” for any other ship of that “nation” accused of carrying off a servant or slave.<sup>126</sup> In times of conflict, the assembly and governor feared that foreign sailors on the island might circulate intelligence about the island’s defenses and military strength. In the 1650s, the colony’s leaders banned settlers from going aboard ships before the governor or his representative had collected the ship’s customs and security. This wariness of non-English ships in Carlisle Bay extended not only to their crews but their passengers as well. In November, 1654, months before the arrival of Cromwell’s *Western Design*, Searle ordered that “any foreign ships arrive ye masters of such ship or ships so arriving do bring to ye Governor list of ye names of his passengers and their qualities.”<sup>127</sup> In February, 1656, when England was at war

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<sup>124</sup> Statutes of Barbados, 21.

<sup>125</sup> Statutes of Barbados 47.

<sup>126</sup> Statutes of Barbados 22.

<sup>127</sup> Lucas Manuscripts, 68, Nov 8, 1654.

with Spain, the colonial government permitted Emmanuel Rogers, “a Spaniard” to have freedom of movement around Barbados so long as he “put in security not to depart the Island.” Searle further ordered that Rogers “do not navigate or cause to be navigated any boat or boats, shallop or shallops, till further order from the Governor,” specifically seeking to limit Roger’s access to the sea.<sup>128</sup>

For Barbados’s first generation of planters, transatlantic sailors whose labor was so crucial to Bridgetown’s Atlantic trade were potentially dangerous outsiders with little attachment to the island’s nascent plantation system. The riot of 1654 underscored that sailors and maritime labor, particularly transatlantic sailors with no ties to the island’s landed planter class, existed beyond and outside of the island’s settler society to be controlled and confined by force if necessary. The island’s institutional response remained centered around the assembly and the governor; a power arrangement that firmly placed governance of the port in the hands of the island’s planters through the assembly. In the 1660s, colonial laws shifted away from circumscribing the liberties of maritime labor in Barbados towards regulating trade but still remained predominantly in the hands of the assembly and governor’s council.

In the 1660s, Barbados’s governors passed laws that accepted the presence of maritime labor within the colony’s economy but focused on circumscribing specific economic activities viewed as conflicting with the strategic needs to defend the island’s shores from foreign assault. In March 1667, at the tail-end of the Second Anglo-Dutch war that had seen Dutch assaults on shipping in view of Carlisle Bay, Barbados’s governor, William Willoughby passed “An Act to prevent the raising, digging, breaking up, or taking away of any Stones, in any part of the Sea, or

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<sup>128</sup> Luca Manuscript, 190-1, February 26, 1656.

Sea-Shores before this Island...” The act sought to protect the island’s rocky west coast from “sundry persons” who “by Boat, Vessel, or otherwise” removed the stones and rocks that jutted out of water close to shore. Settlers found guilty of breaking this law forfeited the boats used to break down these coastal rocks and stones. A year later, the colonial government extended their protection over the island’s coasts to the sandy shores around Carlisle Bay. The new law passed in February 1668, outlawed “several Masters of Ships and Vessels...daily take and dig Sand at, and near the Forts and Breast-works in and about the Town of St. Michaels.” The lawmakers noted that the “Sea doth daily encroach upon the Shore” as ship owners and captains filled ballast with sand from around Carlisle Bay. The new law extended the same penalties to the new act against taking sand away from shore.<sup>129</sup>

In a similar vein, in 1671, the colonial government signed “An Act to prohibit the transporting of uncured Ginger off this Island.” Like the previous act against taking up stones and sand from the island’s shores, sought to limit maritime activities and trade. In this case, the colonial government sought to better regulate the marginal trade in ginger grown on the island’s plantations. The law required “every Commander, or Master of any Ship, Bark or Vessel” from taking aboard any cargo of uncured ginger or risk forfeit £10,000 Barbados-currency. The act went on to authorize the governor to appoint commissioners to search any vessel for illicit cargoes of ginger. These acts from the 1660s and early 1670s departed from the laws of the 1650s that had sought to significantly curb the movement of sailors in Barbados, imposing a system of curfews meant to separate maritime labor from the bound labor of the island’s plantation economy. The new laws focused on regulating specific aspects of the island’s trade and maritime activities and while

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<sup>129</sup> Hall, *The Laws of Barbados*, 60-61; 70-71

introducing penalties to ship-owners that did not seek to limit the activities or movement of sailors.<sup>130</sup>

### **3.2 Commerce, Conflict, and Maritime Labor on the Waterfront**

While the laws limiting or circumscribing maritime mobility in Bridgetown and Barbados emerged from the island's assembly and governor's council, in the seventeenth-century, the office of the Island's colonial Secretary regulated the daily conflicts between merchants, planters, ship's captains and sailors that emerged from the island's Atlantic trade.<sup>131</sup> When cooperation or negotiation in the course of the maritime trade in Bridgetown broke down, ship's captains and merchants asked the colonial government to intervene by filing formal complaints with the Secretary's Office. The documents produced by such conflicts reveal not only the messiness of transatlantic commerce but also the central role played by the Secretary's Office in Bridgetown in governing the port's maritime activities and communities, taking over the role of the governor as the first arbiter in conflicts that emerged from the island's trade.

Delays vexed merchants, planters, and ship captains alike, becoming one of the most common complaints ship captains raised with the colonial government's Secretary's Office. Of the 101 bills of protest recorded in the Secretary's office between January 1668 and February 1670, 47 bills of protest were lodged by ships' captains against merchants failing to deliver sugar or other goods promised in a contract with a ship's master or captain. In June 1668, Captain Richard Terry

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<sup>130</sup>Hall, 84-86.

<sup>131</sup> RB3/2/837-916, BDA.

of the *Exchange* of London issued a formal protest against Nathaniel Denham of London and his merchant-factor on Barbados, Spencer Peggot, for failing to “tender onto him ten tons of sugar to put on board of his ship” within the 57 days specified by contract between the parties.<sup>132</sup>

Likewise, Barbados’s merchants filed complaints against ship’s captains that failed to deliver goods as and when promised. In February 1669, a Bridgetown merchant, Benjamin Batten filed a complaint in the Secretary’s office against Thomas Blackeman, the captain of the *Hope* of London, for failing to deposit casks of wine in a convenient place. Blackeman, according to Batten, “had taken fifteen tons of Madera wine from Madera islands...out of the boat unto the mire at low water where it lies in the same until high water.”<sup>133</sup> Dislodging 15 tons of Madeira wine from muck exposed by low-tide and moving it to Batten’s near-by storehouse required manual labor. Batten’s complaint expressed the merchant’s belief that captains like Blackeman were responsible for organizing the labor to bring goods from their ships directly to the storehouse. The colonial Secretary’s office agreed and presented Blackeman with the complaint.

Captains freighting sugar expected merchants to provide labor to transport and load sugar on ships in Carlisle Bay. In February 1668, Robert Browning, master of the *Loyal Monck* of London, complained that Richard Steele, a London merchant, and his factor in Bridgetown, John Johnson, failed to load 20 tons of sugar in casks onto the *Loyal Monck*. When Browning approached Johnson in Bridgetown, Browning made clear he expected Johnson to comply with the terms of the captain’s charter with Steele by bringing the sugar for loading onto the *Loyal*

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<sup>132</sup> RB3/2/868, BDA.

<sup>133</sup> RB3/2/892, BDA.

*Monck*.<sup>134</sup> In his complaint against the Bridgetown merchant Benjamin Scott, captain Charles Thorrowgood of *The Katherine* of Dublin testified that Scott by the date of his complaint “did neither by himself boate or seamen give any assistance or attendance of the Loading of any goods aboard the said ship.”<sup>135</sup>

Captains and merchants were not the only parties active in these disputes. At times, sailors themselves were the subjects of captains’ complaints. Josiah Tidd, the captain of the slave ship, the *Josiah*, arrived in Bridgetown under commission from Bridgetown merchant Reid. Tidd was to first stop at Barbados, gain a better sense of the region’s slave market and then to sell his cargo at “the best market for the Negroes then on board the said ship,” which in 1668 appeared to be the ports and slave markets of Jamaica. Tidd’s troubles, however, began when he landed in Bridgetown after a costly transatlantic voyage. Tidd needed “repairs rigging and vituals” to take on as well as a new mate, and several seamen to replace the crew he lost on the voyage from the coast of West Africa to Barbados. Repairs and replacements to his crew were only one part of Tidd’s troubles. According to Reid’s complaint, “Tidd having communicated his voyage to Jamaica to the seamen on board him who generally refused to proceed there” until they received their promised wages. Constrained by significant losses and the need to repair the *Josiah*, the ship’s sailors, undoubtably shaken by the high mortality of the transatlantic crossing demanded their wages before continuing in their voyage onto Jamaica. The *Josiah*’s sailors forced Reid and Tidd’s hands. Reid and Tidd had to sell many of their captive cargo from the *Josiah* in the less than

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<sup>134</sup> RB3/2/839, BDA.

<sup>135</sup> RB3/2/906, BDA.

favorable Bridgetown markets to pay their sailors' wages and bring whoever among the captives survived to the less-saturated markets in Jamaica.<sup>136</sup>

Occasionally, these complaints came from the island's sailors that worked in the island's coastal trade between the ports of Bridgetown in the south and Speightstown to the island's north. Work coasting around the island could, as these complaints show, be dangerous to the largely local maritime population that ferried goods in sloops between Bridgetown and the island's other ports. At the tail end of Barbados's blustery rainy season, William Clement, owner of a small coasting vessel, likely a shallop, the *Ann and Mary*, attested that "on the 13<sup>th</sup> January the master set sail from Carlisle Road with severall persons, goods, and merchandize bound for Speights Bay, surprised by a sudden gust of wind and the goods were lost at sea."<sup>137</sup>

While the colonial assembly, governor, and council worked to circumscribe the mobility of sailors in Barbados in the 1650s, establishing these institutions' authority over the island's maritime labor, the island's Secretary's Office became a key arbiter in resolving conflict between merchants, ships' captains, and sailors. Authority over the maritime community in the 1660s ended up split between these separate parts of the colonial government centered in Bridgetown. While these institutions governed these aspects of the port's maritime trade and labor in the 1650s and 1660s, this period also saw the introduction of new mercantile and religious diasporas into Bridgetown's settler society. While the colony's governors welcomed or largely ignored the arrival of greater numbers of Sephardim and Quakers in the 1660s, their presence increasingly drew the concern of the town's Anglican parish.

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<sup>136</sup> RB3/2/905, BDA.

<sup>137</sup> RB3/2/889, BDA.



### 3.3 “Nothing Tending to ye Disturbance of the Peace”: Barbados’s Quakers and Sephardim

The island’s growing trade in the 1650s and 1660s brought, for very different reasons, two religious diasporas to Barbados’s shores. The settlement of Quakers and Sephardim, closely tied to Bridgetown’s growth, added to the town’s cultural cosmopolitanism. The presence of these diasporas went largely without note from the island’s colonial government, reflecting the indifferent attitude of the planter elite towards religious diversity in the mid-seventeenth century. Whereas Irish indentured servants and prisoners forced to work on plantations were a source of colonial anxiety and fear long into the seventeenth century, the arrival in significant numbers of Quakers and Sephardim from across the Atlantic world and circum-Caribbean drew little of the colonial government’s attention in the 1660s.

Oliver Cromwell’s formal 1656 readmission of Jews to England opened Barbados to Jewish Sephardi settlers with a long-established commercial and diasporic history in the Atlantic world, contributing to the religious and cultural diversity of Bridgetown’s mercantile communities.<sup>138</sup> On Barbados, the English governor Daniel Searle embarked on a parallel program of religious toleration despite England’s mercantilist distrust of foreign commercial interests in the colonial world. Remarkably, given the strong anti-Dutch sentiment in England during the 1650s, Searle tentatively offered limited freedom of worship to first Dutch Calvinists in an order made on November 8, 1654. A little less than a year later, on July 9, 1655, Searle offered a similar

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<sup>138</sup> Stephen Merchant, *Merchants and Jews: The Struggle for British West India Commerce, 1650-1750* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1984); Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert, *A Nation upon the Ocean Sea* (New York, US: Oxford University Press, 2007).

arrangement for Sephardim acting on a petition of “several Jews and Hebrews inhabiting in and about this island.” Both concessions allowed these communities to worship privately but warned both to avoid anything “tending to ye disturbance of the peace and quiet.”<sup>139</sup> After 1662 and the restoration of the English monarchy, Charles II’s government expanded the means for Jews to obtain letters of denization, allowing permanent settlement and property ownership in territories under English crown jurisdiction. In Barbados, as in in England, Sephardim took advantage of England’s growing acceptance of foreigners as a means of furthering commercial competition, settling into the island’s propertied classes in Bridgetown.<sup>140</sup>

Through the 1660s, Sephardim laid the foundation for permanent settlement on Barbados by building in Bridgetown. The growth of this community, while transforming Bridgetown’s built environment, went largely un-reported by Barbados’s colonial authorities in the 1660s. Concentrated in Bridgetown, Sephardim transformed the port’s social, cultural, and religious geography as the community grew in wealth and numbers on the edge of the plantation economy. Freed through laws of denization, Sephardim in Barbados, as in England, established permanent presences in port towns through purchasing urban properties. In establishing a permanent presence of both sides of the Atlantic, Sephardim invested in these ports’ mercantile communities and helped establish the trust and credit that underpinned seventeenth-century commerce. In Bridgetown, the pattern of urban settlement took shape in the 1660s. Beginning in this decade, the bulk of Barbados’s Sephardim lived in and owned property facing Swan street, one of

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<sup>139</sup> Lucas Manuscripts, “Minutes of the Council of Barbados” BPL, 67, 87.

<sup>140</sup> Nuala Zahedieh, “Defying Mercantilism: Illicit Trade, Trust, and the Jamaican Sephardim,” *The Historical Journal* 61, no. 1 (2017): 77–102.

Bridgetown's back streets a short distance from the waterfront and Carlisle Bay. By the end of the seventeenth century, Barbadian colonists informally referred to Swan street as Jew street while deeds and descriptions of properties make geographic reference to the "Jews Synagogue."<sup>141</sup> Searle's extension of freedom of worship in the mid-1650s led to Sephardim buying and setting aside a plot of land to build a synagogue dedicated as *Nidhe Yisrael* (translated as the scattered of Israel), a *mikvah* (a pool of spring water used for ritual purification) and a separate cemetery attached to the synagogue by the 1660s.<sup>142</sup> From these foundations in Bridgetown, Sephardim became enmeshed in the island's commercial life, a process that occurred with little immediate backlash from formal colonial institutions.

While the settlement of Sephardim in Bridgetown went largely un-noticed by colonial institutions, their involvement within transatlantic trade exposed Sephardim to the conflicts that typified commerce along the town's waterfront. The Sephardim settling around the synagogue on Swan street built their wealth upon maritime trade, serving the need of the colony's plantation economy by connecting its sugar markets to a wider diasporic community of trade. This commercial role across the Atlantic made Sephardim valuable trade partners for Barbados's merchants and planters who struck deals with the island's community of Jewish merchants. In 1668, for example, Mosses Perrera of Amsterdam hired the English Kurton, commander of the ship *Elizabeth and Mary*, to load and carry twenty tons of goods from Isaack Perrera over the course of three weeks while anchored in Carlisle Bay. Similarly, Kurton also held a contract with Abraham Deurde to load ten tons of goods from Louis Dias Goutez in Bridgetown at the rate of

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<sup>141</sup> Will of Joseph Harbin, Sr. RB6/3/97-100, (Barbados Department of Archives).

<sup>142</sup> Welch, *Slave Society in the City: Bridgetown, Barbados, 1680-1834*, 123.

£5- and ten-shillings sterling.<sup>143</sup> For most part, these conflicts remained isolated between individual English and Sephardi merchants and only peripherally involved the colonial state that served as arbiter of such commercial conflicts.

Another example of Barbados's early cultural and religious diversity can be found in the island's Quaker community, which like Bridgetown's Sephardim charted a path for themselves on the island that was entangled with, but not determined by, English imperial politics. For Quakers, too, the 1660s were a decade of quiet growth, largely ignored by the colonial government. In the 1650s, the first itinerant Quakers from England arrived, like the Sephardim, in Barbados. Committed early Quaker converts like Henry Fell arrived in Barbados in 1656 and stayed into the 1670s, settling as a merchant-factor in Bridgetown. Fell and other Quakers found early successes among the island's sugar planters. Sugar plantation-owners like Lewis Morris and John Rous became early patrons and business partners of Quaker itinerants like Fell and pillars of the Quaker community in the 1650s.<sup>144</sup> Missionaries like Fell benefited from the temperament and inclination of the island's colonial leadership. Fell met Governor Searle soon after arriving in Barbados and found him a "very Moderate" man who proved "noble and loveing to friends."<sup>145</sup> In the late 1650s, Fell was holding 4-5 meetings a week. Another Quaker itinerant, John Burnyeat reported in 1667 that he met with "large and full Meetings" in his travels throughout Barbados. In the 1660s, Quakers like Fell and Burnyeat found "many people Convinced" of their religious arguments and beliefs among the island's English settlers.

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<sup>143</sup> RB3/2/865-866, (BDA).

<sup>144</sup> Block, *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean: Religion, Colonial Competition, and the Politics of Profit*.

<sup>145</sup> Gragg, *The Quaker Community on Barbados: Challenging the Culture of the Planter Class*, 38–40.

These early successes did not mean that Quakers completely escaped the violence that marked colonial reaction to the spread of Quakerism in English colonies like Massachusetts Bay.<sup>146</sup> Fell met with a “rude Multitude” led by Anglican priests that barred the Fell from speaking in Anglican churches. Individual Quakers, like Fell, still faced arrest for attempting to disrupt Anglican services or for refusing to serve in the militia or swear oaths. Still, these settler reactions targeted individual preachers viewed as troublemakers rather than the entire Quaker community and were largely led by Anglican clergy rather than the full force of the colonial government. For both Atlantic free religious diasporas, the Sephardim and Quakers, the 1650s and 1660s were decades of growth and conflict between with individual English and Anglican settlers that did not elicit the attention of the formal institutions of the colonial state until much later in the seventeenth century.

### **3.4 “Seeming Mad Men”: Settler Poverty, Vagrancy and the Port**

While religious communities like the Sephardim and Quakers found some success and stability in the post-restoration years of the 1660s, the same period witnessed a sharp spike in white settler poverty and vagrancy as a generation of indentured servants left Barbados’s sugar plantations with few prospects for land-ownership.<sup>147</sup> Throughout the 1650s, 1660s, and into the

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<sup>146</sup> Carla Gardina Pestana, *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 118–19.

<sup>147</sup> An earlier generation of Barbados’s indentured servants were able to find land on Barbados in the 1630s and 1640s. Games, *Migration and the Origins of the English Atlantic World*.

1670s, the parish largely faced the problems posed by urban poverty and vagrancy alone, attempting to ameliorate and control the growth of settler poverty in Bridgetown beyond the coercive mechanisms of the plantation system.

In Bridgetown, the problems of settler poverty and vagrancy appeared most clearly to port's settlers and the vestry of St. Michael's parish. In 1663, William Bragge, a Bridgetown rope-maker approached St Michael's vestry with a proposal "to employ several poor people yt are chargeable to the Parish and ye Vagrants and Idle persons yt lye about town, as seeming mad men."<sup>148</sup> His request vividly illustrated how artisans in Bridgetown viewed the problem poverty posed to the port's propertied in the early 1660s. Without land, a trade, or significant capital, a generation of indentured servants carved out spaces of survival on the island's roads and particularly in the streets of Bridgetown, the island's capital and commercial center. To unsympathetic artisans like Bragge, the poor settlers' efforts to survive on Bridgetown's streets threatened the town and parish's prosperity by drawing resources from the vestry without contributing to the port's economy or society.

By contrast, the colonial government largely stayed out of such matters in this period of settlement and plantation development, delegating to the parish issues relating to the settler poverty, particularly in Bridgetown. In 1655, the governor's council referred the case of Robert Hickerson to the parish. "He being decrepid and not able to help himself," the governor and council ordered the "Trustees" of St Michael's parish form a three-man committee to provide some form

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<sup>148</sup> St. Michael Vestry Minutes, BMHS, 90.

of relief for the disabled and impoverished Hickerson.<sup>149</sup> Such delegation typified the colonial government's response to settler poverty in the 1650s and 1660s.

In the 1650s, 1660s and 1670s, Bridgetown's Anglican parish system played a critical role in the island's development slave society defining social difference through the application of traditional English poor relief laws. Since the mid-sixteenth century, English poor relief laws defined the deserving poor, separating people who earned parochial alms from those considered idle or vagrant and subject to coercion or state violence.<sup>150</sup> Between the 1650s and into the 1670s, St Michael's minute books record how the vestry, the twelve-man lay committee governing the parish, articulated such distinctions as they distributed alms to the growing number of impoverished settlers. They viewed the sick, disabled, aged, or orphaned as particularly vulnerable dependents deserving of organized social relief. The alms they gave took the form of monthly pensions renewed yearly in a public meeting of the vestry in St Michael's church in Bridgetown. Alms, however, took many forms during the seventeenth century. For example, in 1675, the vestry gave William Trundell and his wife ten gallons of rum, 20 pounds of sugar and five shillings in sterling, "in stock for a livelihood." The gifts could also be more basic than the foundations for a trade or livelihood. In 1673, the vestry gave Matthew Tomlinson a new blue shirt and a pair of plain shoes. Whether in the form of a gift in kind, the use of parish land or a pension, the wealthy leaders of St Michaels parish, re-articulated the boundaries of the English colonial community

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<sup>149</sup> Lucas Manuscripts, Minutes of the Barbados Council, BPL128.

<sup>150</sup> For the structure and importance of the parish system and their role in enforcing poor laws see: Stever Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).

every time they identified and acted to relieve settlers they viewed as particularly vulnerable members of a coherent settler society.

In general, the vestry attempted to preserve settler families from poverty whenever possible, reflecting planters growing concern about the demographic of slavery as the institution came to define the island's plantation system. In 1658, the vestry gave John Lambard a six-year lease on 3-acres owned by the parish because he "hath six small children and is destitute of maintenance to mayntayne them."<sup>151</sup> According to the stipulations of the gift, Lambard could cut the wood on these three acres but could not sell the lumber without permission from the parish. Lambard could clear the land to eke a living from its soil, but could not benefit directly from the sale of a commodity like timber. In service of creating and re-creating settler families split apart by the island's disease environment and dislocation, the parish paid parishioners yearly adjusted allowances to provide care for the parish's orphaned settlers.

Between 1655 and 1677, the minutes of St Michael Parish vestry are filled with references to children left orphaned or abandoned to the care and discretion of the vestry, signaling the value the parish placed on re-creating coherent settler families broken by disease and disruption in this period. Over the course of the 22 years at least 36 orphaned or abandoned children of English and Anglican settlers were taken up into parish care or placed in the care of another parishioner. Many entered the minute books as un-named children, with no reference to their parentage or any other identifying descriptors. Sometimes, the vestry clerks described orphans by a parent such as when the vestry entrusted "Thomas West's child" to the care of Mary Nicholls in 1667 for £100 sugar-

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<sup>151</sup> St Michael Vestry Minute Books, Vol I., BMHS, 18.



currency per month.<sup>152</sup> Sometimes the parish dealt with children they believed abandoned. In 1675, Parish authorities decided that Edward Lissle, a “poor child,” be placed in the care of Mary Croome, until “the father of the said child be sought out to maintain the said child.”<sup>153</sup> The mobility of Barbados’s transient poor settler community temporarily solved problems of vagrancy on Barbados but posed new challenges in the form of children left behind for the parish.

The parish’s interest in re-creating settler families extended even to the children of settlers the colonial state put to death. In 1661, when the colonial government executed Elizabeth White for murder, the parish took care to provide for her infant child. For the most part, the parish reacted to the problem of parentless children in Bridgetown by re-creating settler families. The parish paid its parishioners in need of the extra income to open up their homes in the port and shelter and feed orphans and abandoned children. The system, although functioning within a colonial context, replicated patterns of almsgiving established by English parishes in the sixteenth-century.

The extent to which the parish acted within Bridgetown to re-create settler families can be measured through the ways they attempted to organize the care of the parish orphans. Rather than give children alms or charity directly, elites tried to place these vulnerable children of white settler parents into the care of parishioners, often women who received a monthly stipend in return for caring for a parish child. In 1656, for example, the minute books record that “the wife of Robert Stone” cared for an orphaned or abandoned child in exchange for a certain sum of currency.<sup>154</sup> Out of the 35 documented cases of orphan-care, only one, in 1664, indicated that an orphaned

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<sup>152</sup> St Michael Vestry Minute Books, Vol I., BMHS, 69.

<sup>153</sup> St Michael Vestry Minute Books, Vol I., BMHS, 108.

<sup>154</sup> St Michael Parish Minute Books, BMHS, 6.

child, Elizabeth Payne, would be kept and raised by a male parishioner, John Gaynes. Beyond filling crucial parts of the town's service economy through operating taverns, colonial women in Bridgetown helped parish leaders raise vulnerable children within the boundaries of the settler society.

With every passing year, however, the parish's commitment to re-creating settler families weakened as the expansion of the sugar economy drove poorer settlers to greener pastures and raised planters and merchants needs for skilled labor. As the labor needs of elites in Bridgetown and Barbados changed during the 1670s, the parish became more willing to bind orphans out to master-artisans as apprentices. In 1675, for example, the parish bound John Hosskins, described as a parish boy, to the barber John Spencer for seven years. The agreement between the parish and Spencer stipulates that "the said Spencer to teach ye said John Hosskins his trade and to cause him to be taught to read and write."

In the 1670s and 1680s, colonial elites grew increasingly concerned about Barbados's ability to recruit working-class English men to fill crucial roles in the island's artisan-economy and militia.<sup>155</sup> Given these contexts, it is unsurprising that the parish addressed these port artisans' labor needs by drawing from the town and parish's orphans. And by stipulating that artisans like Spencer provided good care and education, the parish tried to ensure that these orphans grew up firmly within the colonial society.

Alongside the orphaned, a crucial part of the parish's efforts to re-create poor white settler families, the parish considered the disabled, aged, or ill deserving of alms. In 1665, the vestry alms

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<sup>155</sup> Gary Puckrein, *Little England: Plantation Societ and Anglo-Barbadian Politics, 1627-1700* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 142–45.

list specified the ailments its vulnerable parishioners faced. Robert Allen had a “Canker in nose” and received £100 sugar-currency per month. William Hale and William Wetforte were both blind and received the same monthly sum of £100 sugar currency for their subsistence. The vestry described Hugh Addley and his wife as “aged” and gave them similar pensions. Others, like Anthonie Persue, the parish considered particularly vulnerable. The vestry described him as a “boy, sick and lame” when they recorded that he would receive £100 sugar-currency per month. In 1666, when Mary Bell was “at present in a very weak condition and helpless,” the vestry gave her the same monthly sum for an indefinite period, as long as her weakened condition persisted.<sup>156</sup> In these early years of Barbados’s plantation society, the parish elite proved willing to divert at least some token resources to maintaining those poorer white settlers without obvious value to the sugar economy.

In moments of particular crisis, such as a natural disaster, the vestry re-articulated its early commitment to extending care to the deserving poor by diverting aid away from the sugar economy. In 1675, for example, the vestry gave Temperance Taylor the lump sum of £500 sugar-currency “towards the repaire of her house” in the wake of a devastating hurricane.<sup>157</sup> While the colonial government responded to the 1675 hurricane and other disasters by repairing public structures and infrastructure, particularly fortifications, the vestry assumed care for settlers without the resources of credit to rebuild broken homes and livelihoods.

Starting in the mid-1660s, however, an alternative method for controlling the rising poverty of Barbados’s lower settler classes emerged in the form of a parish almshouse in Bridgetown. As

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<sup>156</sup> St Michael Vestry Minute Books, Vol I., BMHS, 63-69.

<sup>157</sup> St Michael Vestry Minute Books, Vol I., BMHS, 109-119.

early as September 1666, the vestry of St Michael parish began discussing turning buildings owned by the parish into an almshouse to better provision those poor whites who survived on the streets of Bridgetown. After starting a project to improve the town's church and cleaning the churchyard, the vestry ordered its churchwarden to see "That the house built for the parish be when finished made an almshouse of the parish and the poor kept at the Parish charge be all put there." Separate from the town's Gaol and the Cage (increasingly used in the seventeenth-century to confine enslaved runaways), the almshouse closely attached literally and institutionally to the island's Anglican establishment dealt exclusively with Bridgetown's population of chronically impoverished and vagrant.

The first entrants into the almshouse both reveal the parish's interest in preserving settler families and physically separating such vulnerable settler populations from the colony's emergent plantation landscapes. Among the first people to enter Bridgetown's almshouse in 1667 were Mary Hayes and her three children. Alongside the Hayes family, the vestry placed the sick in the almshouse to regulate and administer care, perhaps to ensure that poor white settlers did not turn to enslaved practitioners on sugar plantations. In 1671, the vestry appointed Oliver Gallhampton, "Apothecary and Surgeon" to "look after the poor of the parish at the almshouse." The vestry ordered Gallhampton "to physique and care the sick from time to time during the space of one yeare from ye date hereof, he being to visit the sick in his own person three times in the week and his servant visit them every day." For his work caring for the almshouse residents, Gallhampton earned £4000 a year in sugar-currency.<sup>158</sup> The vestry's efforts to improve the almshouse emphasized the central role the structure held as a site for providing medical care for the poor

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<sup>158</sup> St Michael Vestry Minutes, Vol I., BMHS, 95.

white community. In 1670, the vestry ordered the churchwardens to “cause convenient rooms to be made for fluxing” in the town’s almshouse, a space for either the purging of blood or diarrhea.<sup>159</sup> Rather than the colonial government, the parish, acting largely independently, worked to exert local power and resources to create such social and physical barriers in Bridgetown in the 1660s and 1670s.

While many of the almshouse inhabitants included children, family-groups, the sick or disabled, the vestry tried to organize the inhabitants to work somewhere in Bridgetown’s complex maritime economy. In 1669, vestry ordered that “ye poor be kept at work by picking acombe or such other reasonable work.”<sup>160</sup> Beyond caring for the sick, the almshouse also functioned, like they did elsewhere in the English Atlantic world, as a mechanism of instilling discipline over the idle or vagrant poor. In the context of Barbados’s emergent slave society, the walls of the almshouse separated the white, settler poor from the emergent social geographies of the island’s enslaved.<sup>161</sup> In Bridgetown, the parish played an important role in drawing these distinctions by physically separating and confining the poor to the town’s almshouse.

While the almshouse separated the European poor from the rest of the island’s working population, increasingly made up of enslaved African peoples, the vestry removed poor whites from the colony altogether. Several of the alms distributed from the parish took the form of paying for transportation off Barbados. John Lambard, after having been given parish land to care for his family, received a further sum to ship him and his family to Jamaica, presumably to take advantage

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<sup>159</sup> St Michael Vestry Minutes, Vol I., BMHS, 86.

<sup>160</sup> St Michael Vestry Minutes, Vol I., BMHs, 87.

<sup>161</sup> Cecily Forde-Jones, “Mapping Racial Boundaries: Gender, Race, and Poor Relief in Barbadian Plantation Society,” *Journal of Women’s History* 10, no. 3 (June 20, 1998): 9–31,.

of the plentiful land opened by the English conquest in the mid-1650s. In 1676, a woman going by the name Urselah, received 20 shillings sterling for passage to Boston in the next ship heading to that port. The parish was less specific with William Ellis and simply ordered the churchwarden to make a contract with any shipmaster to remove Ellis from the island altogether.<sup>162</sup> From Bridgetown, the parish exercised its authority over the deserving poor white settlers, shaping the social geographies of the island's emerging plantation system.

The parish's enforcement of social boundaries extended beyond the dismal walls of the almshouse with its rooms for fluxing. Bridgetown, long the center of trade and the colony's political institutions, emerged a center of the island's social elite. The Anglican church, controlled by St Michael's parish, assumed a central role in the definition of the island's settler social hierarchy. One method in which the vestry informed the articulation of these social boundaries and hierarchies within settler society was the placing of pews in the parish church of St Michael's in the center of Bridgetown. In 1667, ordered "Mr Nicholas Prideaux and Mr Ralph Hartleye with all convient speed take order for ye placing and seating of inhabitants according to their degree and quality in the parish Church."<sup>163</sup>

Over the course of the 1670s, the parish and the island's colonial government both began to take notice of growing religious minorities as the parish continued to struggle with controlling the settler poor. In the 1660s, while the growth of Sephardi and Quaker communities went largely unnoticed by the island's planters and merchants in the colonial government, the parish acted to enforce new categories of social difference beyond the boundaries of the sugar plantation. Key

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<sup>162</sup> St Michael Vestry Minutes, Vol I., BMHS, 32, 85, 121.

<sup>163</sup> St Michael Vestry Minute Books, Vol I., BMHS, 74.

moments of colonial crisis in the mid-1670s spurred greater institutional action from the colonial government as it began to reckon with the implications of the religious and cultural diversity created by the tacit acceptance of Quaker and Sephardi diasporas in the 1660s.

### 3.5 Crisis of the Mid-1670s

In the 1670s, just a short walk the Sephardi neighborhood of Bridgetown centered on *Nidhe Yisrael* and Swan street, hundreds of English colonists gathered together to attend the yearly meetings the Society of Friends held at their largest meeting house on the corner of James and Tudor streets. Like their Sephardi neighbors on Swan street, the town's Quakers represented a religious minority in Anglican Barbados despite sharing cultural origins with the island's merchant and planter elite. And like the port's Jews, Bridgetown's Quakers made up one node in a sprawling Atlantic diaspora that, while centered in London, stretched from the English metropole to colonies in North America and the Caribbean.<sup>164</sup> On Barbados, Bridgetown and its Meeting Houses served as the center of Quaker activity and spiritual life. While many aspects of the Quaker theology may have challenged the principles of Barbados's slave society and the planter class, the community's

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<sup>164</sup> On the Atlantic origins of the Quaker community and their role in seventeenth-century Barbados in addition to Gragg's work, see: Katherine Gerbner, "The Ultimate Sin: Christianising Slaves in Barbados in the Seventeenth Century." *Slavery & Abolition* 31.1 (2010): 57–73; Block, Kristen. "Cultivating Inner and Outer Plantations: Property, Industry, and Slavery in Early Quaker Migration to the New World." *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 8.3 (2010): 515–548.

leaders and most successful figures found, like some of their Jewish neighbors, a measure of financial success and stability in the 1650s and 1660s. This relative invisibility ended in the 1670s, as a growing number of colonial institutions took notice of these communities and sought to curtail their influence in Barbados.

By the 1670s, the presence of Quakers in Bridgetown was marked in the town's built environment. In Barbados, many of the wealthiest of the newly-convinced Quakers were Bridgetown merchants like Richard Forstall. Forstall owned nearly 316 acres of plantations in Barbados but styled himself as a merchant and held extensive properties in Bridgetown. Not only did he donate the use of one of his buildings to serve as the Quaker meetinghouse on James Street, but also gave a nearby plot of land to serve as a Quaker cemetery. Before his generous donations in the 1670s, the island's Quakers used their gardens as burial grounds. Such donations and the needs of a growing religious community demanded centralization of the Society of Friends of Barbados in Bridgetown.

With the community's spiritual life centralized in Bridgetown in the 1670s, itinerant preachers could more easily reach new converts. In 1670, George Fox, the Society's English founder visited Barbados, arriving first to preach in Bridgetown. Fox attracted interest from Quaker and non-Quaker alike. Planters and the colonial elite travelled to Bridgetown to hear Fox preach, energizing the convinced and enabling others to find inner light. After Fox's visit, the centralization of the community in Bridgetown grew. Barbados's Quakers began meeting not only for religious gatherings on Sunday but also at local meetings mapped roughly onto the island's Anglican parochial system. On a more local level, Friends were now encouraged to meet once every six weeks and every quarter at Friends' houses in the countryside. But the ultimate forum for island-wide decisions took place in Bridgetown at two monthly meetings held at the Friend's



meetinghouse on James Street.<sup>165</sup> In Bridgetown, the island's community came together to guide the social life of the community and answer its most fundamental questions of spiritual life amidst the hostility of the colony's Anglican church.

Quaker centralization in Bridgetown alongside the town's Sephardim made both communities more visible to the island's colonial elite, enabling the town's parish to view such communities as exploitable for their resources. Despite greater visibility, in the first half of the 1670s, Sephardim in particular were able to earn the protection of the colonial government. The vestry of St Michael's parish viewed Sephardim as a source of income for the over-stretched colonial institution. Beginning in the late 1660s and into the 1670s, St. Michael's parish disproportionately taxed Bridgetown's Jews. Sephardim represented at most two percent of Barbados's seventeenth-century settler population in the mid-seventeenth century. Nevertheless, they paid a significant portion of the parish's annual levies. In 1670, for example, the St Michael's vestry ordered £50,000 of sugar-currency for repairing the parish highways. The town's inhabitants would pay £34,000 of that sum, while the Jews would pay £16,000.<sup>166</sup> In the early years of the 1670s, Sephardim on Barbados still felt empowered enough to seek redress from the island's London-appointed governor, William Willoughby. In 1671, leading Sephardi merchants complained directly to Willoughby about the parish's extortionary taxes. While the governor re-affirmed the vestry's ability to tax the Jewish community, Willoughby intervened on behalf of the community, persuading the vestry to lower its rate.

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<sup>165</sup> Gragg, *The Quaker Community on Barbados: Challenging the Culture of the Planter Class*, 81–82.

<sup>166</sup> Minutes of the St Michael Parish Vestry, BMHS, 89.

In the 1670s, Sephardim continued to earn the protection of the island's colonial government with the arrival of a new colonial governor from London, Jonathan Atkins. In 1674, shortly after Atkin's arrival, the Assembly passed an act with Atkin's approval "appointing how the testimony of the People of the Hebrew nation shall be admitted in all Courts and Causes." Before this act, the law only allowed for testimony in Barbados's courts by free Englishmen willing to swear on a Christian bible. This act allowed Jewish people (if they were considered "Men of Credit and Commerce") to swear on "the five books of Moses, in such manner and form as is usual, and the religion of the said Nation doth admit."<sup>167</sup> In the context of Bridgetown's maritime commerce driven by high levels of planter debt, the inability of Sephardim to present testimony in the island's courts represented a serious handicap in their ability to negotiate mercantile relationships with the island's planters, English merchants and ships' captains.

Before 1675, both Sephardim and Quakers enjoyed a period of relatively quiet growth and the slow extension of acceptance by the island's colonial government if not the larger settler society. This changed in 1675 as a series of crises de-stabilized Barbados's settler society and concerned the colonial government. First a hurricane wrecked the plantation economy, ruining crops and damaging buildings across the island. In the wake of the hurricane, the colonial government learned of a growing conspiracy among the island's enslaved population. For the island's planters and colonial government, the conspiracy of 1675 represented an especially grave threat to the colony's security. The result was a shift away from the parochial power structure that defined elite's management of Bridgetown's social and cultural diversity towards a system marked by the greater intervention of the colonial state.

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<sup>167</sup> Hall, *Acts Passed in the Island of Barbados*, 94.

The crisis of the mid-1670s, while of profound importance to the ways settlers governed Bridgetown, originated in the island's transatlantic slave trade and the island's plantation system. The news of an island-wide conspiracy of Akan-speaking peoples to replace the colonial government with a reconstructed west African kingdom, proved sensational enough to merit inclusion in an anonymously-written pamphlet published in London in 1676.<sup>168</sup> The pamphlet, *Great Newes from the Barbadoes*, published in London in 1676, was included alongside a raft of crises shaking England's imperial projects in the Atlantic world.<sup>169</sup> From the indigenous resistance led by Metacom in New England to the joint insurrection of working poor, indentured servants, and enslaved people of Bacon's rebellion in the Chesapeake, the pamphlet-makers included "A True and Faithful Account of the Grand Conspiracy of the *Negroes* against the *English*." The pamphlet described the alleged plot for enslaved African people of mostly Akan-speakers to rise-

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<sup>168</sup> *Great newes from the Barbadoes, or, A True and faithful account of the grand conspiracy of the Negroes against the English and the happy discovery of the same with the number of those that were burned alive, beheaded, and otherwise executed for their horrid crimes: with a short discription of that plantation*, (London: 1676) 1-14.

<sup>169</sup> These crises included descriptions of King Philip's War and Bacon's Rebellion. For the connections between King Phillips War in New England and Barbados see: Lindford Fisher, "'Dangerous Designes': The 1676 Barbados Act to Prohibit New England Indian Slave Importation." *William and Mary Quarterly* 71.1 (2014): 99-124; for a dated but influential interpretation of Bacon's Rebellion see: Edmund Morgan, Edmund. *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. New York: Norton, 1975); and a more recent interpretation of the Rebellion in the context of colonial Virginia: Lorena Walsh, *Motives of Honor, Pleasure, and Profit: Plantation Management in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1607-1763*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010; and for Bacon's Rebellion within the context of resistance throughout the early modern Atlantic see: Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000) 136-137.

up and enthrone an Akan man, Cuffee, as the ruler of a liberated African state on Barbados. After discovering the rumors, the colonial government acted swiftly empowering the island's justices of the peace and militia officers to arrest and execute the alleged ringleaders in Speightstown, the island's second largest port behind Bridgetown.<sup>170</sup> The pamphlet-writers described the conspiracy's ringleader, "one *Tony*, a sturdy Rogue, a *Jew's Negro*" who had the temerity to taunt his executioners and the crowd gathered to watch his body burnt alive.<sup>171</sup>

In the wake of the 1675 conspiracy, the colonial government imposed anti-Quaker and antisemitic measures popular with the Anglican parochial authorities in Bridgetown. Practices that had largely gone unnoticed before 1675, suddenly found themselves not just the focus of irate Anglican clergy and antisemitic merchants but the concern of the colonial government. Of greatest interest to the colonial government after the Akan-conspiracy of 1675 was the unsettling Quaker practice of including enslaved people in their meetings.

The first part of this broader reaction against Quakers and Sephardim built on the colonial government's traditional responsibility over legislating the island's slave codes. Starting in April 1676, Barbados's Assembly passed a series of laws prohibiting Quakers from allowing enslaved people into their meetings. The first of such laws responded to Quaker practices of bringing the enslaved to meetings. During his visit, Fox admonished Quaker slave-owners to ameliorate the

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<sup>170</sup> In August 1675, a hurricane caused extensive damages throughout Barbados and in Bridgetown particularly. It seems like that for this reason Barbados's colonial government used Speightstown rather than Bridgetown as the place of execution. P.F. Campbell, *Some Early Barbadian History*, (Barbados: Caribbean Graphics & Letchworth Ltd., 1993) 239.

<sup>171</sup> *Great newes from the Barbadoes, or, A True and faithful account of the grand conspiracy of the Negroes against the English and the happy discovery of the same* (London, 1676), page 12.

deplorable conditions of enslaved peoples and indentured servants. They should, according to Fox, “deal mildly and gently with them and not use cruelty as the manner of some is and hath been.” This care extended to the spiritual lives of the enslaved. Fox organized meetings on individual plantations specifically to preach to enslaved African peoples, and before departing Fox instructed planters and merchants to include enslaved people in the Quaker’s spiritual community. Settlers had long feared the Quaker practice of allowing enslaved people to attend their meetings, but it was not until the 1675 conspiracy that assembly and the governor passed such restrictions into law.

The 1676 law banning the enslaved from Quaker meetings sought to foster a system of surveillance in places like Bridgetown to limit the practice. The law’s authors argued that enslaved peoples “taught in [Quaker] Principles...” represented a threat “...whereby the safety of this Island may be much hazarded.” Any informant who knew of and reported on the presence of enslaved African people at a Quaker meeting would receive half of a ten-pound sterling fine levied on either the Quaker owner of the enslaved person present or any of the free Quakers sharing space with an enslaved person.<sup>172</sup> Two years later, Atkin’s successor to the governorship, Richard Dutton ordered the act to continue another two years beyond its initial mandate with slight modifications in the fines and punishments meted out to Quakers violating the law.

After banning enslaved people from Quaker meetings, the colonial government took active measures to further limit the spread of Quakerism among the island’s Anglican settlers, extending the colonial reaction against Quakers into the late 1670s. Two laws passed in 1676 and 1678 laws required anyone trying to “keep any School or Schools, to instruct any Child or Children” to take the oath of allegiance and supremacy before a Justice of the Peace (JP), measures which would

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<sup>172</sup> Hall, *Acts Passed in the Island of Barbados*, 97-98.

effectively ban Quakers, unable to swear or make oaths, from operating schools. School-keepers refusing to take an oath, almost certainly Quakers, would face three-month imprisonment and a fine of £3000 in muscovado sugar. To limit proselytizing, the same laws ordered that only “no person or persons whatsoever, that is not an Inhabitant and resident of this Island, and hath been so for the space of twelve months together, shall hereafter publickly discourse or preach at the Meetings of the *Quakers*.”<sup>173</sup> Such a clause prohibited the landless, itinerant preachers that had done so much to build the community in the 1650s and 1660s. The colonial crises of the mid-1670s ushered in a period of repression against Quaker settlers that more directly brought the colonial government into intervening in Bridgetown’s social and cultural geographies.

In the 1680s, these colonial efforts to repress the challenges posed by Quaker practices began to specifically target the Society of Friend’s meeting house in Bridgetown. In 1680, when Richard Dutton arrived on Barbados to take over the governorship, he heeded the warnings of his council and ordered Bridgetown’s constables to go to the Tudor Street meeting house and pull “down the Seats, Pews, Desks or Stages” and shutter the doors to the building. Ultimately, the island’s deputy provost-marshall did not follow through on the whole-sale destruction of the meeting house but did bar the entrance to the house, forcing the town’s Quakers to gather outside in the town’s streets. Under Dutton, more hardships followed. Quakers refusing to serve in the island’s militia or pay parish taxes faced heavy fines, imprisonment, and seizure of property. Other members of the community faced physical violence, either at the hands of colonial officials according to law or spontaneous violence meted out by colonists in Anglican churches or the island’s towns. Such was the case when two Quakers rode through one of the island’s port towns

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<sup>173</sup> Hall, *Acts Passed in the Island of Barbados*, 102-103.

and encountered a crowd that beat them after they refused to drink at a tavern. “They tossed the two Quakers in front of their horses and ‘whipt the Horses to make them tread upon’ the men.” Then, after first pelting the pair with stones, the crowd tossed them from the wharves into the waters of Carlisle Bay.<sup>174</sup> Bridgetown became not only a key site of individual Anglican violence against Quakers but also an arena for the colonial government to visibly repress a particularly threatening religious community.

Although more directly implicated in the Akan conspiracy of 1675 than the Quakers, settlers reacted more slowly and haphazardly against Sephardim and the colonial government’s response to this popular antisemitism proved much more muted than reprisals against Quakerism. Unlike their Quaker neighbors, Sephardim were geographically concentrated in the island’s ports and largely excluded from owning the ultimate source of colonial power, sugar plantations.<sup>175</sup> While Quakers counted members of the planter elite among their ranks in the seventeenth-century, Sephardim were uniformly excluded from these powerful social circles. Individual Sephardim achieved wealth, stability, and stature in Bridgetown but remained significantly marginalized. Perhaps because of this relative marginalization, colonial reaction against Sephardim in Bridgetown and Barbados as a whole remained significantly less acute following the colonial crises of the mid-1670s.

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<sup>174</sup> Gragg, *The Quaker Community on Barbados: Challenging the Culture of the Planter Class*, 147-149; Joseph Besse, *A Collection of the Sufferings of the People Called Quakers for a Testimony of a Good Conscience*. vol 2., (London, 1753) 290-219, 327-328 .

<sup>175</sup> On the divergent geographies and status of Quakers and Sephardim on Barbados see: Welch, *Slave Society in the City: Bridgetown, Barbados, 1680-1834*, 119–21; Gragg, *The Quaker Community on Barbados: Challenging the Culture of the Planter Class*, 38–58.

At least some settlers, in particular English merchants in Bridgetown, believed that the governor, council, and assembly should take legislative or executive action to not only repress the growth of the island's Sephardi community but effectuate their removal from the island. In 1681, shortly after the arrival of the newly appointed governor from London, Sir Richard Dutton, a group of English colonists delivered a petition to Barbados's Assembly calling for the complete removal of Jews from Barbados. This was not the first time these petitioners had approached the colonial government with such a proposal. Before Dutton's arrival, they had apparently sent a similar petition to Dutton's predecessor, Sir Jonathan Atkins. Neither Dutton nor Atkins acted on such proposals, nor did they mention such requests in their frequent reports back to London. Their silence on these reports speaks to the apathy the imperial government felt about the presence of Jewish foreigners in Barbados. Most of Barbados's planters seemed to share London's apathy towards Bridgetown's Jews. Some of Bridgetown's merchants, at least, believed that the colonial government, its governor and council, might take action and support such a proposal.

The language of the 1681 petition deployed traditional expressions of Christian antisemitism but originated in the specificities of mercantile competition in Bridgetown and sought to prompt greater intervention in Bridgetown by the island's English colonial government. The petition framed its accusations of disloyalty amongst the island's Sephardim in the broadest terms possible. The petitioners accused Jews of "barbarous inhumanity and subtle conspiracy... in general against all Christendom..."<sup>176</sup> They narrowed their focus particularly to Jewish plotting

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<sup>176</sup> 'America and West Indies: June 1681,' in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Vol 11, 1681-1685*, ed JW Fortescue (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1898), 65-80. *British History Online*, accessed March 25, 2019.



against England in the vague form of “they have already given, as there is too much reason to believe, intelligence to her enemies and will do the same again.” In the context of Barbados, the petitioners referred to the inter-colonial trade that made Bridgetown’s Sephardi community both an asset for the town’s trade and a potential source of tension during times of war. Submitted by Jeremiah Cooke, Robert Draper, Thomas Morris, and John Smith, the leaders behind this antisemitic petition were all English merchants in Bridgetown.

While Barbados’s colonial government rejected such extreme measures as expulsion, the island’s Assembly did pass restrictive legislation that reinforced the exclusion of Sephardim from directly participating in the plantation economy in the 1680s. In 1688, the island’s Assembly passed a revised slave code that built and expanded on the earlier act passed in 1661. One of the new clauses to this act curtailed Sephardi ownership of enslaved people. The new clause argued that

the Planter’s necessity doth compel them for the management only of their Lands, to keep so vast a stock of Negroes and other Slaves, whose desperate lives and great numbers become dangerous to them and all other the Inhabitants; that therefore such who are not bound up by that necessity, in having Plantations of their own, or hired Land, may not increase the danger to this Island, by keeping Negroes or other Slaves to hire out to others.

The English law makers concluded, therefore, that “no person of the *Hebrew* nation residing in any Sea-port Town” could own or employ more than one enslaved person. They included only one exception for Sephardim who were made English denizens by a royal Letter Patent, a lengthy process reserved for the wealthiest members of the community. Even with this limited exception the Assembly warned that denizenized Jews should “keep no more than for their own use.”<sup>177</sup> Such legal codes did not share the religious antisemitism of the earlier petitions but

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<sup>177</sup> Hall, *Laws of Barbados*, (London, 1762) page 119-120.

nevertheless articulated a skepticism held by English colonists of the economic relations, such as hiring enslaved people, with Jewish residents in Bridgetown.

### **3.6 The Persistence of Religious Diversity**

By the end of the 1680s, Barbados's colonial government had endeavored to pass and enforce legislation that, by intervening in Bridgetown's emergent social and cultural geographies in the 1670s responded to a moment of colonial crisis and built on the settler's popular anti-Quaker and antisemitic beliefs. These laws sought to regulate the degree to which religious community engaged with the institution of slavery. For Quakers, the laws passed in the 1670s primarily sought to limit Quaker meetings and their inclusion of enslaved people. Laws passed in the 1680s sought to restrict Sephardim from engaging in the island's larger slave labor markets. This period of colonial religious repression, however, did little to limit individual Sephardim and Quakers from finding fortunes, success, and building community in Barbados and Bridgetown. Despite these years of tightening restrictions on these communities, they nevertheless appear to have continued to thrive in the island's principal port towns.

However, in spite of these changes, these communities preserved their integrity through whatever means available to them, whether that was assimilation into the formal avenues of colonial power available to the Quakers or through diasporic connections available to the island's Sephardim. Wills from the 1680s reveal the social geographies upon which Sephardim in Bridgetown built their lives in the context of colonial backlash against non-Anglicans. These scattered wills and depositions, some written in English, but for the most part written in the community's native Portuguese and Spanish, recorded how the complex social geographies of

diaspora shaped the island's earliest Jewish community. These connections and relations existed on multiple scales. In 1682, for example, depositions taken before Barbados's secretary describes how Jacob Pathecoe lived in Bridgetown with his sister and brother-in-law, Rachel and Moses Arrobus. During Pathecoe's final illness in his sister and brother-in-law's house, he kept company with two Sephardi friends, Daniel Bueno and Samuel Navarro.<sup>178</sup> For the most part, however, these wills describe diasporic connections spanning the early modern Atlantic world that connected the insular world of Swan street and *Nidhe Yisrael* to Portuguese Brazil, Amsterdam, and London.

Diasporic and transatlantic connections enabled individual Sephardim to carve out a place of themselves on Barbados in this moment of planter backlash against free religious and social outsiders. In July 1685, for example, Aaron Navarro, the son of a prominent Sephardi merchant in Amsterdam, died in Bridgetown. Aaron, as his will testifies to, formed part of an expansive trade operation that included his two brothers (Moseh and Jacob), one described as a merchant "*de Brazil*" and another "*de Amsterdam*." Dying without immediate family, Navarro asked his two surviving brothers to settle his business in these two major poles of the Sephardi mercantile diaspora in the early modern Atlantic world.<sup>179</sup> Such connections speak to the methods Sephardim used to weather this moment of planter backlash. This pattern of Sephardi settlement in the Atlantic world may have originated in sixteenth-century mass expulsions and forced-conversions of Iberian Jews, but came to sustain communities in places like Bridgetown.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> RB6/12.247-248, BDA.

<sup>179</sup> RB6/10/442-445, BDA.

<sup>180</sup> Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert, *A Nation upon the Ocean Sea* (New York, US: Oxford University Press, 2007). This pattern of Sephardi settlement in the Atlantic world originated in sixteenth-century mass expulsions and forced-conversions of Iberian Jews. Iberian oppression spurred Sephardi migration to anti-Habsburg, Protestant, and

Through such diasporic connections, Bridgetown's Sephardim were able to face an increasingly hostile political climate for Sephardim and Quakers in the 1680s. By the 1690s, Sephardim gained a measure of economic security and status in Bridgetown through these mercantile connections. The wealthiest merchants of the community owned property in buildings closer to Carlisle Bay on the main thoroughfare, Cheapside. Listed among the Cheapside property owners in 1692 were prominent members of the town's Jewish community, Lewis Dies, David Nameas, David Israel, and the widow Hester Navarro. From the parochial tax lists, Lewis Dies's house on Cheapside ranked as the fourth highest assessed building on the street at £480 in sugar; just slightly above the £400 in sugar the RAC paid for its office and warehouse on the same street.<sup>181</sup> More important than real estate, members of Bridgetown's Sephardi community owned enslaved people, a critical marker of success and social rank in Barbados's nascent slave society. In his 1685 will, David Deacosta left a bequest of "*los Negros de caza, Namadas Deana, y Una Oria, Beas y Vos Muchacho llamado Gersou Catalina*" to his son-in-law and daughter, Daniel and

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relatively tolerant Dutch Republic. While some left their homes, others stayed to become conversos or crypto-Jews. Surviving principally in Portugal, these communities became active participants in the Portuguese colonization of and trade with Brazil.<sup>180</sup> When the Dutch attacked Brazil in the 1630s, seeking to carve out a colony on the American mainland, crypto-Jews and New Christians welcomed the invasion as an opportunity to escape Iberian oppression. Anchored in Dutch Brazil, Sephardim began to specialize in the sugar trade which began in the 1640s to include English producers on Barbados. With the Portuguese reconquest of Dutch Brazil in the mid-1650s, Sephardim turned increasingly to these English producers as sources of supply in the sugar trade with Amsterdam, then one of the largest markets for sugar in Europe. After 1654, the Sephardi diaspora spanned the remnants of Dutch Brazil in Surinam to Dutch Curaçao as well as the sugar colonies of Barbados and to a lesser extent French Martinique.

<sup>181</sup> St. Michael Parish Levybooks, (1692), BDA.

Sarah Bueno Enriques.<sup>182</sup> As in all slave societies, the trappings of success for Sephardim included direct ownership of enslaved peoples, even outside the plantation economy in ports like Bridgetown.

By the 1680s, despite years of anti-Quaker measures coming from the colony's governors and assembly, Bridgetown, in the large parish of St. Michael, still had the highest concentration of Quakers on the island. Unlike the town's Sephardi community centered in Swan street around *Nidhe Israel*, Quaker settlers remained spread out across the town. The most successful Friends, however, owned property in Cheapside, the town's commercial center and the street closest to the waterfront. Along with Richard Forstall, the Quaker merchants of Cheapside owned thirteen percent of the 102 properties listed on the parish tax lists of 1686. The town not only attracted wealthy Quaker merchants but also the greatest proportion of the island's landless Quakers, categorized on Barbados's censuses as freemen, lived in the island's two ports, Bridgetown and Speightstown. So, while Quakers were not as geographically concentrated as the town's Sephardim, they made up a significant part of the port's free population in the latter-half of the seventeenth century.

Through the town's mercantile economy, Quakers found ways to preserve their families' fortunes despite the growing hostility of the island's colonial government to their religious lives. By the end of the seventeenth century, Barbados's Quakers still came from all social classes and occupations in the island's settler society, a legacy of the widespread successes itinerant preachers had in the 1650s and 1660s. Bridgetown's Quaker community displayed this social stratification. Some, like Richard Forstall who donated land for a Quaker cemetery in Bridgetown also owned

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<sup>182</sup> RB6/10/341, BDA.

sugar plantations on Barbados, while others, like Hugh Hall were merchants in Bridgetown.<sup>183</sup> Hall, originally a New England merchant moved to Barbados and became a Quaker sometime in the 1660s or 1670s. In the late 1690s, Hall left his sons, Hugh Jr, Joseph, John, and Benjamin parts and parcels of two significant plantations in Pennsylvania, just outside of the newly founded Quaker settlement of Philadelphia.<sup>184</sup> Merchants like Hall and Forstall, in addition to having plantations, both on and off the island, also acted as crucial factors for larger Quaker sugar planters as well as other English colonists. Often through kinship ties fostered through the Society of Friends, these Quaker-merchants made commercial and market decisions that brought a degree of stability to individual Quaker families in Bridgetown.

Quaker families like the Forstalls and Halls lived in Bridgetown with less affluent families of shopkeepers and minor merchants that survived the period of Quaker repression. Among these shopkeepers and middling merchant-provisioners to survive this period of political repression was Richard Poor, a member of a Quaker family active in business between 1699 and 1713. His account book offers a rare glimpse into his business as a provisioner, the struggles he faced in making the transition towards becoming a transatlantic importer in his own right. Poor began his business as a shopkeeper selling perishables imported from the young Quaker colony around Philadelphia. Never yielding high profit margins, Poor nevertheless found the means to bring importing manufactured goods and textiles from Britain by the 1710s. For the rest of his life, Poor remained a middling merchant and provisioner, living and working in town's secondary commercial

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<sup>183</sup> For a discussion of Hall's mercantile activities in the seventeenth century see: Smith, *Slavery, Family, and Gentry Capitalism in the British Atlantic: The World of the Lascelles, 1648-1834*, 11–37.

<sup>184</sup> RB6/1/1-4, BDA.

thorough-fare, High Street.<sup>185</sup> Such families like the Poors built their family's personal fortunes through transatlantic trade driven by the island's sugar and slave economy.

Despite this social stratification and Quaker's practice of admitting the enslaved to their meetings and manumitting enslaved people in their wills, Quakers in Bridgetown and throughout Barbados remained enthusiastic slave-owners both before and after the period of colonial repression in the late 1670s and 1680s. Investment in slavery underpinned these families' ability to survive a particularly repressive period that followed 1675. Writing his will in 1698, Hugh Hall expressed his desire to be buried "According to the Plaine ... Manner of the People of God called Quakers" while leaving sixteen enslaved peoples by name amongst his bequests to his family.<sup>186</sup> Other Quakers like Forstall and the wealthy planter Lewis Morris depended on hundreds of enslaved workers to operate their sugar plantations.<sup>187</sup>

Quakers and Sephardim were not the only non-Anglican minorities to thrive in Bridgetown during the years in which the colonial government attempt to repress these minorities within settler society. In 1690, Edward Prince, a "practitioner in physicks," died leaving behind a will with multiple bequests. While Prince asked to be buried in the new church yard in Bridgetown, also asking his executors to "give unto Mr Vaughan the minister of the Presbyterian meeting in said town a Ring of 40 shillings price."<sup>188</sup> From such references, it becomes apparent that Bridgetown's English community was not uniformly Anglican nor was its religious dissident community entirely

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<sup>185</sup> S D Smith, "The Account Book of Richard Poor, Quaker Merchant of Barbados," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (n.d.): 605–28.

<sup>186</sup> RB6/1/1-4, BDA.

<sup>187</sup> Block, *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean: Religion, Colonial Competition, and the Politics of Profit*.

<sup>188</sup> RB6/41/452-456, BDA.

made up of the Society of Friends. Quakers, Presbyterians, and Sephardi Jews all shared the streets of Bridgetown with the island's working poor, including those of European descent. Despite fierce colonial reaction to the religious diversity of the island's free settler society in the wake of the 1675 conspiracy, such diversity continued to mark the port's cultural and social geographies. The colonial government's reactions to the conspiracy of 1675 marked a step forward in the ways the colonial government intervened in governing Bridgetown in the seventeenth century.

### **3.7 “The Fewer the Better”: Civic Improvement and the Decline of Indentured Servitude**

Mirroring the growing interest of the governor, counsel, and assembly in governing Bridgetown's religious outsiders within settler society, individual planters and merchants increasingly intervened in Bridgetown's built environment to articulate social hierarchies within the island's free settler society. Over the course of this period, however, the rapid expansion of the island's enslaved population brought the plight of the settler poor to the attention of the colonial government. Concern with the overall social health of settler society spread from the local level of the island's Anglican parish system to the wider planter elite. Planters and colonial elite expressed these concerns in a number of ways, from planter instructions to plantation managers warning against the detrimental effects of the island's poor settlers on enslaved workers' discipline to elite civic projects in Bridgetown.

Leading planters wrote publicly and privately about their distrust of indentured servants and poor white labor on sugar plantations. Henry Drax, the son of sugar pioneer James Drax, left detailed instructions for the management to his estate when he returned to England in 1679. Drax's instructions ended up being circulated amongst West Indian and English planters, eventually



forming the basis for a popular booklet on plantation management published in 1755. Drax's attitudes shed light on the growing distrust planters held towards their indentured labor in the second-half of the seventeenth century. "I shall Not leave you many white Servants," Drax instructed his manager, Richard Harwood, "the ffewer the better." Those Drax did agree to send would be "tradesmen as I Can possibly procure." In describing how he wanted Harwood to manage his labor, Drax warned that he should be "Sewere in punishing all Vice and Espetially drunknese that being oft times the origanell of all others and is the vice the Whits are Much adicted to."<sup>189</sup>

By 1680, planters like Drax had formed a critical set of assumptions about indentured servants brought from the British Isles. The Catholicism and Irish heritage of many indentured servants brought over in the 1650s surely must have contributed to this evolving set of assumptions about the desirability of employing indentured servants in the cane fields, mills, and boiling houses. The few that Drax would bring over in the future would fill specialized positions as artisans or managerial overseers. As planters brought fewer indentured servants to Barbados and distrusted those they currently employed, former indentured servants who survived their indentures during the second half of the seventeenth-century faced an uncertain future on the island as they were simultaneously protected from future labor on sugar plantations but distrusted by the island's propertied classes. The uncertain position and general instability of these figures within settler society demanded new articulations of the island's shared white settler culture.

The continued precarity of indentured servants in Bridgetown and elsewhere around the island continued to provoke parochial interventions. A significant portion of the community ended

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<sup>189</sup> Plantation Author and Peter Thompson, "Henry Drax's Instructions on the Management of a Seventeenth-Century Barbadian Sugar," *Third Series*, vol. 66, 2009,.

up on what were called “rab lands,” parts of the island unfit for sugar agriculture but suitable for growing root vegetables and other provisions. On the margins of the large sugar estates, poor whites eked out a living from these less-profitable grounds. At least some of the island’s poor whites and former indentured servants turned towards the sea. In 1676, for example, the vestry of St John’s parish along the rocky bays of the island’s east coast tried to protect a community of people “which draw there principle livelihood and subsistence by there trade and occupation of fishing by sale of part where of they supply there necessitates and with ye remainder feed there families.” The vestry put together a petition condemning the “greedy and avaricious desires of some person who make it there Endeavor to ingross the fishing to themselves.”<sup>190</sup> The vestry feared that if any one planter or planters managed to secure exclusive rights to these coastal fishing spots “it would inevitably bring them to so great poverty that they must either have relief from ye parish to supporte there families or be inforced to depart ye island.” Through an act of planter paternalism, the vestry hoped to keep these communities from starving and either going on the parish dole or fleeing the island altogether.

Alongside the persistent intervention of parochial governments, individual planters and merchants expressed their communal responsibility to the island’s white population through bequests to the island’s settler society and colonial institutions. Most bequests were modest contributions to the parish poor relief. A few were of greater size and significance. Like the poor relief organized by the parish, these legacy-bequests, while exceptional in their scale, suggest the degree in which individual planters and merchants who profited from sugar and slavery, tried to pour those profits into creating real and figurative symbols for a white, English community that

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<sup>190</sup> Vestry minutes of St John Parish, page 21 BMHS.,

extended beyond the planter and merchant classes. The concentration of these efforts in Bridgetown speaks to the importance that space held for elites trying to articulate the boundaries and principles of white supremacy in Barbados.

Despite expressing his disdain for former indentured servants and the carters that travelled Barbados's roads in his private instructions to his plantation manager, Henry Drax tried to establish a "Free College" in Bridgetown for the benefit of the island's general free settler society. While he's known by historians today for his instructions and writings on plantation management, Drax, the scion of one of Barbados's sugar and slave pioneers, owned considerable property in Bridgetown. Like his father James Drax, Henry owned a large storehouse facing the town's main commercial thoroughfare, Cheapside. His estate on Barbados firmly secured and family fortunes well-established, Drax returned to London early in the 1680s. In 1683, he sat down to write his will. As a document, Drax's will testifies to the enormous wealth his family amassed and the degree to which he wanted to preserve his family's legacy. Dying childless, Drax required his nephew and heir Thomas Shetterden to change his last name to Drax before formally inheriting the lion's share of his estate.<sup>191</sup> Beyond ensuring the survival of his family name, Drax sought to leave a permanent mark on the island's colonial society by endowing a school.

Leaving aside £2000 sterling for his executors in England and Barbados, Drax hoped the money would go towards creating a "free school or College at the Bridgetown," an act which simultaneously expressed his hopes for the island's future and his own family's position within the hierarchy of the island's settler society. He hoped that this sum would go towards building this school three years after his decease and any remaining debts of the estate had been resolved. After

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<sup>191</sup> RB6/12/358-371, BDA.

building the school, Drax entrusted his executors to “make such Rules Orders and Constitutions for the said Government and continuance of the said Free schoole or College as by them or the survivor of them shall be adjudged convenient.” Pre-dating the establishment of Codrington College by three decades, Drax’s wish to establish a “Free schoole” represented the earliest attempt to create an academic institution on Barbados.<sup>192</sup> Drax, like Christopher Codrington in the early eighteenth century, and their counterparts in England and British North America, saw building schools as a grand work for the public good. This project was a means to create a permanent legacy, define the local symbols of social and cultural elitism, as well as educate a segment of the population. Across colonial North America, the first colleges, following Harvard, represented clear symbols of social class. Founded close to colonial political and commercial centers, places like Yale, Harvard, Brown, and Columbia functioned as institutions to train perspective clergymen or buttress the budding political careers of colonial lawyers or statesmen.<sup>193</sup> Drax’s plan to endow a College near Bridgetown seems to follow these North American patterns.

Like Drax, Richard Barrett, a wealthy merchant and member of the island’s colonial assembly, tried to leave a permanent symbol and legacy in Bridgetown after his death in the 1690s that articulated the personal hierarchies within the island’s propertied classes. Barrett’s will,

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<sup>192</sup> Friend of the family and contemporary of Henry Drax, Christopher Codrington the younger left his expansive library to Christ Church College, Oxford University, but donated his land on Barbados, including 300 enslaved people to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel for founding a College. As an Anglican institution, Codrington College began operating as a College and school in the mid-eighteenth century. Codrington College continues to train its students for the clergy.

<sup>193</sup> John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, Third Edit (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2019).

unusual for its unstipulated manumission of an enslaved person, included a legacy-bequest that sought to start a significant public project of monumental purpose and scale. Barrett left to the “town of St. Michaels” a porcelain and metal “clock hand and Dyall,” valued at £400 sterling. He instructed his executors “to sett up the same clock in some convenient place as my executors shall think fitt.”<sup>194</sup> Mechanical clocks, a main-stay in most European cities by the seventeenth-century were critical parts of focusing communal life on the daily rhythms of market-places and market-principles. The public clocks were harbingers of the industrial imposition of time-discipline later in the eighteenth century.<sup>195</sup> Within the context of seventeenth-century Barbados, placing a clock in Bridgetown served as a way of creating a distinctive division of time from the highly regimented organization of time on sugar plantations. Where the rhythms of sugar cane’s growing season, harvesting, and processing dominated the lives of enslaved workers, the hourly movement of the tides and fluctuations of the river and swamp around the town defined life for workers and merchants along Carlisle Bay. Barrett’s public project, unrealized until the construction of a clock tower on St Michael’s church in the 1710s, sought to create a symbolic barrier around Bridgetown from the surrounding landscape dominated by sugar plantations and the specific time and work-discipline there. Barrett’s clock served as a way of reinforcing deferential social norms through elaborate social posturing in Bridgetown.

Like Barrett and Drax, many of Barbados’s planters and merchants considered Bridgetown an important place for social signaling. The concentration of these efforts to display public wealth went beyond the convenience of government and church institutions being concentrated in the

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<sup>194</sup> RB6/3/188, BDA.

<sup>195</sup> E.P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” *Past and Present* No. 38 (1967): 56–97.

town, but also because of the town's complex social hierarchy. In acerbic tones, an English observer in the early eighteenth century described social posturing and the role of port towns in such signaling. In his letters to England he included a list of the informal social distinctions used amongst Barbados's elite, "the windward gentry, the Bridge Beaux, the Scotland people, and the Leeward folks."<sup>196</sup> The author specifically tied Bridgetown to an elite colonial culture of opulence and social posturing. In Bridgetown, such social posturing extended into religious observance and churches. In 1695 John Pilgrim, for instance, sought to distinguish his family's social importance by requesting permission from the parish to have a separate and exclusive pew built in St Michael's church.<sup>197</sup> Such social jockeying and conspicuous consumption in Bridgetown and its churches helped define what it meant to be a part of Barbados's colonial society.

### **3.8 Building Bridgetown's "Middle" From Below**

While planters and the colonial elite engaged in civic projects meant to edify members of the planter class and direct the development of the island's settler society, artisans and middling merchants and shopkeepers in Bridgetown forged their own individual and communal success in the 1680s and 1690s. Their success in forging new patterns of trade and urban life laid the foundation for building a middling settler community in Bridgetown in the second-half of the seventeenth-century.

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<sup>196</sup> Sloane MS. 2302, letter 5, fol 14., British Library.

<sup>197</sup> St Michael Parish Minute Books, Vol II., BMHS, 59.

From tax lists and wills produced during the second half of the seventeenth century, colonial and parochial officials identified many of the men living in Bridgetown according to a specific trade as artisans. These figures, almost exclusively men, formed an important and understudied segment of the port's urban population during this critical period in the colony's social formation. Without being confined to any one neighborhood, artisans lived throughout the town, plying their trade alongside the merchants who imported provisions and manufactured goods from Europe and North America. The maritime economy made up a significant part of the town's laboring men. In tax lists and wills from the seventeenth century, seventeen men are referred to as sailors or mariners. The next four most frequently referenced trades in this historical documentation were coopers, butchers, masons, carpenters, and joiners. In total there were 26 identifiable trades carried out by men in Bridgetown, including one woman, Margaret Dally, named as a schoolmistress in the 1692 parish tax lists.<sup>198</sup> Before the eighteenth century, artisans made up a significant and pervasive part of the town's social landscape. The wills they left behind hint at the social strategies they used to compete in a colonial economy dominated by powerful merchants with transatlantic connections and immensely wealthy planters.

Wills of urban craftsmen suggest that Bridgetown's artisans brought with them traditional craft-solidarities; the legacies of trade-cultures in the provincial towns of seventeenth-century England that enabled certain parts of the island's poorer settler communities to survive the social upheavals of the seventeenth century. In 1682, the brasier, John Richeson fell ill and had his last will and testaments recorded for entry into the island's secretary's office in Bridgetown. Not particularly wealthy, Richeson left most of his modest (by planter standards at least) household

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<sup>198</sup> St Michael's Vestry Levy Books, 1692, BDA.

items to his daughter-law. To some of his friends he left clothes-items and rings worth a few shillings each. But to a business partner, Richard Forde, Richeson left “all my workeing Tooles,” presumably to enable his friend and partner to carry on a successful trade in town. Not only did Richeson set Forde up with the tools of his trade, he allowed him “the use of my shoppe for one yeares tyme for his best advantage.”<sup>199</sup> Similarly, in 1687, the blacksmith Thomas Litton left a fellow craftsmen a set of tools and a working space in his will. He left “John Freeman smith a small parcel of land in Palmetto Street to him and his heirs for ever which land I purchased of Anthony Freeman.” Additionally, he gave Freeman “several working tools in my custody that I had of his Father Wm Freeman.”<sup>200</sup> From his will, the blacksmith Litton seems to have been deeply entangled as a craftsman with a family of other smiths in Barbados, the Freemans. Within this group of Bridgetown smiths, workspaces and tools of the trade circulated amongst themselves. Like their English counterparts, Bridgetown’s artisans shared space and tools within the ranks of their craft; a means of economic and social survival. While some of the town’s craftsmen appear to have deployed traditionally English means of survival and work in the colonial environment, others aspired to not only survive this period of social upheaval but to eventually enable their families to enter the planter class.

The case of Simon Cooper is exemplary of how some of Bridgetown’s artisans and craftsmen pursued and achieved entrance into Barbados’s planter class. In 1668, Cooper first appears in Barbados’s colonial archives as a bricklayer hired by St Michael’s parish to assess and evaluate work done on the parish church in town. In the 1670s and 1680s, Cooper managed to

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<sup>199</sup> RB6/12/79-80, BDA.

<sup>200</sup> RB6/40/568-570, BDA.



secure lucrative contracts from the colonial government to expand and improve fortifications in Carlisle Bay. Records relating to this commission shows the scale of Cooper's operations. He owned a small fleet of boats, had access to a reliable source of stone material, and employed dozens of enslaved people to do the hard labor of transporting and placing masonry into Carlisle Bay and along the waterfront. While earning these commissions from the colonial government, Cooper appears to have continued to do work for Bridgetown's vestry, right up to the end of his life when he owned a plantation in St. Michaels. In 1693, Cooper built a loft for the parish-church's newly purchased and installed English pipe-organ.<sup>201</sup> When he died sometime in 1694, he left his widow and daughters a ten-acre plantation and enslaved people. A small-holding by seventeenth and eighteenth-century standards, Cooper nevertheless possessed enough land to count himself amongst the island's planter class. Cooper's rise from Bridgetown bricklayer, hired by the parish, to colonial contractor and planter mirrors the rise of Irishman Cornelius Bryan into the ranks of the English planter class after finding himself on the wrong side of the colonial law in the 1650s.<sup>202</sup> In both cases, ownership of enslaved African people represented the key to social mobility.

Alongside male-dominated shopkeepers and artisans in Bridgetown, a large group of widows carried on a multitude of businesses in the service sector while remaining socially marginalized within a patriarchal colonial society. The town's high mortality rates, evidenced in Bridgetown's parochial burial records, created a significant social block of widows with economic means to conduct important business in the service sector while remaining socially and politically marginalized from formal political power.

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<sup>201</sup> St Michael Parish Vestry Minutebooks, Vol II., BMHS, 49.

<sup>202</sup> Shaw, *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean: Irish, Africans, and the Construction of Difference*.

The existence of large numbers of widowed women appears to have encouraged gendered connections that fostered conducting business in the port's service sector. For example, when Anne Turpine, "widow of St Michael's town," died in May 1682, she left most of her estate to her son Henry Turpine and a granddaughter, Anne Willoughby. To her son, Henry, Anne left him "all that House or Tenmt conteyaining Eight by twentie feet in length and thirties feet in breadth backwards which lyes between the Houses wherein I now live." She left this house to her son and his heirs in perpetuity. While she gave her son and his children a house in Bridgetown, she left her granddaughter, Anne Willoughby "that house or Tenement commonly called or known by the name of the Bow Bell," likely a tavern or public house of some sort, a critical part of the port's service sector. The bequest included all the infrastructure necessary for carrying on the Bow Bell as a business in the service sector;

also one new piece of Building adjoyning to itt commonly known by the name of the Kitchen Roome over the Kitchen and one shopp below and also fifteen foote of ground backward behind the Bow Bell by me reserved and taken of the Yard wch my husband in his lityme purchased from Richard Baynes.

The final bequest Turpine left her granddaughter were two enslaved people, a child named Mingoe and a woman name Mall who she instructed her granddaughter to free from enslavement after seven years.<sup>203</sup> When considering how to leave her commercial enterprises behind, Turpine prioritized the women in her life.

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<sup>203</sup> RB6/12/211-215, BDA.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

In the mid-seventeenth century, multiple Atlantic diasporas converged in Bridgetown transforming the port's social and cultural life as well as the mechanisms and structures of colonial governance over the town. In the years after 1660, while the island's planters fully embraced enslaved labor, Quaker and Sephardi diasporas laid down significant roots in Bridgetown, fully establishing their communities in Barbados's principal port and colonial capital. Alongside these religious communities, former indentured servants and the island's working poor increasingly made their homes in Bridgetown. The concentration of these communities in Bridgetown in the mid-seventeenth century, strained the resources of Bridgetown's parochial institutions. The stresses of the sharp rise in the town's poor settler community as well as crises in the island's slave society in the 1670s encouraged the island's colonial government to increasingly police the social and cultural boundaries in Bridgetown, a key element of the port's governance.

#### 4.0 The Geographies of Slavery and Urban Governance, 1690-1710

In October 1692, four officers in Barbados's militia formed a commission to investigate reports of a plot among the island's enslaved people to revolt and overthrow the English colony's government. What followed was a month of torture, interrogations, executions, and exile for the accused slaves caught up in the conspiracy. With the plot unraveled by November, the colony arrested 200-300 enslaved people, executed 92 suspected conspirators, separating and shipping the rest to Jamaica, the Leeward Islands, or North America.<sup>204</sup> The slave conspiracy of 1692 and its aftermath represents a brief but critical moment in the early colonial history of Barbados's settler society; a crucial but overlooked turning point in the colony's relationship to how it governed and policed Bridgetown. In the 1670s and 1680s, parochial institutions had begun to cede some power to imperial ones and Bridgetown's remarkable, if limited, diversity became curtailed by hardening racial and religious lines. The threat of a slave revolt in 1692 served to further fragment power in Bridgetown as the colonial government looked to secure the port from the unrest and conflicts that marked Barbados's slave society within a period of sustained colonial crisis in the late-seventeenth century.

The colonial government's reactions to slave mobility and urban labor in the wake of the 1692 conspiracy laid the foundations for the way settlers and the colonial state surveilled and sought to control enslaved people in Bridgetown in the eighteenth century. Rather than emerging out of the general development of the island's plantation economy, the emergence of these new

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<sup>204</sup> Hilary McD. Beckles, *A History of Barbados: From Amerindian Settlement to Caribbean Single Market* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 51.

urban slave codes and practices resulted from a critical confluence of events and colonial crises, further emphasizing the fluidity and instability of Barbados's slave society long into the seventeenth century. This chapter re-interprets the role of enslaved resistance and mobility in this critical port town, highlighting the centrality of the port's social geography to the conspiracy's impact on Barbados's slave society.

Compared to Caribbean colonies like Jamaica or the Leeward Islands, Barbados experienced relatively few moments of mass enslaved resistance in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This relative quiet has led most historians of slave resistance and insurrection in the greater Caribbean to overlook the conspiracy of 1692 as an isolated moment of slave resistance in Barbados, perhaps emblematic of the general social tensions inherent to Caribbean slave societies but ultimately of little importance to Barbados's colonial development. The relative quiet of Barbados's eighteenth-century seems to justify this general dismissal of the importance of the 1692 conspiracy. Barbados would not experience a mass slave rebellion until 1816, well into an age of revolutions that witnessed widespread revolt and insurrection against slavery throughout the greater Caribbean.<sup>205</sup> Likewise, for the few historians of Bridgetown's slave society, the conspiracy is told primarily as a story of a broader plantation society and enslaved resistance to rural institutions, rather than a critical moment in the social and political development of settler society's relationship to Bridgetown. The conspiracy, situated in a period of profound upheaval in Barbados's settler society, reflected an emergent attitude among settler society about the fundamental dangers posed by the presence of Afro-Barbadians in Bridgetown to the colony's

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<sup>205</sup> Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies*, (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1982).

social stability and order. The threat of black insurrection impressed upon Barbados's colonial authorities the urgent need to govern and police Afro-Caribbean people in the island's principal port town.

By 1692, Bridgetown was not only a center of colonial commerce but a crucial node within the island's internal and informal marketing system through which the enslaved struggled to survive and build livelihoods beyond the confines of the plantation system. Within Bridgetown, multiple social and commercial geographies converged and overlapped. Merchants, ship's captains, and wealthy planters struck lucrative deals of transatlantic importance in the comfort of a tavern or on waterfront while the plantation enslaved, a few hundred feet away, furtively traded basic food staples and provisions in the town's back streets and alleys.

Contributing to the restructuring of the town's social geographies was a general growth in the port's population. In this feverish period, Bridgetown itself grew in leaps and bounds. By the late seventeenth century, Bridgetown population rose from 3000 in 1680 to over 10,000 just over three decades later in 1712.<sup>206</sup> Much of this growth occurred in the town's enslaved population. It was in this context of the port's rapid population growth and the expansion of slavery into the port's internal economy that colonists and the enslaved envisioned an insurrection focused on seizing Bridgetown, and thus Barbados, from the hands of English colonists.

In the aftermath of the 1692 conspiracy, the colony's Assembly and governor refined the island's slave codes and laws to engineer a system of governance and policing in Bridgetown unique to the port and distinctive from the legal and social regimes that governed the island's sugar

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<sup>206</sup> Pedro Welch, *Slave Society in the City: Bridgetown, Barbados, 1680-1834* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2003), 54.

plantations, further fragmenting the centers of colonial power in Bridgetown, a process that had begun in the 1670s and 1680s. The laws that emerged in reaction to this moment of colonial crisis in the early 1690s produced the colonial landscapes of eighteenth-century Bridgetown that enabled greater surveillance and confinement of enslaved people at the center of the colony's commerce.<sup>207</sup> These efforts to police Bridgetown played a critical role in the expansion of Barbados colonial state.<sup>208</sup> Bridgetown's colonial geographies and the methods colonists used to police these geographies in the eighteenth century are legacies of the 1692 conspiracy.

Settlers' attitudes towards Bridgetown changed over the course of the seventeenth century as the island's social world changed and the colonial government became more involved in governing Bridgetown. Bridgetown was long viewed ambivalently as a space of both colonial wealth and prosperity as well as extreme disorder and disease. Despite the growing involvement of the island's Assembly, council, and governor in governing Bridgetown, it was only until after the 1692 conspiracy that the colonial government began to engineer a more coherent system of governance and policing in Bridgetown.

#### **4.1 Disease and Disorder**

From the earliest written descriptions of Bridgetown, two pictures of the port town emerged that persisted into the early eighteenth century and played an important role in how settlers

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<sup>207</sup> Marisa J Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

<sup>208</sup> Fuentes, 20; Diana Paton, *No Bond but the Law: Punishment, Race, and Gender in Jamaican State Formation, 1780-1870* (Durham: North Carolina, 2004).

organized power in the port. The first set of depictions portrayed the town as a center of colonial commerce, trade, and wealth; the prosperous capital of one of England's oldest and wealthiest Caribbean colony. The other set of descriptions presented Bridgetown as a space of rampant disease, vice, and social disorder. Often authors, included both sets of representations in the same text. This duality found in the textual descriptions of Bridgetown remained strikingly consistent over the course of the seventeenth century; an ambivalence echoed by and reflected in the inconsistent ways the colonial government approached issues of governing and policing Bridgetown for much of the seventeenth century.

For early chroniclers of Barbados's colonial history, Bridgetown reflected both the extraordinary wealth of the island's sugar plantations as well as the disorder produced by climate and settler society. In his account of Barbados in the mid-1650s, Antoine Biet, a French priest and missionary sent to Martinique and Guadeloupe, extensively described Bridgetown, noting both its wealth as well as scenes of disorder reflecting the island's settler society. To give his readers a sense of the scale of the town, Biet counted 300-400 buildings in Bridgetown, noting that the majority were inns or stores filled with the island's goods which supported the planter's wealth. Biet, however, found the concentration of taverns and inns in Bridgetown a source of social disorder that complimented the brutality the priest witnessed on the island's sugar plantations. He paints Barbados's English colonists as irreligious spendthrifts prone to violence not just against the enslaved but each other. Biet found, among the poorer settlers, that "drunkenness is great" and that they "settle their differences by fist fighting...give each other black eyes, scratch each other, tear each other's hair" And in public places, like Bridgetown, "the onlookers let them do this and



surround them so as to see who will be made victorious.”<sup>209</sup> Although an outsider writing for a French audience, Biet’s account hit on a theme common to descriptions of the port and reflecting an ambivalence shared by the colonial government.

For another set of authors, a main source of the town’s disorder was found not in the island’s settler society, but in the town’s disease environment. For these authors, the town’s other most defining feature, aside from the wealth of its trade, was the high rates of disease and death that cut down settlers and visitors. Crucially missing from these descriptions were the thousands of enslaved people who died aboard slave ships in Carlisle Bay or shortly after they were landed and sold by the town’s merchants. Richard Ligon, who focused on the English colony’s extremes of wealth, climate, and disease, blamed the colonists’ rush for profits in building Bridgetown on a marsh as a cause of the town’s poor disease environment. Ligon’s account, like these other descriptions also praised the town’s wealth and ability to command trade in the region. Likening Bridgetown’s maritime trade to the busyness of London, Ligon praised the port’s capacity to attract trade.<sup>210</sup> Ligon, however, goes on to warn readers that the town was “ill situate,” meaning that the port was susceptible to disease which he blamed on “a kind of Bog or Morass, which vents out so loathsome a savor, as cannot but breed ill blood.” Ligon recounted that, a month or so before his arrival, disease had so ravaged the town that settlers impulsively threw corpses into the swamp surrounding Bridgetown.<sup>211</sup> Musing on why the settlers built a town so close to a fetid swamp, Ligon concluded that “one house being set up, another was erected, and so a third, and a fourth...

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<sup>209</sup> Jerome Handler, “Father Antoine Biet’s Visit to Barbados in 1654” *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* no. 32 (1967), 56-76.

<sup>210</sup> Richard Ligon *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (London, 1657) 21.

<sup>211</sup> Ligon, 25.

for their convenience, being near the Harbor.” Ligon believed that recklessness and a drive for profit rather than health animated the town’s first builders, bequeathing the town a deadly legacy which neither the parish nor the colonial government had taken enough action to address.

Writing in the early eighteenth century, another French visitor to Bridgetown, Father Jean-Baptiste Labat, likewise described the port as a space of wealth but also disease and social disorder. While Biet noted the number of taverns and storehouses in the port, Labat praised Bridgetown for projecting an air of European civility in a region Labat considered generally lacking the hallmarks of civilization.

The Town is beautiful and quite large, the streets are straight, broad, proper and well laid. Houses are well-built in the English-style with many glass windows, and are magnificently furnished; in a word, all has an air of propriety, politeness, and opulence which one cannot find in the other islands and which would be difficult to find elsewhere. The townhouses are very beautiful and well-adorned. The shops and stores of the merchants are full of all that one could wish for from all parts of the world.<sup>212</sup>

Labat describes the variety of artisans and crafts-workers that populated the town and the considerable commerce its merchants carried on, but acknowledges in the same text that *le mal de Siam*, yellow fever, struck down the town’s inhabitants as frequently as anywhere else in the Caribbean; the inescapable mark of the region’s relentless disease environment. The themes Europeans used to describe Bridgetown, at once a center of colonial commerce and a town blighted by the disease and disorder endemic to an intemperate climate, remained remarkably consistent over the course of the seventeenth century. Like Ligon before him, Labat considered that there was little the parochial or colonial government could do to address the town’s disease environment.

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<sup>212</sup> Jean-Baptiste Labat, *Nouveau Voyage aus isles de l’Amerique: contenant l’histoire naturelle de ces pays...* vol. 6, (Paris: 1742) 392-393.

Undoubtably, the transatlantic slave trade fueled Bridgetown's disease environment, further enmeshing its inhabitants with the slave trade through a service economy centered on caring for the ill. In the late-seventeenth century, care for the sick sailors from the slave ships arriving in Carlisle Bay fell to individual inhabitants rather than any single colonial institution. For sailors, finding care depended on building trust with the town's inhabitants. Disease, sickness, and death, never far from the Atlantic slave trade that passed through Bridgetown, forged lasting connections between sailors and the port's inhabitants.<sup>213</sup> While the embarkment points of West Africa proved most fatal, particularly to European sailors, slave ships arriving in Bridgetown held cargoes of hundreds of sick and dying enslaved as well as sick and dying sailors. While merchants and ship's captains tried to sell the sick to planters on Barbados or smaller ships heading for other colonial markets, sailors were mostly left to fend for themselves in Bridgetown, contributing to particular social geographies of disease, death, and care in the port.

In November 1692, the slave ship *Scepter* arrived in Carlisle Bay carrying a cargo of over 600 captives shipped from the Gold Coast and Ouidah. When she sailed from Ouidah, the *Scepter* embarked with over 800 captives. Disease, malnutrition, and abuse killed 200 captives during the voyage to Barbados. After arriving in Carlisle Bay, the *Scepter* sold and disposed of its cargo for over a month. Within a month after arriving, the *Scepter*'s captain William Parrish had died, and members of its crew lay dying in Bridgetown's taverns. Among the dying crew was Robert Adair, from "the shire of Galloway" in Scotland. In his will, he left gold rings for his father, brother, and sister-in-law. To his shipmate, a "Mr John Smith a Boatswaine," he left the wages the *Scepter* owed its crew. Adair died on December 28, a week after writing his will. While Adair kept his

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<sup>213</sup> Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery*, 2008, 29–48.

bequests to his family and friends aboard the *Scepter*, other members of the crew that died in Bridgetown made more lasting connections to English settlers in the port.

A few days before Adair signed his will, Richard Mercer, from a village outside Liverpool, “being weakened by sickness” left his shipmate John Walls, another Liverpool native and cooper aboard the *Scepter* £5 sterling and “my best bedding... and all my wearing apparel which is aboard the aforesaid ship or ashore in Barbados.”<sup>214</sup> He then left the widow Jane Wadsworth and her two daughters rings worth ten shillings each. While Adair sought to distribute mourning rings to his relatives across the Atlantic, Mercer, perhaps grateful for care administered during his final days, left rings to the Wadsworths in Bridgetown.

While slave ships were infamously deadly to captives and crews alike, in Bridgetown disease never remained confined to one ship or sets of ships. David Evers, a mariner aboard the Royal Navy ship the *Diamond*, left bequests to both his shipmates and friends in Bridgetown, including the landlady he rented from in his last days. In his will, drawn up shortly after the arrival of the *Scepter* and its crew, Evers left his landlady, Mrs. Ealy, a plain gold ring “for her care and kindness in my sickness extraordinary.”<sup>215</sup> Death shaped life throughout the early modern Caribbean, and in ports like Bridgetown, by the end of the seventeenth century the transatlantic trades clustered thousands of sailors together aboard ships known for their morbidity and mortality. Few of these sailors hailed from Barbados’s settler society but nevertheless their wills attest to the bonds created by care and proximity between settlers and sailors engaged in the transatlantic and

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<sup>214</sup> RB6/3/66, BDA.

<sup>215</sup> RB6/3/55-56, BDA.

inter-colonial trades. For much of the seventeenth century, individuals, rather than institutions, dealt with the realities of Bridgetown's disease environments.

Descriptions of Bridgetown's disease environment, even those made by officers in the Royal Navy, rarely led to the colonial government intervening in the port. In 1702, Captain Walker, the commander of the English frigate *the Boyne*, described a harrowing transatlantic crossing made worse upon arrival in Bridgetown to his superiors in London. As *the Boyne* left England in a convoy with other naval and merchant ships bound for the Caribbean, "the feavour & other Distempers... raged amongst both the men of war & Transports." As soon as the fleet arrived in Bridgetown, Walker reported, the soldiers who had fared better than the sailors in the fleet began to fall sick, especially "those quartered in the Bridge Town of Barbados." Walker immediately blamed both the port for being "a very sickly place," and the town's tavern owners and inhabitants who housed sick soldiers and sailors for profit without considering proper care or housing. Walker feared that "the continuall receiving Sick persons into their houses has created an Infection not easily to be removed." Recognizing the port's strategic and commercial importance, Walker recommended to the Board of Trade and Plantations in London that "the Islanders would take care to have an Hospital at some distance from the Town," rather than keeping the sick quartered in private houses on the waterfront.<sup>216</sup> Walker's prescient recommendations fell on deaf ears in London as well as Barbados. It took until the 1790s for the British Royal Navy to construct a hospital in Bridgetown.

Until the closing decade of the seventeenth century, such recommendations fell far outside how the colonial state functioned in Bridgetown. The Highway Act passed during Searle's

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<sup>216</sup> TNA, CO28/38 fols., 30-32.

governorship in 1654 essentially left all matters related to the town's order, appearance, and health to St Michael's parish. Parishioners bore the sole responsibility of raising funds for building and repairing roads and bridges. The 1654 act specifically directed St Michael's parish to raise a tax on parishioners and build a gravel pathway to cut through the town's surrounding swamp. A notice posted at St Michael's parish church in September 1656 reminded parishioners to provide labor and tools for the parish's surveyors of the highway and that "every man do mender his door according to the discretion of ye Surveyors."<sup>217</sup> Such notices located the responsibility for ordering the town not in the colonial government but in individual inhabitants and property-owners in Bridgetown. This arrangement persisted until the 1670s and 1680s when, as discussed earlier, the colonial government began to intervene in circumscribing the port's fluid social and religious boundaries

Similarly, policing Bridgetown was left to the island's constables and justices of the peace with no particular law passed to deal with the port as a separate and distinctive space on the island. The colony's earliest labor codes dealing with indentured servants and enslaved people empowered constables to "apprehend all Runaways" where-ever or however they found them and return them to their masters or mistresses directly. Barbados's 1661 slave code, "*An Act for the governing of Negroes*" renewed and updated in 1688, granted expansive and near-unlimited powers of life and death to slave-owners and their hired overseers, drawn from the island's poor white settlers. The island's constables and Provost-Marshal, however, had the final say in exercising violence against enslaved people known to have repeatedly fled from or resisted their masters or mistresses on behalf of a colonial state invested in preserving a functioning slave

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<sup>217</sup> Minutes of the vestry St Michael's Parish, Barbados Museum and Historical Society, 3.

society. Such laws suggested that the colonial state's authority over Bridgetown remained fragmented throughout much of the seventeenth-century. The island's Provost-Marshall held runaways in Bridgetown's make-shift prison, the Cage, working alongside another colonial officer, the Keeper of the Cage, to confine enslaved people in a complex arrangement governed by multiple laws and legal codes.

With such authority over the port fragmented, a largely un-organized group of settlers and colonial officers filled crucial roles imposing the slave society's social order in spaces like Bridgetown. Constables, charged with the basic tasks of law enforcement under the Provost-Marshall and Justices of the Peace, appear to have even organized town watches in Bridgetown during the seventeenth century without holding any specific commissions from the colonial government.<sup>218</sup> No law, however, organized constables' efforts to govern Bridgetown, and the servant and slave codes that did exist in the seventeenth century made no distinction between slave law enforcement in the port from elsewhere in the plantation colony. By the end of the seventeenth-century, much authority over Bridgetown still remained in the hands of the parish system.

In the wake of the 1692 conspiracy, these informal systems, unevenly spread between the colonial government, individual colonial officers, and parishes, came together into a set of laws that organized the policing of Bridgetown. The most important of these laws, "*An Act Appointing Watches for the Respective Towns in the Island*," empowered a commission to regulate a town watch specifically for Bridgetown that built upon and expanded on these earlier solutions. The timing of these developments in the early eighteenth century in the wake of the 1692 conspiracy suggests a causal relationship. The 1692 conspiracy, however, must be contextualized within a

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<sup>218</sup> *Acts and Statutes of Barbados* (London 1656).

much broader crisis within Barbados's slave society of even greater magnitude than the social upheaval and crises of the 1650s and 1670s. This colonial crisis, of which the 1692 conspiracy was only a part, appeared to represent an existential threat to the entire plantation system in the 1690s and 1700s, laying the foundation for the act which created Bridgetown's town watch system. The passage of this act in 1705 signaled a departure from settlers' previous ambivalence towards Bridgetown towards a growing recognition of the need for settler society to regulate and police a town increasingly defined by the presence of enslaved people.

#### **4.2 Barbados Crisis of the Late-Seventeenth Century**

To better understand the impact of the 1692 conspiracy on the colonial power structures that governed Bridgetown, the events of 1692 must be contextualized with a broader period of crisis and decline which marked Barbados's plantation economy in the late-seventeenth and early eighteenth century. The 1692 conspiracy formed a single but critical part of a much broader set of emergencies that encompassed a colonial crisis that profoundly affected the island's settler society in the 1690s and 1700s. Out of the insecurity of this moment, Barbados's colonial society and political system changed its attitude towards Bridgetown and began to engineer a system of urban governance and policing unprecedented in English slave societies to that time. This colonial crisis, lasting roughly from the late-1680s to the 1710s, consisted of multiple parts.

The first was economic and social. Beginning in the late-seventeenth century, after years of intensive monoculture, the economic cracks in Barbados's plantation system began to fully emerge. Exhausted soil no longer yielded the crops planters had grown accustomed to. In times of peace, declining crop yields was not a major problem, but starting in 1688, England and later



Britain entered a decades long period of war with France.<sup>219</sup> This conflict threw the island's trade into utter disarray as the French leaned heavily on a war of colonial attrition that used Caribbean-based privateers to siphon wealth from England's colonies without spending much on outright conquest or naval supremacy in the region. Barbadian planters' debts, driven by the slave trade and without the offsetting profits of a productive plantation sector, were unsustainable. Plantations collapsed and their planters fled for, literally, greener pastures.

The second component of this colonial crisis was demographic and social. White colonists and planters had struggled throughout the second-half of the seventeenth century to recruit more white settlers and servants to fill the ranks of the island's militias and bolster the colonial economy. The decades of warfare and economic disruption exacerbated this demographic decline of Barbados's poor white community, heightening planters' fears of slave insurrection or betrayal in the face of French invasion.

Finally, this crisis was also political for the planter class, as the fallout of these challenges in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century left Barbados's legislature and colonial government deeply divided. Various factions of planters and merchants fought to control the colonial system, often bringing their grievances not just to governors but to competing interests in London. Unpopular governors appointed from London found themselves forced to take sides in these local squabbles further entrenching the political chaos. Out of this toxic stew of economic, social, and political crises of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Barbados's colonial government took much firmer control of the practical colonial governance and policing of Bridgetown.

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<sup>219</sup> Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies*, 140.

As early as the 1650s, the roots of Barbados's economic troubles began with the first signs of soil exhaustion, the result of reckless monoculture. Throughout the seventeenth century, as the island's plantations expanded to cover most of the arable land, colonists reported clear signs of soil exhaustion and declining yields of sugar from newly planted cane. By the 1680s, the environmental degradation produced by decades of intensive deforestation and sugar cane agriculture was unescapable to colonists. Edward Littleton, an observer writing in 1689, reported that planters used upwards of thirty cartloads of cow dung to fertilize a meager acre of land. Another English writer familiar with the colony, John Oldmixon, wrote in the early 1700s, that "the Soil is so impoverish'd, that they [the planters] are forc'd to dung and plant every Year."<sup>220</sup> The effects of the reckless early years of the plantation sector had begun, in this crucial period of the late seventeenth century, to catch up to the colony's sugar economy. While these accounts paint a particular dismal picture of Barbados at the turn of the eighteenth century, planters remained particularly adaptive and innovative in their economic responses to declining soil yields, investing in more in slavery and livestock to make up for declining soil fertility.<sup>221</sup>

Rising costs of production, however, were met with declining sugar prices in London, furthering planters' economic troubles. In 1640, the price of muscovado sugar was £4 per hundredweight. By the 1660s, that price had fallen to £2. In the 1670s, the price had fallen even further to 25 shillings before reaching a nadir of 16 shillings in the mid-1680s.<sup>222</sup> Increasing competition from the rise of plantation economies in the Leeward Islands and the much larger

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<sup>220</sup> Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery* 140.

<sup>221</sup> Ryan Dennis McGuinness, "'They Can Now Digest Strong Meats': Two Decades of Expansion, Adaptation, Innovation, and Maturation on Barbados, 1680-1700," (2016).

<sup>222</sup> Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713*, 205.

Jamaica began in the last decades of the seventeenth century continuing into the eighteenth century fundamentally marginalizing Barbados's role as the principal sugar producer of the English West Indies. When over two decades of regional warfare began in 1688, London prices fluctuated violently as successful French privateering in the region significantly disrupted Barbados's trade. Additionally, the risks posed by French privateers meant that the rates of freightage to Barbados rose. The economic challenges planters faced in the 1690s and 1700s bred novel solutions, some of which ultimately proved politically poisonous and drew negative attention to Barbados from London.

Throughout the seventeenth century, Barbados's sugar plantations were notoriously indebted, predominantly to merchants involved in the transatlantic slave trade. The war years of the 1690s and early 1700s with fluctuating sugar prices, higher freightage rates, and declining productivity drove planters to adopt extraordinary measures to handle the debt crisis and chronic shortage of currency. In 1705, Barbados's assembly passed an act creating a paper currency based on securities of land and enslaved people. The colonial government issued £65,000 worth of nearly worthless bills. London quickly squashed the colonial law, and Barbados's chastised colonial leaders withdrew the paper currency swiftly. The incident left deep political fissures within the colonial government that stretched in the eighteenth century, as the eminent planters and merchants who led the scheme found themselves excluded from the newly appointed governor's council.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Robert Schomburgk, *The History of Barbados: Comprising a Geographical and Statistical Description of the Island; A Sketch of the Historical Events Since the Settlement; and an Account of Its Geology and Natural Productions*, 1848.

What followed was a period of worsening political factionalism that marred the island's settler society well into the eighteenth century.

Finally, over the course of the second-half of the seventeenth century, the island faced a demographic and social transition as the island's white population declined and enslaved African and Afro-Caribbean labor expanded beyond the plantation sector. In 1655, the island's population stood at approximately 43,000. A remarkably high figure for an island only 166 square miles in a period when the population of Massachusetts Bay colony stood at about 20,000 in 1660 and when around 27,000 settlers, white and black, worked the tobacco plantations of the Chesapeake Bay. Out of Barbados's unusually dense population of 43,000 an estimated 23,000 settlers were white. The planter class remained a small but immensely powerful minority supported by a sizable poor white community. 175 of the island's planters, 7% of the island's total property-owners, claimed at least 54% of the island's property.<sup>224</sup> Most of this white population were indentured servants or had been recently released from their contracts, and were part of a population that boomed during the English Civil Wars and the upheaval of the English revolution. After reaching this height in the 1650s, the island's white population slid into a steady decline. In 1684, there were 19,568 white settlers. By 1700, the figures suggest a population of white settlers standing at 15,400. The population of white settlers, the majority poor whites, would continue to fluctuate over the course of the eighteenth century; falling as low as 12,528 in 1712 but never exceeding 20,000.<sup>225</sup> Despite increasingly lenient laws regulating the institution of indentured servitude, the decline of a poor

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<sup>224</sup> Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713*, 87–96.

<sup>225</sup> Patricia Molen, "Population and Social Patterns in Barbados in the Early Eighteenth Century," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1971): 287–300; Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713*, 87.

white population to work as artisans and overseers on Barbados's plantations appeared irreversible. The decline of indentured servitude and the island's poor white population in the late-seventeenth century mirrored and paralleled the rise of a "creole" generation of enslaved Afro-Barbadians; a population that made up what Hilary Beckles calls a slave labor elite.

In tandem with the decline of a sizable free white population, Barbadian historian Hilary Beckles notes that the late-seventeenth century witnessed key demographic and social changes among the island's enslaved population. Beckles notes three important demographic changes to the island's enslaved population in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries: the emergence of a sizable island-born population of enslaved people, a shift in the gender balance of the enslaved population from men to women, and the rise of a slave labor elite.<sup>226</sup> The slave labor elite, according to Beckles, were predominantly island-born who came to occupy key occupational positions within the plantation complex. These privileged occupations afforded these creoles better opportunity for

manumission, improved nutrition, literacy, better medical and material care, right to 'respected' family life, access to skilled/supervisory work, remuneration, socio-sexual relations with free persons, possession of property, unsupervised off-plantation movements, and greater sociocultural autonomy.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Hilary Beckles, "Creolisation in Action: The Slave Labour Élite and Anti-Slavery in Barbados," *Caribbean Quarterly* 44, no. 1/2 (July 5, 1998): 108–28, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40654025>; Hilary C N - HT1105.B3 B34 1989 Beckles, *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Hilary McD. Beckles, *The First Black Slave Society* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 2016).

<sup>227</sup> Beckles, "Creolisation in Action: The Slave Labour Élite and Anti-Slavery in Barbados," 112–13.

As the island's pool of free white artisans and overseers shrank, it appears that planters turned towards entrusting enslaved Afro-Caribbean labor with artisanal occupations requiring greater degrees of mobility and independence. Growing mobility likely increased enslaved people's access to Bridgetown's markets, contributing to the expansion of the island's informal networks and social geographies.

In Bridgetown, African and Afro-Caribbean slavery expanded into the urban economy in the same period. Illustrative of these slow demographic and social transformations is the case of John Blake, an Irish merchant who settled in Bridgetown in the mid-1670s. Initially settling in Barbados alone, Blake's wife and children joined him in 1675 and brought with them an Irish woman to work as a domestic servant "washing starching making of drinke and keeping the house in good order." Blake, however, wrote to his brother on Monserrat that the young Irish woman was "most vitious" and needed, in his opinion, to be kept under the "most sever correction," meaning frequent physical punishment. Eager to rid himself of the Irish servant, Blake had an enslaved African or Afro-Caribbean woman "brought to knowledge" so he could be "without a white maid."<sup>228</sup> Such decisions underpinned the changing demographics and social geography of Bridgetown in the closing decades of the seventeenth century.

The expansion of slave labor into the urban economy likely drove much of the growth in Bridgetown's population during this period. In the 1680s, Bridgetown had become one of the largest English towns in the Americas with a population of 3000, second only to Boston in Massachusetts. By 1712, the population had grown to nearly 11,000, making the town the largest

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<sup>228</sup> Vere Langford Oliver, *Caribbeana: Containing Letters and Dissertations, Together with Poetical Essays, On various Subjects and Occassions* (London 1741) reprinted by Kraus Reprint Co. (1978), 55-56.

urban center in the British Americas for a brief window of time. Enslaved people made up the bulk of this demographic expansion in Bridgetown. This trend of a growing enslaved urban population accelerated over the course of the eighteenth century. According to one estimate, Bridgetown's enslaved population grew from 13,000 in 1715 to 17,000 by the end of the century.<sup>229</sup> The growing size of the port in the late-seventeenth century contributed to the growing necessity of the colonial government to intervene in the town's governance.

For the island's colonial elite, these changes in the island's plantation economy and settler society in the late-seventeenth century proved profoundly destabilizing, convincing some that the island was entering a period of irreversible decline. Within this context, the colonial government began to assert more direct authority over Bridgetown through creating a new system to police and defend the town from the threat of enslaved insurrection. The conspiracy of 1692 was the most immediate spark that drove this colonial reaction and the creation of these new systems of policing and governance. The reports given to Barbados's governor James Kendall can reveal much about the cultural paradigms which framed how settlers described and wrote about slave conspiracies, particularly the social geographies that troubled the planter elites most.<sup>230</sup> The report on the 1692 conspiracy is rife with references to Bridgetown's unique social geographies that emerged over the course of the seventeenth century and had long posed problems for the colonial government. The entanglement of these urban social geographies in one of the most serious plans for enslaved insurrection in Barbados's early colonial history helped significantly further colonial interest in

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<sup>229</sup> Welch, *Slave Society in the City: Bridgetown, Barbados, 1680-1834*, 54.

<sup>230</sup> Jason T Sharples, "Discovering Slave Conspiracies: New Fears of Rebellion and Old Paradigms of Plotting in Seventeenth-Century Barbados," *The American Historical Review* 120, no. 3 (June 22, 2015): 811–43.

policing enslaved people in the port. From this period of colonial crises in the late-seventeenth century, including the 1692 conspiracy, the geographies of colonial power in eighteenth-century Bridgetown fully emerged.

#### **4.3 The 1692 Conspiracy: Mapping the Social Geographies of Slavery and Resistance in Bridgetown**

In October 1692, Major John Duboys applied to the island's governor James Kendall for a commission to form a four-man court martial which investigated, tortured, and executed hundreds of enslaved people caught up in the 1692 conspiracy. The report that resulted from Duboys' commission mapped the geography of the conspiracy, sketching the outlines of the plot; revealing its goals to claim Bridgetown, burn the port, and turn the island's fortifications against the ships anchored in Carlisle Bay. The report is a map, not only of the conspiracy itself, but of the informal networks that crisscrossed the island in the late-seventeenth century. This map of the island's informal social systems and networks converged, like the roads represented on officially-sanctioned maps of the island, in Bridgetown. The formal purpose of the court martial given to Duboys was to conduct a "trial of all such Negros, who shall be impeached for consulting and contriving Mutiny, Rebellion or insurrection against their Maities Subjects in this Island." The report that resulted from these efforts mapped a social world that troubled a colony wracked by disease, mortality, disrupted trade, and declining plantations.

Organized mostly as narrative, following Duboys's report of the conspiracy allows us to map the outlines of these informal systems and networks extending from the island's plantations into Bridgetown. Duboys's story starts in Bridgetown with the Cage, the open-air prison at the



center of Bridgetown used to hold runaways. To explain how colonial officials learned of the plot, the report describes how Duboys seized two men, Ben and Sambo, “who were in Consultation about breaking the Prison for the relief” of other enslaved people held in the Cage. Duboys had only just committed Ben and Sambo to the Cage when a third Afro-Caribbean man, Hammon, appeared in Bridgetown. Caught giving Ben and Sambo “advice that they should not discover any thing,” Hammon was brought to Duboys and questioned. Fearing for his life and under the duress of torture, Hammon confessed to the three’s involvement in a plot to “cut off all the Menkind in this Island.” The location of this discovery in Bridgetown, specifically the Cage, is indicative of how colonial officials had used particular infrastructures in Bridgetown to confine and circumscribe different forms of bound labor on Barbados since the 1650s.

Since the 1650s, the Cage stood in the center of Bridgetown as a small, open-air prison and served a critical role in controlling enslaved mobility in Barbados by holding runaways from the island’s plantations. Reflecting planter concerns over labor mobility in the mid-1650s, Governor Searle initially built the Cage in 1655 to temporarily hold riotous sailors viewed as a disruptive element within a landed settler society.<sup>231</sup> By the 1660s, it served new purpose as the island’s early servant and slave codes directed the island’s constables to bring men and women suspected of being plantation runaways to Bridgetown for temporary confinement. By the end of the seventeenth-century, the Cage stood as a potent symbol of planter control over enslaved labor, but also a physical space that could foster conspiracies and illicit “Consultation” between enslaved individuals hoping to “break the Prison for... relief.” Finding the source of the conspiracy in enslaved people confined in Bridgetown, particularly in the Cage, reflected not only the colonial

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<sup>231</sup> Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*, 22–25.

landscapes that emerged earlier in the seventeenth century, but the alternative geographies the enslaved created atop these landscapes.

With the first reports of the conspiracy established around the Cage, Duboys questioned and tortured Ben and Sambo in Bridgetown, revealing for the colonial officials the crucial role played by the slave labor elite in the informal networks and geographies in Bridgetown. To push Ben and Sambo to confess and reveal the extent of the plot, Duboys ordered the two hung in chains until “starved to death” in Bridgetown, a public reminder of colonial power in the port. The two lasted four days before they “resolved to make a Clear Confession of the whole matter, provided they might be taken downe & promised Life.” Sambo died shortly after his “confession,” but Ben lived to impeach “all those he had Spoke to as also those whom others had engaged to their Party,” revealing a particular social profile critical in how such informal geographies emerged in Bridgetown.

The confessions mapped the state of the island’s plantations in the late seventeenth century, where a class of slave labor elite had access to tools and spaces like the plantations’ stables while working in relative positions of power and independence. Following Ben’s confession, Duboys and his commissioners arrested hundreds of enslaved people, predominantly the slave labor elite who enjoyed a greater degree of mobility on Barbados. The conspiracy ranged geographically across the island’s plantations but captured a large swath of the island’s slave labor elite, “Overseers, Carpenters, Bricklayers, Wheelwrights, Sawyers, Blacksmiths, Grooms, and such others that have more favour showne them by their Masters.” This group of slave labor elite, according to the confessions, would form “four Regiments of foot and two regiments of horse,” the horses stolen directly from the master’s stables. Enjoying the greatest degree of trust and

freedom on the plantation estates, the slave labor elite also had the greatest access to Bridgetown and the island's internal marketing system based in the port.

By identifying enslaved people involved in the conspiracy as those with “more favour showne them by their Masters,” the report outlined the social geographies centered in Bridgetown and used by enslaved people to communicate, trade, and survive the island's plantation slave society. By the end of the seventeenth century, Bridgetown's markets facilitated both the transatlantic circulation of plantation-produced commodities as well as the island's internal marketing system; an informal commercial network that helped above all else feed the island's overwhelmingly malnourished enslaved population.<sup>232</sup> The enslaved faced grueling conditions of forced labor and rampant disease exacerbated by severe malnutrition. In this context, enslaved people congregated in Bridgetown to find and barter goods for food. Some resorted to begging. Benjamin Lay, a sympathetic and unusually observant writer described the groups of enslaved people that gathered around his shop in the early eighteenth century. Lay, writing later in the eighteenth century, recounted how his wife, Sarah, would give the enslaved provisions from their shop in Bridgetown spoiled from the island's hot climate. After giving away food in the shop, Lay brought “more of the same sort and thrown it into the Street... yet the poor Creatures would come running, and tearing, and rending one another to get a part... their poor Bellies were so empty, and so ravenous.” These rushes happened on Sunday, the island's principal day for marketing in Bridgetown. Lay recounted how the enslaved left plantations for the day,

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<sup>232</sup> Robert Schroeder, Hannes; O'Connell, Tasmin; Evans, Jane; Shuler, Kristina; Hedges, “Trans-Atlantic Slavery: Isotopic Evidence for Forced Migration to Barbados,” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 139, no. 4 (2009): 547–57.

come down to Town, many Hundreds of them, they that could get or steal any Thing, a little Sugar, or Cotton, Ginger, Aloes, Rum, Cocoa-Nuts, Pine-Apples, Oranges, Lemmons, Citrons, old Iron, Wood for Firing, steal any Thing out of Houses, Yards or anywhere, or any Thing that was not too hot or too heavy, and bring it to Market.<sup>233</sup>

The journey from plantation to town was no easy feat either. The enslaved could get “no Truck in the Country” some fell down and fainted on the way to Bridgetown “being perished with Hunger and hard Labour the Week before.” Bridgetown’s informal internal markets were located on the same streets where merchants and planters carried on the island’s transatlantic and inter-colonial trades in sugar cane products and enslaved people.

The identification of the conspirators as members of the island’s slave labor elite suggested a crucial link between the use of emergent informal networks and marketing in Bridgetown with the circulation of conspiracies and plots to overthrow the colonial government. The enslaved trouped to Bridgetown every Sunday alone, in pairs, or small groups in a desperate scramble to use the island’s largest market to eke out survival. Just as the enslaved marched to Bridgetown every Sunday, the writers of the report on the 1692 conspiracy took seriously the threat that the enslaved might march, armed with their masters’ tools and horses, to seize the island for themselves and wreak a bloody vengeance on its settler society.

As Dubois went on to detail the conspirators plans to seize control of the island from the planters, he made that link between these emergent social geographies in Bridgetown and the slave labor elite explicit in his description of the social geographies that supported the spread of the conspiracy. Dubois’s report claimed the conspiracy would start on the plantations with the insurrection moving to Bridgetown where the plotters had well-placed allies in the militia that

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<sup>233</sup> Benjamin Lay, *All slave-keepers that keep the innocent in bondage, apostates*, (1737) 34-38.

guarded the town. The first key ally was “an Armourer in ye Magazine,” an enslaved Afro-Caribbean man working for the island’s militia system central to the colony’s defense. At the right moment, the armorer would kill the militia captain commanding the colony’s armory in Bridgetown, seize the magazine’s powder, firearms, swords, and ammunition to supply the rebels. For betraying this position of trust, Duboys’s commission hung the man in chains until dead. This enslaved armorer was hardly the only enslaved person to aid in the island’s defense in the 1680s and 1690s, a fact not missed by the commissioners that investigated the 1692 conspiracy.

The link Duboys made in the report between the conspirators and the key locations within the island’s militia reflected the recent reality that Barbados’s defense depended on enslaved labor, requiring their presence in Bridgetown in such critical spaces like the town magazine. The presence of enslaved people in such vital colonial infrastructures in Bridgetown had emerged quite recently with the pressures placed on the island’s militia in the context of the Nine Years War. With fewer poor white settlers to serve in the island’s militia in the late seventeenth-century, the colonial government pressed hundreds of enslaved men into the island’s service, primarily to dig trenches and build fortifications along the coast. On June 10, 1691, the colony’s assembly ordered that every plantation send one out of every five servants or slaves to the coast to aid the militia “for entrenching such places as required the same” for the span of one week. The law applied to any planter owning over 20 acres, enough to encompass a significant portion of the island’s planter class.<sup>234</sup> The early 1690s and the onset of war with France saw mass upheaval in the island’s labor system with mass mobilization of not only the militia made up of the island’s poor whites, but also enslaved labor pressed into colonial service to fortify the coasts and aid in defending the island.

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<sup>234</sup> TNA, CO30/3/ fol 285.

As the report described the next part of the plot to overthrow the colonial government in Bridgetown, Dubois identified a threat to colonial order in the continued presence of outsiders like the Irish in the port and the island's fortifications. Having armed themselves out of Bridgetown's magazine and armory, the conspirators, according to Dubois's report, would infiltrate the fortifications on Needham's point near the town to gain control of Carlisle Bay. "The Stratagem they resolved on for gainning the forts was this, they resolved to procure four or five Irish men to their Party Who were to be Sent into Needham's fort, with money to buy drinke for ye Montrosses." The plot planned to use Irish allies to inebriate the fortification's gunners and guards, and then open the gates for the rebels waiting in "the many bushes high Corne" and other blinds surrounding the fort. Barbados's colonial government and settlers had long feared the presence of Irish servants who often aided French invasions of the Leeward Islands in the seventeenth century, but the colonial government also had reason to doubt the loyalty of the montrosses that manned the guns in the fortifications around Bridgetown. Unlike the members of the colony's militia, the gunners that commanded the cannon in the fortifications around Bridgetown received payment for their service. The colonial assembly, however, was not always prompt in paying the gunners. A decade or so later, in 1714, the gunners of St Michael's divisions responsible for manning the fortifications around Bridgetown requested that the assembly to pay two years' salary to a gunner, Joseph Young.<sup>235</sup> Paid by the cash-strapped colonial government, the island's gunners could be just as easily and cheaply bought with booze. The threats of outsiders like the Irish in Bridgetown, long a feature of the town's social and cultural geography, as well as

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<sup>235</sup> TNA, CO31/12/ volume A, fol. 77.

the strains placed on the colonial government during times of war, presented new threats for the commissioners in the face of insurrection.

Having mapped the key spaces and figures in the conspiracy, Duboys turned to describing how the conspirators planned to use fire. Fire was traditionally used to destroy crops of sugar cane, and in the context of Bridgetown, reflected a linking of planters' and merchants' greatest fears. According to Duboys's report, after having bought their way into Needham's fort with the help of Irish allies, the rebels planned to burn much of Bridgetown to the ground, fulfilling a long-standing fear of the colony's planters. Since the 1640s, servants and slaves had, according to the planters, set the island's sugar cane on fire in destructive acts of resistance. Some of the earliest colonial laws addressed planters' fears of fire destroying the pressure sugar cane crops. Fire in Bridgetown had proven just as destructive. The fire of 1668 had destroyed the town's supply of gun powder and ammunition along with thousands of pounds worth of goods. Bridgetown, like the island's plantations, was no stranger to fires, and all elements of settler society knew the chaos created by such disasters, particularly in the context of the island's ports.

According to Duboys's report, the conspirators did not confine their attack on the island's colonial government to the island and its port, but turned to the ships anchored in Carlisle Bay, linking the geography of the port and island to maritime spaces just offshore. After burning the port and seizing Needham's fort overlooking Carlisle Bay, the plotters planned to turn the forts' guns on the ships harbored in Carlisle Bay "to batter all ye ships out of their Harbour," clearly displaying knowledge of Carlisle Bay's important role in the networks of communication and empire that sustained Barbados's colonial system. The enslaved plotters, watching the wartime mobilization of Barbadian society in the late 1680s and early 1690s, recognized the strategic importance of the ships anchored in Carlisle Bay. From Hammon's confession, Duboys learned

how the plotters tracked the comings and goings of English naval forces to time the uprising. According to these confessions, the plotters were repeatedly stymied by the fortuitous arrival of English forces on Barbados. The first planned date for the plot was:

sometime after the going off of Sr Timothy Thornhill from this Island, but your Excellency's arrival with their Majesties Squadron of Ships put so great a Stop to it that few were Spoke to and the more said until the Expedition designed under Colonel Salter for Guadalupe then put on a fresh and the time was the night after the fleet sailed from hence but Admiral Wright with the fleet appearing from Guadalupe, diverted our men's going from hence and so put a Second stop to their hellish design.<sup>236</sup>

The enslaved, as the summary of Hammon's confession suggests, observed and tracked naval movements in and out of Bridgetown closely, following the ups and downs of English imperial fortunes in the region. Their plan to bombard the ships in Carlisle Bay likewise suggests that the enslaved recognized not only the military power of English naval vessels, but also their capacity to circulate news and militia from neighboring English islands to the north.

Dubois's report on the 1692 conspiracy not only documented the forced confessions of the conspirators and the planters' fears of insurrection, but also mapped Bridgetown's overlapping geographies of settler and enslaved mobility that emerged over the course of the late seventeenth century. The report, fixated on these social geographies and their potential for facilitating dangerous enslaved mobility, also marked an inflection point in settler society's attitude towards Bridgetown. The decade that followed the 1692 conspiracy witnessed the colonial government engineering a system of laws and statutes to govern and police Bridgetown. The instability of the last decades of the seventeenth century had produced multiple colonial geographies as various institutions struggled to deal with the port's complex and overlapping labor systems and

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<sup>236</sup> TNA, CO31/12/A-D/77.



communities. In the late-seventeenth century, new alternative geographies employed by the enslaved for survival entered into this space, which Dubois's report on the conspirators acknowledged and identified as a critical threat to the island's colonial order.

#### **4.4 Policing Bridgetown**

While the 1692 conspiracy's impact appears to have been decidedly local in its scope and scale, its nevertheless had a profound impact on the colonial government's relationship to Bridgetown, particularly the laws and institutions governing and policing the port. As had been the case for much of the seventeenth century, such moments of crisis and instability changed the colony's relationship to Bridgetown by reconfiguring the balance of colonial power in the town, placing greater authority over the port into the hands of colonial officers away from the parish system. The immediate wake of the 1692 conspiracy was predictable but its consequences were felt long into the 1700s. Like other instances of slave conspiracies throughout the early modern Atlantic world, the planter class's immediate reprisals were swift, brutal and intended to terrorize the enslaved Afro-Barbadian population.<sup>237</sup> Dubois's court martial had the ringleaders broken, gibbeted, burned, and dismembered in Bridgetown, the intended target of their efforts and site of the conspiracy's discovery.

Studies of enslaved resistance often stop the story of an individual uprising or conspiracy there, with the planter class imposing a new regime of militarized terror. In such narratives,

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<sup>237</sup> Sharples, "Discovering Slave Conspiracies: New Fears of Rebellion and Old Paradigms of Plotting in Seventeenth-Century Barbados."

slavery's order is restored and insurrection temporarily repressed or dispersed to find rebirth elsewhere. The events in the years and decades after, however, are often of equal or greater importance, as scholars like Trevor Burnard and David Garrigus have discovered with the legacies of Tacky's Revolt and the Macandal poisonings of the late 1750s and 1760s in the greater Caribbean plantation colonies of France and Britain.<sup>238</sup> Likewise, in Barbados, the conspiracy of 1692 had profound implications for how the colony would come to govern spaces like Bridgetown.

Between 1692 and 1715, planters and colonists embarked on a project of codifying and regulating how they governed and policed the town's black population, distributing the responsibility of population control from the exclusive hands of individual planters and colonists into colonial state authorities. The colonial state took on the majority of surveilling, disciplining, and controlling enslaved populations through regulating black marketing and hucksters, creating a comprehensive system of town watches, and erecting new fortifications around Bridgetown to protect against enslaved insurrection. Colonists' beliefs in Bridgetown's capacity to foster disease, disorder, and insurrection drove these efforts to strengthen the apparatuses of the colonial state in its role as municipal government.

The first elements of this legislative project were put in place almost immediately after the conspiracy's discovery in October 1692 when the colonial assembly banned the sale of liquor and other alcohol to enslaved people. Planters feared alcohol fueled multiple forms of enslaved crime and resistance, including planning insurrection. The new law explained in the preamble that "many enormities have been committed, and mischiefs hatch and contrived Negroes and other Slaves,

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<sup>238</sup> John D Burnard, Trevor G; Garrigus, *The Plantation Machine: Atlantic Capitalism in French Saint-Domingue and British Jamaica* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

when opportunities have been given of meeting, and excessive drinking thereat.” Observing enslaved communal life from afar, the planters saw how alcohol served a vital role in the rites and rituals that sustained enslaved African and Afro-Caribbean communities throughout the early modern Caribbean. Given the centrality of alcohol to Afro-Caribbean ritual and communal life, rum and other liquors drove a part of the island’s internal marketing system in Bridgetown throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>239</sup> The law, entitled “An Act for prohibiting the selling of Rum, or other strong Liquors to any Negro or other Slave,” however, predominantly targeted the economic activities of white inhabitants, mostly concentrated in the island’s ports, who sold alcohol to enslaved people in the Sunday markets. Any colonist or visitor found guilty of breaking the new law paid twenty shillings for each offence or received ten lashes administered by public “Whippers” in Bridgetown. The new law ensured that economic boundaries between poorer whites and enslaved peoples were violently enforced in the town’s marketplace.<sup>240</sup>

The planters then took steps to reimpose the harsh penalties that had previously existed to punish long-term runaways from the island’s plantation in an attempt to limit the fugitivity that sustained many of the informal networks connecting Bridgetown to the rest of Barbados. In 1688, in the last major amendment to the island’s slave code, the planters relaxed the laws governing desertion and absences from the island’s plantations. They removed a clause from the Act governing slavery that made desertion lasting over a month punishable by death. It took until the

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<sup>239</sup> Frederick H Smith, “Spirits and Spirituality: Enslaved Persons and Alcohol in West Africa,” *The Journal of Caribbean History* 38, no.2 (2004), Smith and Watson, “Urbanity, Sociability, and Commercial Exchange in the Barbados Sugar Trade: A Comparative Colonial Archaeological Perspective on Bridgetown, Barbados in the Seventeenth Century.”

<sup>240</sup> Richard Hall, *Acts passed in the island of Barbados: from 1643 to 1762, inclusive*, (London, 1674) 131.

immediate aftermath of the conspiracy for planters in the assembly to re-assess this decision and return this clause to the island's slave code in a conscious effort to limit enslaved mobility and the short-term maroonage endemic to Caribbean slave societies by the late-seventeenth century.

In the wake of the conspiracy, planter concerns about enslaved mobility and changing occupational patterns prompted proposals to limit the use of enslaved people as maritime labor in small coasting vessels, revealing a growing interest among the island's planters and merchants to regulate labor systems used in spaces like Bridgetown and Carlisle Bay. In 1695, a group of planters and merchants in the colonial assembly proposed a law entitled "an act prohibiting negroes to be employed in wherrys or shallops." On the face of it, the proposal addressed settlers' fears of poor white population decline and social marginalization in Barbados by focusing on limiting enslaved labor employed in the small crafts used to load and unload ships in Carlisle Bay. The proposed act criticized how owners of "wherries and shallops... doe to the discouragement of white men, Employ negroes chiefly in their Shallopps." Their proposal argued for establishing a quota for coasting crafts, similar, in some ways, to the Navigation Acts requirements that English sailors form a majority crews in English ships. The proposed act would require shallop owners to "hire and Employ in the service of said Shallop two white men at the Least."<sup>241</sup> While the assembly ultimately rejected the proposal, the proposed act reflects a growing interest among the planters and merchants of the colonial assembly in regulating the port's labor systems.

This interest in governing Bridgetown only intensified over the next decade, reflecting a lasting change in how merchants and planters in the colonial assembly thought about the role of the colonial state in urban-maritime spaces like Bridgetown. By December 1704, after disastrous

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<sup>241</sup> TNA, CO31/5/fol. 28.

years of imperial warfare, bitter colonial politics, and widespread economic misfortune among the planter class, a group of Bridgetown merchants and sugar planters in the assembly presented the finds of a “Grand Inquest for the body of the Island” to the temporary governor, William Sharpe. While framed as an island-wide investigation into the most pressing issues facing the colonial economy and society, the commissioners ended up focusing primarily on the conditions of Bridgetown. Such a critical examination into the material conditions of the port led by the colonial government rather than the parish reflected a keen interest in governing Bridgetown, breaking with the division of power that placed the parish system as the port’s primary government.

While earlier descriptions of Barbados had blamed the town’s ills mostly on proximity to an unhealthy climate, the “Grand Inquest” blamed the town’s problems on the material conditions of the built environment and proposed ways the colonial government could solve such problems. The capital’s streets, according to the report, were filled with “beastlyness and filthiness.” Tottering buildings, abandoned and neglected by absentee owners, threatened to collapse on inhabitants. The port, in their opinion, had fallen into such a state of disrepair and neglect that it could only prove to inhabitants “unhealthy as well as uneasie in their persons and Consequently very uncomfortable to themselves.” The streets, according to the commissioners lacked proper drainage, leading to flooding and pools of stagnating water threatening to damage buildings foundations and the valuable commodities merchants stored in them. The island’s propertied classes, obliged to do business and attend government in a town they now apparently associated with dirt, disease, and disorder, hoped to use this inquest as a means of encouraging new projects and laws to revitalize the port and, by extension, the island’s colonial economy. The commissioners of the “Grand Inquest,” drawn from the island’s elite propertied classes, painted a

strikingly bleak portrait of the island's colonial capital, one that focused on the port's capacity to foster disease and disorder.<sup>242</sup>

The commissioners' fixation on disease and disorder, particularly Bridgetown's "beastliness and filthiness" expressed fears not only of the town's material conditions but of its social conditions as well, tying projects of urban renewal to policing enslaved people in the port. In the eighteenth century, planters and masters around the early modern Atlantic world associate enslaved African and Afro-Caribbean people and labor with material degradation and excrement; an association born from masters' use of enslaved labor in plantation society's dirtiest and most dishonored jobs. The inquest, as an expression of municipal interest in the port, expressed settler's negative associations of Bridgetown's material condition with slave labor and mobility in the port in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Out of the concerns expressed in the "Grand Inquest" of 1704 emerged a law that sought to address both the problems of Bridgetown's material conditions as well as enslaved mobility in the urban-maritime landscape of the port. This new act regulating a renewed and organized town watch blended the concerns about enslaved mobility raised by Dubois's commission into the 1692 conspiracy and the port's material conditions raised by the "Grand Inquest" of 1704. "An act appointing watches for the respective towns in the island" had two stated purposes. The first was to control crimes against property, which planters often associated with the marketing activities of enslaved populations. As the preamble explained in language rife with code language describing fears of enslaved crime and mobility:

there hath been of late great Neglect in setting and keeping Watches within the several Towns of this Island so that many Robberies, Felonies, Burglaries, have been committed

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<sup>242</sup> TNA, CO31/1 fols 62-63.

and many suspicious persons wander about the said Towns in the Night-time, without control or Question.

The second purpose of the law was to address the issues of sanitation and material order in the town. The town watch would direct and enforce where and how the town's inhabitants disposed of "dung, stinking provisions, sweepings of their houses, or other Nusances,"<sup>243</sup> the sort of "fylthiness" the members of the commission had associated with the diseases that plagued Bridgetown periodically throughout the 1690s and 1700s. The tactics the assembly used to organize the town watch extended and modified the military organization of the island's militia system onto Bridgetown's urban landscape.

The new act broke with the island's long-standing division of urban governance that placed the parochial vestry of St Michaels as the primary and nearly exclusive government for Bridgetown. The new act turned instead to the colony's Justices of the Peace and constables, extending their authority into Bridgetown. The first clause of the newly passed act ordered that "the several Justices of the Peace within the Precincts of St Michael, shall meet in their usual Place of Meeting upon the First Tuesday after publication of this Act..." and there consult with "the several Churchwardens" of the town's urban parishes and their "Parish-Books, Accounts, and of Assessments, and Levies on the Houses within the several towns."<sup>244</sup> By working with parish tax and levy records, the Justices of the Peace would create "an equal division of the Towns," just as each set of plantations in the countryside formed companies for the island's militia.<sup>245</sup> The solution

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<sup>243</sup> John Basket, *Acts of assembly passed in the island of Barbadoes from 1648-1721* (London, 1721) page 215.

<sup>244</sup> John Basket, *Acts of assembly passed in the Island of Barbadoes from 1648-1721* (London, 1721) pages 215-216.

<sup>245</sup> Richard Hall, *Acts Passsed in the Island of Barbados from 1643-1762, inclusive;* (London, 1764) 138-155.

blended the authorities of the parish churchwardens with the activities of colonial law enforcement exercised by the Justices of the Peace.

After dividing the town into smaller precincts, the law established how the town watches would be armed and the nature of their duties. The officers – Constables - of the town watch were chosen by the parish Justices of the Peace and commanded men sent by the town’s property-owners to serve in the patrols, a system mirroring the colony’s militia system. Just as planters were responsible for keeping an indentured servant or poor white inhabitant for every ten acres, the law ordered

every Master or Mistress of a Family, or Shop-keeper, and every owner of a House or Store-house within the Town of St Michael, to the Value of Fifteen Pounds *per Annum*, or more, for every such Store-house, and also every Owner of a Store-house of the like Value within the said Town of St. Michael, and is a planter and hath a Plantation in this Island, though the said Store-house be not rented out, he having no Person dwelling therein, shall, and the very of them beforementioned, are hereby required to send an able Man every eighteen Night<sup>246</sup>

But while colonists in the island’s militia were required to purchase and maintain their own red coats, black hats, muskets, ammunition, and cartridge boxes, the men serving in the town watch were to be provided with “a good Sword, Watch-Bill, or Half-Pike,” militarizing the port’s streets. Keeping strict guard, the watches had the authority to “take up all wandring suspected idle Persons, who cannot give a good account of themselves, and their Business.” If they came across anyone “endeavouring to break open any House or Houses, or fire the same; or if any Person shall with Force and Violence resist and oppose the said Constables and Watches” they had the authority to resort with deadly violence. The act paid particular attention to the watches’ duty to arrest anyone attempting to start fires, an echo of the fears of urban conflagration stoked by the 1692 conspiracy.

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<sup>246</sup> John Basket, *Acts of assembly passed in the island of Barbadoes from 1648-1721* (London, 1721) 216.



Beyond policing and surveilling the port town at night, the newly established town watches enforced the new standards of urban cleanliness, linking policing to regulating the town's material conditions which had traditionally been the role of the parochial government. The final clauses of the new law establishing a town watch forbade any person within Bridgetown's streets from throwing "at any time, by Day or Night, into any Street, Lane, Alley, or other Place within the said Towns, any Dung, Stinking Provisions, Sweepings of their Houses, or other Nusances." Justices of the Peace, constables, watchmen, clerks of the market, were "strictly required and enjoined" to report or arrest settlers or enslaved people breaking the new law. Those found guilty of violating the new sanitary regulations risked paying a fine of twenty-shilling in pounds sterling. If any of the watchmen or constables turned a blind eye to inhabitants littering the streets, they faced the same fine.<sup>247</sup> Although the act relied on a unique blending of parochial and colonial authorities to police and govern the town and did not result in the intentional creation of a municipal government as such, it did represent a watershed in how settlers surveilled and policed black bodies in Bridgetown.

Planters efforts to govern Bridgetown did not stop with the creation of a renewed and organized town watch, it continued with further restriction on enslaved mobility. In 1708, the assembly passed a measure "to prohibit the Inhabitants of this Island from employing, their Negroes or other slaves, in selling and bartering." Targeting the white and black hucksters plying their goods to supply the island's internal marketing system "quick-stock, Corn, Fruit, Pulse... Milk, Horse-meat, and Firewood," the law levied heavy fines on white buyers of goods sold by enslaved sellers. Black sellers of such goods, whether on behalf of their masters or acting on their

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 219.

own, faced corporal punishment of twenty-one lashes on their backs executed by a Justice of the Peace at the site of the violation. In the context of Bridgetown's crowded markets, this meant that the law had the potential to transform the market into a site of colonial violence against the enslaved. Recognizing the difficulties of stopping the small commerce and marketing between poor whites and black people in Bridgetown, the law ordered the clerks of the market to hire two men at the rate of fifteen pounds a year to "diligently inspect the Tippling-houses, Huckstering shops, Markets and all other suspected places within or near the said Town," adding another group of police onto the town's streets and into its taverns and public houses.<sup>248</sup> Finding it nearly "impossible altogether to discourage and find out such evil practices," the assembly expanded the power of the colonial state in Bridgetown in an effort of controlling the port's economy. Alongside the act establishing a town watch, it sought to bring the town's settler population and propertied classes together in an effort of civic renewal and obligation towards policing the boundaries of the island's slave society. Squads of settlers patrolled the port's streets, markets, and taverns, and were not the only symbols of the colonial state's interest in urban renewal and control.

In the early years of the eighteenth century, planters' efforts to govern and police Bridgetown extended into improving the port's principal fortifications, signaling a new interest in guarding the port from insurrection rather than just foreign invasion. The 1692 conspiracy and Dubois's report had raised issues about the security of the island's fortifications from the dangers of slave insurrection. Disloyal Irish and enslaved workers in the town magazine and Needham's point could be removed and punished; outdated and poorly engineered fortifications would remain susceptible to the attacks of a slave uprising if one were to occur. Dubois included in his report to

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<sup>248</sup> Richard Hall, *Acts Passed in the Island of Barbados from 1643-1762, inclusive*; (London, 1764) 185-187.

the governor recommendations for solving some of these tricky problems. Dubois noted that around the walls and near the gate to Needham's point, Bridgetown's most important fortification, "many bushes high Corne and other blinds" could successfully hide rebels looking to surprise the fort.<sup>249</sup> Dubois's recommendation was limited to removing and clearing the dense undergrowth in front of the fort.<sup>250</sup> As the wars of the early eighteenth century raged on in this context of planters' attempts to revitalize Bridgetown, planters turned towards British royal engineers to help build new fortifications around the port.

Bridgetown's fortifications had long been viewed as inadequate for defending the island, yet it took until the early years of the eighteenth century for the colonial government to enlist British Royal Engineers to improve the town's forts. British royal engineer Talbot Edwards arrived in Barbados during the closing years of Nine Years War and offered an unsparing assessment of Barbados's forts to the Secretary of the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Edward Blathwayte. Sent to assess the island's defenses, Edwards dismissed them out of hand. "Some places they call Forts which have neither moats nor pallizadoes about them... and have such sorry guns in them... that, should they ever come to make use of these works, would serve only to deceive ye island, but not to defend it." His concerns for Barbados's security ran deep, "They have nothing to secure themselves but a small Trench they have sunk of about seven foot broad by five foot deep all next ye sea, and as this is a very slight defence, soe it is washed downe almost every year with ye

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<sup>249</sup> TNA, CO28/1 fol 204.

<sup>250</sup> Archealogist Nial Finneran and historian Emily Mann have traced "creole" influences on the seventeenth century development of Barbados's fortifications. Niall Finneran, "'This Islande Is Inhabited with All Sortes': The Archaeology of Creolisation in Speightstown, Barbados, and Beyond, AD 1650–1900," *The Antiquaries Journal* 93 (June 7, 2013): 319–51, ; Mann, "To Build and Fortify: Defensive Architecture in the Early Atlantic Colonies."

rains.”<sup>251</sup> If the problems with the island’s fortifications were of serious concern to British Engineers and the imperial government, Edwards’ solutions were grandiose to the point of absurdity.

Edward’s proposals, while unrealistic given the constraints on the colony’s finances, did signal the colonial government’s serious interest in strengthening the port’s defenses from insurrection originating in the island’s sugar plantations. Edwards’ proposal for a new fortification to defend Bridgetown envisioned a massive structure that would house no less than 500 pieces of cannon and 4,000-5,000 British soldiers.<sup>252</sup> At the time of Edwards’ report, Needham’s point, the island’s largest fort, had only 40 pieces of ordinance overlooking Carlisle Bay.<sup>253</sup> Edwards dreamed to build a fort that would rival any defensive structure in Europe, referencing his plan, “I believe it is ye first piece of fortification as ever was contrived with such large flanks, being 300 foot in length, and the greatest Engineers in Europe has never yet brought them higher then 200ft.,” Facing immense financial pressure and stress after years of costly warfare, Barbados’s colonial government and assembly rejected Edward’s ambitious plans, citing the decline of the island’s white population, high taxes, and continuing costs of defense. Barbadian planters considered any additional tax to be simply unacceptable. Edwards and the island’s colonial government agreed, however, on the need to adjust the orientation of Barbados’s defenses from

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<sup>251</sup> "America and West Indies: November 1700, 12-15," in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 18, 1700*, ed. Cecil Headlam (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1910), 646-660. *British History Online*,.

<sup>252</sup> CPSC., 928.

<sup>253</sup> British Library, Add MS 33231 OO.2., Talbot Edwards: Plans for forts, Carlisle Bay, Barbados: 1697, 1698.

away from the sea towards internal threats to “check the insults of the negroes as to be the grand place of retreat.”<sup>254</sup>

The compromise between the cash-strapped colonists and the overly ambitious Edwards was St Ann’s fort, built on an elevation above Bridgetown to protect the port from foreign naval forces and local insurrection from inland. St Ann’s location above and outside Bridgetown shifted the center of Bridgetown’s defensive infrastructure away from Needham’s point and the coast. Colonists invested in rebuilding a platform on the northern edge of the town to complement the new defenses, near the old colonial seat of Fontabelle. The colonial assembly invested in placing cannons, ordinances, and armed guards to the east of Bridgetown near the new governor’s mansion at Pilgrim’s plantation. These fortifications formed a ring around Bridgetown with St. Ann’s, and oriented as much towards the island’s interior as towards the sea and foreign attacks. In addition to the strategic value these fortifications had to the port’s defense, they also served as symbols of the planters’ power concentrated around the port to deter the mobility of enslaved people seeking a degree of freedom in Bridgetown’s markets.

## 4.5 Conclusion

The contours of Bridgetown’s social and colonial geographies did not fundamentally change between 1690 and 1710. The colonial politics of governing Bridgetown, however, changed enormously during this period. At the start of this period of colonial crisis, decline, and renewal on Barbados, St Michael’s parish played a central role in governing the port. The 1692 conspiracy

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<sup>254</sup> *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 18, 1700*, no. 954.

and the broader crisis of the colony's plantation economy in this period changed how planters related to Bridgetown, ushering in a new system of governance and policing in Bridgetown. New laws passed in the aftermath of the 1692 conspiracy laid the foundation for a system of surveillance and colonial terror that marked the boundaries of slave society in Bridgetown expanding the power of Barbados's colonial state.

These new laws and the emergence of a new system of urban governance in Bridgetown were predominantly reactions to emergent patterns of enslaved mobility and resistance in Barbados. The relationship between the 1692 conspiracy and the process of urban renewal in Bridgetown confirms what Emma Hart and Trevor Burnard have identified about the urban histories of eighteenth-century Kingston and Charleston. In the context of these plantation societies, urban renewal focused on addressing the needs of these places to police enslaved people. Studies of this eighteenth-century effort of urban renewal in the eighteenth century British Atlantic, however, often focus on how the movement broadened political participation and spread ideas of civic participation through the creation of new municipal governments and institutions. These studies have thus produced narratives that envision urban renewal of the kind experienced by Bridgetown in this particularly unstable period as a part of an expanding, transatlantic urban middle class. The case of Bridgetown, in a transatlantic context, reminds us that such projects of urban renewal often rested on a foundation of racial capitalism partially engineered on Barbadian plantations in the seventeenth century, and had as much to do with the protection of property and social order as it did the growth of an urban middle class.

## 5.0 Bridgetown's Builders: The Parish, Merchants, Planters and Barbados's Building Industry

In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, English settlers in Barbados and the rest of the Greater Caribbean performed a delicate balancing act, constructing a profitable colonial landscape marked by comfortingly English architectural and cultural forms while adapting life to the harsh realities of hurricanes, earthquakes, tropical heat, and the constant social violence of racial slavery.<sup>255</sup> The builders whose structures marked and defined these landscapes adapted to the necessities of the environment while seeking to profit from the demands of a colonial market in constant need of housing and infrastructure. As the site of tense political and social negotiations and conflict throughout the seventeenth-century, settlers' need for stability in Bridgetown's built environment was perhaps greater than anywhere else on Barbados.

Housing remained a constant need for Bridgetown's 10,000-plus inhabitants in the late-seventeenth and early eighteenth century. The largest period of growth in the town's permanent inhabitants took place towards the end of the seventeenth century. As discussed in chapter three, between 1680 and 1712, Bridgetown's population grew from 3000 to 11,000 year-round inhabitants, greatly increasing the need for housing in the port.<sup>256</sup> While the structures of municipal

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<sup>255</sup> Matthew Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean, 1624-1783* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), 117–40; Stuart Schwartz, *Sea of Storms*, 2015; Louis Nelson, *Architecture and Empire in Jamaica* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

<sup>256</sup> Aaron Graham, "Towns, Government, Legislation and the 'police' in Jamaica and the British Atlantic, 1770-1805," *Urban History* Vol 47., no. 1 (2020): 46.

government in Bridgetown remained in flux for much of the seventeenth and earlier eighteenth century, Bridgetown's builders nevertheless created a local industry to meet these housing needs. In Bridgetown, like elsewhere in British Caribbean, such builders developed what Lois Nelson calls "creole architectures": local adaptations of English architectural forms to tropical environments. Just as the form of Bridgetown's buildings displayed evidence of creolization, Barbadian conditions and developments created a creole building industry capable of meeting the housing demands of a vibrant Atlantic port.

In the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century, as the colonial government began to create a system of municipal governance and policing, the parish became a critical patron establishing the port's building industry. Despite an early attempt in the 1660s to regulate the town's builders and built environment, the colonial government made little sustained effort to regulate multiple actors who engaged with the town's earliest building industry. The port's earliest builders were elusive figures in the colony's early history, predominantly marginal and marginalized within Barbados's settler society. Unlike other members of the island's propertied classes, they left little trace in the colonial archives. This changed with a series of parish projects in the 1690s and 1700s, that consolidated control over public projects into the hands of a select group of artisans and Bridgetown's inhabitants. In the eighteenth century, however, these parochial builders were joined by a new generation of merchants and sugar planters who embraced building in Bridgetown as a profitable arm of their economic activities. This merge of building for profit with the production of sugar forms an underappreciated part of the transformation of plantation estates and operations that occurred over the course of the eighteenth century.

The history of Bridgetown's urban growth and development provides a useful lens for studying the ways vernacular building industries took root and adapted not only to unfamiliar



environments but to complex institutional settings in the greater Caribbean and Atlantic world. Throughout the British Atlantic world, local building industries created the vital infrastructures that enabled settlement and expanded markets into a growing web of transatlantic commerce and capitalism, including in plantation societies like Barbados. The builders of Charleston, for example, according to Emma Hart, “were working within a British paradigm, they operated according to the habits of their metropolitan counterparts,” producing in the South Carolinian port a recognizably British provincial town.<sup>257</sup> Bridgetown’s building industry followed a different trajectory than its mainland counterpart in South Carolina, emerging much earlier in the seventeenth century and reflecting not only local environmental conditions but the particular institutional and social pressures of Barbados’s sugar plantation colony. Rather than representing a pure extension of an urbanizing British provincial world, Bridgetown represents a local, Caribbean departure from this Atlantic trend.

While these sources reveal a great deal about the island’s building industry, the scale of this sector of Barbados’s colonial economy remains elusive. Precise figures for the number of artisans and laborers involved, free and enslaved, white and black, are difficult to determine for Barbados. While precise figures remain out of reach, the importance of the industry can be measured in terms of the town and island’s housing needs. Plagued by fire, hurricane, and the extremes of tropical weather, buildings in Bridgetown and Barbados more broadly required constant repairs and reconstruction.<sup>258</sup> In the densest of the island’s settlements, thousands of

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<sup>257</sup> Emma Hart, *Building Charleston: Town and Society in the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009) 66-67.

<sup>258</sup> For an overview of Hurricanes impact on the societies and peoples of the greater Caribbean see: Schwartz, *Sea of Storms*; Matthew Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean, 1624-1783*, 118.

buildings surrounded Carlisle Bay from the 1660s onward. The fact that so little of this seventeenth and eighteenth-century material culture remains is a powerful testament to both the destructive potential of the region's climate as well as the imperatives behind the emergence of the island's building industry during this period and in years afterward. This chapter attempts to answer long-neglected questions about who built Bridgetown's infrastructure and who, if anyone, profited from their construction, repair, and reconstruction. The political and social struggles that marked the history of Bridgetown's governance shaped the trajectory and particularities of the town's building industry in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries.

### **5.1 A Parish Problem and the Colony's Concern**

In the 1660s, problems regulating Bridgeton's built environment remained largely the concern and responsibility of the town's parochial system. The town's complete destruction in 1668, however, briefly became a concern of the island's governor leading to an ultimately unsuccessful effort to regulate the town's nascent building industry.<sup>259</sup> These efforts, while largely unsuccessful, became one of the earliest attempts of an English colony to regulate an urban building industry. Borrowing from metropolitan laws meant to rebuild London after the Great Fire of 1666, these efforts focused on regulating materials used to reconstruct the town's storehouses and buildings. Within a few years, however, the colonial government abandoned these efforts.

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<sup>259</sup> In comparison, Charleston's colonial government turned to regulate the town's building industry in the 1740s. Emma Hart, *Building Charleston: Town and Society in the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World* (Charlottesville, US: University of Virginia Press, 2009).

While short-lived, these attempts illustrate the persistence of the parochial system as the sole authority over much of the port's social and economic life.

The island's earliest acts governing the Highways dated from the 1650s, and established the critical role played by the parish system in regulating and organizing Bridgetown's built environment.<sup>260</sup> Parishes used their resources to create specific offices to deal with the problems of building public roads and ways. The parishes' surveyor of the Highways organized the work and labor needed to build and maintain this public infrastructure so vital to the circulation of people and the products of sugar cane in the island's plantation economy. The labor used in such projects was drawn largely from those same sugar plantations. In Bridgetown, the Surveyors of the Highway faced an even greater task than their rural counterparts. In St Michael's parish, the surveyors were also responsible for policing the town's inhabitants, requiring each owner of a house or store to tend to their doorsteps and keep the streets of the busy and crowded commercial port clean. In addition to overseeing these issues particular to the port, the parish also needed to keep the town's bridges stable and sound enough to bear the loads of sugar carts that carried plantation products to the island's principal port.<sup>261</sup> By the restoration of crown governance in 1660, the parish system had emerged alongside the sugar plantation as a key and vital institution responsible, among other things, for the regulation and maintenance of the built environment in Bridgetown.

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<sup>260</sup> Ligon appears to have acted as an overseer in charge of building "Churchways," a form of public way explicitly tied to the island's developing parish system. Ligon, *History of Barbados*, 49.

<sup>261</sup> Acts of Barbados, (London 1655) 155.

Given the parish's role in maintaining Bridgetown's urban built environment, it is unsurprising that when news arrived in 1666 of London's Great Fire, the parish quickly took action. As a significant colonial port and major sugar exporter to London, Barbados in the 1660s was closely attuned to metropolitan developments, particularly the merchants who lived and worked in Bridgetown and made up the parish's governing body, the vestry. When news arrived in Bridgetown of London's Great Fire in the fall of 1666, the parish convened a special meeting of the vestry. There, they decided to take measures to make the town ready and prepared to address the familiar early modern scourge of urban fire. They directed Major James Beake, a prominent merchant in town, to purchase and bring over from England "a couple of Water Engines for the use of the parish and a dozen leather buckets and three hooks."<sup>262</sup> With little authority beyond the oversight of the town's streets, the parish roads, and bridges, the vestry turned to the port's wealthiest inhabitants to secure the special equipment deemed necessary to prevent or fight fires that devastated townscapes throughout the urban early modern world. For the parish to function as an institution governing the port, it depended on the wealth and involvement of the town's wealthiest sugar merchants and slave traders. When the risk of urban fire remained just news circulating around the Atlantic world and not an actuality, this arrangement served the parish system well.

The extraordinary event of a violent fire in Bridgetown two years later, in April 1668, helped make the parochial concern with fire-prevention an interest of Barbados's colonial government. Barbadian settlers, particularly Bridgetown's merchants who lost so much in the conflagration were quick to pick up on the resonances between the two unusually devastating fires.

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<sup>262</sup> Minutes of the St Michael Vestry, BMHS, 66.

John Bushel and James Bond, merchants and partners in Bridgetown shared a storehouse not far from the waterfront and publicized the fire to their correspondents in London. They told the readers of their publicized letters that “fire in our Town... burnt and consumed almost all the whole buildings thereof, save only a very few houses,” in the short space of a few hours after flames ignited the colony’s central magazine and store of gunpowder. The subsequent explosion caused, according to the eyewitnesses, “great terrour and damage.” Bushel and Bond exploited their reader’s taste for descriptions of the Caribbean’s unusual climate and geography by speculated that “it might have caused a very great Earthquake (which Islands of this Nature are much subject unto).” The explosion “dispersed the Fire and shattered all the houses, that the whole Town became presently a prey to its flames.”<sup>263</sup> These dramatic reports made it in the *London Gazette* late in 1668 alongside calls for imported timber to help the efforts to rebuild the shattered and traumatized town.<sup>264</sup> Reports calculated that the fire razed around 800 buildings and destroyed, in the process, most of sugar, molasses, and rum stored in the warehouses and wharfs lining Carlisle Bay. The fire may have cost the island’s inhabitants £400,000 island-currency in damages and nearly wiped out the colony’s reserves of arms, armaments, and munitions.<sup>265</sup> The scale of the damages, the loss of the island’s arsenal and the timing of the catastrophe during the Second Anglo-Dutch war demanded the governor’s intervention. In this moment of crisis, the parish’s problems in Bridgetown now became the colony’s concern.

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<sup>263</sup> Acts and Statutes of Barbados (London: 1655).

<sup>264</sup> The London Gazette, Issue 284, (August 3, 1668) Page 1.

<sup>265</sup> John Bushel and Francis Bond, “A true and perfect narrative of the late dreadful fire which happed at Bridge-Town in the Barbadoes, April 18, 1668. As the same was communicated in two letters from Mr. John Bushel and Mr Francis Bond, two eminent merchants there, to Mr. Edward Bushel, citizen and merchant of London” (London, 1668).

In October 1668, the colonial government passed an act for rebuilding St Michael's Town; an early attempt to regulate the island's building industry and a significant departure from the established authority of the parish over the port. The act borrowed from crown edicts passed in London after the Great Fire to insist that inhabitants rebuild Bridgetown in stone, rather than the wood and timber that defined much of the town's earliest structures.<sup>266</sup> In the wake of the London's great fires and the dictates of Charles II's government in London, urban authorities throughout Great Britain embraced regulations to build towns and cities in stone and brick.<sup>267</sup> The laws governing the reconstruction of London went further to delineate the size of streets and heights of buildings. In their efforts to regulate Bridgetown's reconstruction, Barbados's colonial authorities sought to emulate metropolitan authorities who embraced strict building regulations in the wake of London's major seventeenth century fires, but faced a vernacular built environment and building industry more indebted to local constraints than urban visions articulated in Britain.

In Barbados, before the mid-seventeenth century, buildings in stone or brick were rare. Up until the 1650s, builders on plantations and in the towns had abundant supplies of wood on the island itself as planters continued to clear land and carved out fields for sugar cane. By as early as the 1660s, when the last accessible forests were cleared and fields planted with sugar cane,

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<sup>266</sup> Frederick H Smith and Karl Watson, "Urbanity, Sociability, and Commercial Exchange in the Barbados Sugar Trade: A Comparative Colonial Archaeological Perspective on Bridgetown, Barbados in the Seventeenth Century," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 13, no. 1 (June 7, 2009): 63–79.

<sup>267</sup> Emma Hart, "Charleston and the British Industrial Revolution, 1750-1790," in *Global Perspectives on Industrial Transformation in the American South* (St. Louis: University of Missouri Press, 2005); Elizabeth McKellar, *The Birth of Modern London: The Development and Design of the City, 1660-1720* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

settlers needed to import timber. The town's ship owners and merchants regularly organized timbering expeditions to Suriname and the indigenous-held islands of the eastern Caribbean, the sources of vernacular industries and trades in the region.<sup>268</sup> The new act to rebuild St Michael's town, with its insistence on enforcing the use of stone, faced the geographic and economic constraints particular to the region. Such constraints doomed the colonial government's early intervention into regulating the town's building infrastructure and preserved the vestry's authority over the town.

Barbadian planters, merchants, and builders faced geographically and economically-specific challenges to finding cheap sources of stone and brick. Barbados, a colony in the middle of a revolutionary adoption of mass sugar cultivation, had few settlers engaged in quarrying and brick-making, despite the abundant white coral limestone found throughout the island.<sup>269</sup> Settlers more frequently mined stone available along the coasts for ship's ballast rather than construction, a practice that worried colonial officials tasked with defending the island from French, Dutch, and Spanish attacks by sea. In 1665, at the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Dutch war, colonial authorities passed a law "to prevent the raising, digging, breaking up, or taking away of any Stones, in any part of the Sea, or Seashores before this Island."<sup>270</sup> A few years later, after the Bridgetown fire and recognizing colonists' use of these rocks along the eastern coast, colonial authorities temporarily relaxed the prohibition against mining coastal rock formations, briefly placing the needs of the island's building industry above strategic considerations. In their efforts to enable

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<sup>268</sup> Mary Draper, "Timbering and Turtling: The Maritime Hinterlands of Early Modern British Caribbean Cities," *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 15, no. 4 (2017): 769–800.

<sup>269</sup> McKellar, *The Birth of Modern London: The Development and Design of the City, 1660-1720*, 71–74.

<sup>270</sup> Rawlins, *Acts and Statutes of Barbados*, 1699.

Bridgetown's builders to construct a new town of stone, the colonial government briefly set aside concerns over defending the island's coasts.

Despite loosening regulations against mining stone from the island's coasts, the demand for imported timber remained high throughout the seventeenth century, suggesting that Barbados's early building industry continued to favor using wood over brick or stone. Inhabitants appeared to prefer the loose building restrictions of the merchant-led parochial government over the new colonial laws issued by the governor. Months after the April fire, advertisements in London newspapers looked to attract merchants willing to supply timber to Barbados on easy terms for inhabitants hoping to rebuild the town quickly and cheaply. When reporting on the state of the English colony in the early 1680s, however, governor Dutton, praised the rebuilt town. "The cheife Town in the Island is... partly built of Brick, but most of Stone with handsome Streets," suggesting that at least some builders in Bridgetown took the laws of the late 1660s as serious guidelines.<sup>271</sup> Dutton, a new arrival to Barbados in the early 1680s, praised the town for being built "after the English fashion for commodiousness and decency," in his reports back to the Board of Trade and Plantations in London.<sup>272</sup>

Despite these governors's praise of Bridgetown, they took few steps to regulate the island's building industry, leaving much of the practical governance of the port town to parochial authorities. Their disinterest in regulating the town or its builders suggests that the Act to Rebuild St Michael's town in 1668 was the product of an exceptional moment; the convergence of colonial interests influenced by the metropolitan experience of a particularly violent urban fire in the

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<sup>271</sup> Sloane MS 2441, fols. 16-17. British Library

<sup>272</sup> Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: volume 11, 1681-1685, May 30, 1681, pp 67-72.



island's only urban center and principal market town. Nevertheless, it provides a unique window into the state of the island's building industry in the early years of the seventeenth century and the limitations of colonial institutions to effectively regulate or control its practitioners. What little we can learn of these earlier builders, particularly those who sought to profit from development and construction in Bridgetown, suggests that the town's early building industry was driven by figures traditionally ignored by narratives that chart the rise of the island's plantation economy.

As the smoke cleared from Bridgetown in September 1668, merchants like John Bushel and Francis Bond surveyed the damage, noting the tremendous costs to the island's trade. Nearly a years-worth of products drawn from crops of sugar cane went up in flames with the town's storehouses. In their public letters to London, Bushel and Bond used these calculations to impress upon their mercantile readers the dire needs of the colony and signal the commercial opportunities available to those willing to supply its merchants with trade.<sup>273</sup> They were not alone in tallying up the costs of the fire and using the disaster to further their aims and interests. The island's governor, William Willoughby and his council drafted a letter to Charles II's government, emphasizing the grave danger posed by the loss of guns and armaments stored in Bridgetown.<sup>274</sup> Using the conflagration, they begged the crown to renew their investment in the island's defenses and ease the costs of defense placed on the island's planters. While Atlantic merchants like Bushel and Bond and the island's governor articulated their stakes in the efforts to rebuild Bridgetown in 1668, they were not alone in spotting the opportunities that appeared in the ashes and smoke. As deeds

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<sup>273</sup> John Bushel and Francis Bond, "A true and perfect narrative of the late dreadful fire which happed at Bridge-Town in the Barbadoes, April 18, 1668. As the same was communicated in two letters from Mr. John Bushel and Mr Francis Bond, two eminent merchants there, to Mr. Edward Bushel, citizen and merchant of London" (London, 1668).

<sup>274</sup> Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies, Volume 5, 1661-1668, pp 571-581.

from the period show, local builders, largely on the margins of Barbados's planter and mercantile elite, played a crucial role in rebuilding Bridgetown after the fire of 1668.

A host of lesser known figures sought out and found opportunity for profit in the unique circumstances of Bridgetown's post-fire development. Leaving behind only sparse trails in the archives, they nevertheless helped rebuild one of England's wealthiest colonial ports. One of the reasons why such actors and their activities as post-disaster developers remain obscure is that most failed to lay down permanent roots in Barbados during the second-half of the seventeenth century. While they played pivotal roles in this exceptional moment of crisis and development, they either had no interest or ability to translate whatever gains they made in redevelopment into the mainstays of the colonial economy: sugar and slaves.

Packed closely together by the waterfront and wharfs, the April fire spared few of the storehouses lining Bridgetown's main commercial thoroughfare, Cheapside. Named for the London commercial center, the main street in Bridgetown had been the home of the town's principle merchants and a good number of colonial leaders since the 1640s. Daniel Searle, a London merchant and the Protectorate's chief agent in the 1650s kept his governor's residence along the street at the center of town.<sup>275</sup> So close to the waterfront, the parish taxed the houses and inhabitants of Cheapside at higher rates than many of the town's other streets in the late seventeenth century.<sup>276</sup> Later in the century, English merchants monopolized the thoroughfare, but at mid-century the street was home to wealthy merchants from a variety of communities and

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<sup>275</sup> Martyn Bowden, "The Three Centuries of Bridgetown: An Historical Geography," *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* XLIX (2003): 3–138.

<sup>276</sup> St Michael's Vestry Tax Lists, 1692, BDA.

occupations. One of Searle's neighbors in the late 1650s was Nathaniel White, a "Churgyon and practitioner of Physick," signaling the occupational diversity of Cheapside in the early years of the town's life as a vital Atlantic port.<sup>277</sup>

Such figures like the "Churgyon" White, held onto their property well into the 1660s as the port's social and cultural geography grew in diversity and complexity. Nathaniel White held a 99-year lease on a 20-foot wide parcel of land fronting on Cheapside, located next door to the governor's mansion in the 1650s. Dated from December 10, 1673, White's presence in Bridgetown can be traced from the waning days of the English Commonwealth, a moment of uncertainty in the colonial government as Searle's grip on colonial power faded and was replaced by a string of influential planters that hoped to lead the island through the restoration of Charles II.<sup>278</sup> White received the lease from one of the island's earliest settlers, Captain James White, a planter who held titles to land in the port. Long after Searle's governorship ended. Nathaniel White stayed in Bridgetown, holding onto to the Cheapside property until the November following the town's great fire.

Reflecting the town's growing religious and cultural diversity, following the town's fire in 1668, White transferred his lease to Abraham Levi Rezio, a Sephardi man with few connections to even the island's Jewish community and even fewer to the rest of the island. While Nathaniel White's presence in Bridgetown can be traced through wills and deeds connecting him to multiple merchants from Speightstown and Bridgetown. References to White's occupation as a Surgeon and practitioner of Physick signals his place in Barbados's settler society. Levi Rezio, by contrast,

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<sup>277</sup> RB3/12/87, deed dated December 10, 1673, BDA.

<sup>278</sup> RB3/20/397-405, deed dated from August 30, 1692; Larry Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted*, 64.

is mentioned in only one set of deeds connected to White's plot in Bridgetown and subsequently disappears from the island's historical record. Levi Rezio's name is absent from the island and town's earliest census in 1680, suggesting that his presence in Barbados was fleeting and temporary.<sup>279</sup> Figures like Levi Rezio reflect the growth of a segment of Bridgetown's population that, alongside the town's growing social and cultural diversity laid down few roots in the port.

Even if Levi Rezio's presence on Barbados was temporary, his interests in Bridgetown depended on building durable commercial relationships and, literally, solid foundations. As discussed earlier, Sephardim proved successful at forging such commercial connections in Bridgetown, particularly in the 1660s. In the months following the April fire, Levi Rezio began buying properties not just facing Cheapside, but others facing a parallel street. His plans, from the deeds we have access to, reveal a slow consolidation of properties at the center of the town from largely Anglican merchant-settlers. When Captain William Withington, an established planter and officer in the island's militia, acquired a property sold off by one of the island's marshals to pay a merchant's debt, he sold the newly acquired property to Levi Rezio for an unknown sum. With Withington's parcel in hand, Levi Rezio struck a similar deal with Nathaniel White for the valuable Cheapside property on November 24, 1668. In short order, a relatively unknown and little noted figure on Barbados managed to acquire two valuable properties at the center of the colony's principle commercial town and capital. If he depended on English settlers to acquire this valuable plot of land, he turned to the island's Sephardi community when he looked to sell. When he sold the plots in February 1670, it was to Antonio Rodrigues, a figure of some stature and connection

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<sup>279</sup> CO1/44/142-379; St Michael Parish Tax Lists 1692, 1712 (BDA).

among the island's Jewish community.<sup>280</sup> In his business dealings, the most lucrative commercial relationships for Levi Rezio remained within the town's Sephardi community.

Rodrigues capitalized on Levi Rezio's earlier work joining and developing this property in Bridgetown. Levi Rezio, according to the deeds describing the property, "did erect and build a large stone house ... since the town of St Michael's aforesaid was burnt by fire." In addition to acquiring these separate plots of land in Bridgetown, Levi Rezio managed to muster enough labor to build the large stone house despite his relatively weak ties to the island's settler society. While these deeds allow us to trace the property-owners who developed the town, they say nothing to answer crucial questions about the labor builders like Levi Rezio used in this construction project. Having acquired the plot of land from Levi Rezio in February 1670, Rodrigues sold the large stone structure - perhaps a storehouse given its location near the waterfront - to an English settler, Nathaniel Clare, for the much larger sum of £500 sterling and ten guineas. In the year or so that he had possession of the plot of land, Levi Rezio acted as a developer, consolidating properties, acquiring specialized labor and stone material, and building a new structure in line with island's legislation governing the town's re-building in stone.<sup>281</sup> Levi Rezio's actions in Bridgetown and his relative marginality even within the island's Sephardi community presents an interesting counter-point to the typical roles held by Sephardim in the early modern Caribbean.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> RB3/15/66, BDA.

<sup>281</sup> RB3/20/397-405, BDA.

<sup>282</sup> Yda Schreuder, *Amsterdam's Sephardic Merchants and the Atlantic Sugar Trade in the Seventeenth Century* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), ; Stephen Fortune, *Merchants and Jews: The Struggle for British West Indian Commerce, 1650-1750*. (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1984).

Builders like Levi Rezio present an alternative model for Bridgetown's Sephardim in the seventeenth-century. As previously discussed, much of Bridgetown's Sephardi community established long-lasting commercial ties to Barbados during the seventeenth century despite the anti-Semitism of their neighbors and restrictions placed on the community by the colonial government in the 1680s. Such commercial bonds and connections to a wider Atlantic mercantile diaspora allowed figures like Rodrigues to establish a permanent presence in Bridgetown helping to build a community that lasted into the nineteenth century. Levi Rezio departs from this model of the diasporic merchant translating commercial connections into a settled presence in plantation societies like Barbados. Rather, Levi Rezio appears in the archival record as an opportunistic builder of new urban structures who engaged in a limited set of projects in Bridgetown and simply left Barbados.

The scarcity of references to Bridgetown's earlier builders makes the deeds describing Levi Rezio's project an unusual glimpse into who stepped into the void left by the fire of 1668. In these early years of Barbados's slave society, figures like Levi Rezio existed on the margins of Barbados's plantation society within an urban-maritime society that allowed such transient figures to carve out new opportunities provided by the needs for builders. Figures like Levi Rezio took advantage of moments like the town's efforts to rebuild with permanent stone rather than temporary timber. In the late-seventeenth century an entirely different set of builders became more closely enmeshed in the island's Anglican planter establishment, transforming the town's nascent building industry. Unlike Levi Rezio, they found ways to establish a permanent presence on Barbados as settlers capable of consistently profiting from building infrastructure. Key to their success was the patronage of the island's parochial institutions, particularly in Bridgetown where the need to build monumental architecture for the colony was at its greatest.

## 5.2 Building for the Parish

In the 1730s, a generation after Copen's depiction of Bridgetown from the sea, an anonymous artist attempted to render Barbados's capital in paint. Like Copen's earlier depiction, much of the town is an indistinct blur of houses and buildings with a few key exceptions again reflecting the priorities of the painter wishing to please his patron with a flattering view of the colony. With the viewer's perspective situating inland, however, wind-mills and fields of sugar cane ring the town while on the edges of the town stand fortifications flying the flag of Great Britain. At the edge of the town, towards the center of the painting stands St Michael's church with its nave and tower looming large over the town. The church's steeple is clearly the tallest structure in the town, both a symbolic gesture of the parish church's continued importance in Barbados and a recognition of the structure's reality as a central location in the island's social geography.<sup>283</sup> From the 1690s to the early 1720s, at the moment when the parish began to cede further control over governing Bridgetown to the governor and assembly, St Michael's vestry devoted a great deal of time and resources to building the structure that appears so prominently in this anonymous painting. The volume of work these building projects required changed how the parish conducted its business with the town's builders.

Over three decades around the early eighteenth century, St Michael's parish entrusted a small group of artisans to build a church that reflected the dignity and wealth of the island as well as the continued relevance of the parish system in a moment when the colonial state took a more

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<sup>283</sup> Anonymous, *View of Bridge Town and Carlisle Bay in Barbados with the Governor going to Church and attended by his guards*, (circa. 1740s) BMHS.

active role in governing Bridgetown. Gaining their trust, this group of builders went on to build roads, bridges, and infrastructure vital to the town's commerce. The patronage of the Anglican parish in Bridgetown, played a pivotal role in establishing the town's artisans as public builders enabling some to join the ranks of the island's planter class.

The island's parish churches, as critical centers of social, economic, and political power in seventeenth century Barbados, had long presented opportunities for the island's builders in the seventeenth century. The earliest reference to the mason-turned-planter Simon Cooper comes from the parochial records of the mid-1660s. Simon Cooper, a prominent mason tasked with re-building the colony's fortifications in the 1680s, had his start assessing the newly built St Michael's church decades earlier.<sup>284</sup> In the 1660s St Michael's parish decided to relocate their church from the northern edge of town to the south-eastern corner closer to where the colony's legislative assembly met and the port's central markets did business.<sup>285</sup> In this central location, the island's governors, leading planters, and merchants met on Sundays and to mark the critical moments in the island's Anglican religious life. From its pulpits, the island's clergymen justified the island's social and colonial order as loyal expressions of Anglican establishment overseas. The church also served as the meeting-place for the vestry that governed much of Bridgetown's settler society. As a critical center of social, religious, and political power on Barbados, the church, unlike much of the town in the 1660s, was constructed in stone, had a tiled roof, and sported lead gutters and pipes to re-direct the torrents and rains that washed out the island every rainy season. Most of the artisans who constructed this building and did this work in the 1660s remain unknown, but by the 1690s when

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<sup>284</sup> CO31/3/279, May 9, 1691, TNA.

<sup>285</sup> Minutes of St Michaels Vestry, Vol I., 1655-1677, BMHS 27.



the parish sought to improve and expand this structure, its builders had become established figures in the town's settler society.

Such projects began in the 1690s as a generation of wealthy and generous Bridgetown merchants left elaborate bequests to the parish. Like Richard Barrett's clock, John Mills left £350 sterling to St Michael's parish to buy an organ for the town's church. Signaling the merchant elite's interest in linking their local Anglican religious leadership to the metropole, Mills' bequest specified that any organ be purchased from London. Placing the organ in the old church structure meant significantly altering its interior; this project was dependent on the contribution of the town's artisans and served to strengthen the ties between the parish and the town's middling classes. Two years after Mills left the parish the money to buy an organ, the vestry settled a contract with the artisan Latimer Richards to build an ornate loft to hold the newly acquired organ and establish St Michael's church as the centerpiece of the Anglican colonial religious establishment. While the 1690s had been a destabilizing decade for Barbados, one in which the colonial government began policing Bridgetown, the parish turned towards the town's middling classes to help project the institution's wealth and power.

Reacting to the uncertainty of the 1690s, the parish focused on creating an ornate church that borrowed architectural elements from a wider British Atlantic world. While the artisan Latimer Richards' occupation remains unknown, the specific project of building the loft depended on knowledge of multiple crafts and architectural styles borrowed from around the Atlantic world. Specifically, as a carpenter, Richards build a 26-foot-long loft running along the church's western end. Likewise, he built two sets of stairs needed to access the organ and the loft. Intent on ornamenting the church's interior, the parish commissioned Richards to build ten elaborate Solomonian columns. The contract to build a loft, set of stairs, and the decorative columns not only

speaks to the town's access to a market of skilled artisanal labor that possessed knowledge of broad European architectural and ornamental trends, but also the parish's interest in this uncertain period to enhance the appearance of its most important structure. Paying Richards £100 sterling in £25 sterling installments, the vestry trusted Richards to supply the labor and knowledge for such an ornate project while the parish promised to find "all manner of materials convenient for the work."

<sup>286</sup> Building for the parish was both profitable for Richards and critical for the parish to maintain its relevance in a rapidly changing Barbados.

Still, some of the labor needed to install the organ could not be met through Bridgetown's market of artisans and craftsmen forcing the parish to turn to England for specialized labor to help bolster the appearance of the parish church. By 1697, Richards had finished the organ loft, but it remained empty. Without an instrument to fill the space, the vestry formed a three-man committee to negotiate with William Brookes, "merchant in London... to procure an able Organ for the Parish of St. Michaels."<sup>287</sup> Finding the instrument alone was not enough, however, and the vestry instructed the committee to make sure that Brookes bring over "some able person to come over with the said Organ who understands the setting up of such an Instrument Ordered."<sup>288</sup> While the vestry made an attempt to find the labor needed to actually set up the organ in the newly built loft in 1697, it took nearly a decade later in the early 1700s that the vestry actually needed to pay a parishioner, the sexton Edward Wilson, to conduct regular maintenance and provide the labor to work the Organ's bellows.<sup>289</sup> Even while decades of warfare disrupted the island's trade and

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<sup>286</sup> St Michaels Minute Books, Vol II. BMHS, 58.

<sup>287</sup> St. Michaels Minute Books Vol II., BMHS, 66-67.

<sup>288</sup> St. Michaels Minute Books Vol II BMHS, 64-65.

<sup>289</sup> St. Michaels Minute Books Vol II BMHS, 95.

plantation economy, destabilizing its settler society, the parish remained focused on bringing a pipe organ to Bridgetown to edify the parish church.

Such projects continued into the 1710s as the parish sought to navigate its place in a town transformed by a decade of uncertainty in the late seventeenth-century. These projects and investments in parochial infrastructure established a cadre of parish-sanctioned builders and contractors both establishing the parish as a new source of economic influence just at the moment when its power as a political institution in Bridgetown began to significantly fade. In the 1710s, the parish's attempts to build a tower to house a clock and bells left to the town in Richard Barrett's will met with similar success as the project to bring in a pipe organ by tapping into this robust labor market, further establishing a cadre of parochially-sanctioned builders and contractors. In 1711, the vestry organized a committee of leading figures in the town and colony's settler society to organize the work of contracting with some of the island's builders to realize the model of a tower produced by Colonel Christian Lilly, a Royal Engineer stationed on Barbados at the height of the War of Spanish Succession and responsible for the unenviable task of reforming the island's hap-hazard system of fortifications.<sup>290</sup> The committee settled on a mason, Thomas Godfrey, paying him £205 sterling for work "carefully and honestly performed by him or his masons."<sup>291</sup>

By 1715, Godfrey and his masons had finished the work on the new stone tower, and the parish continued to solicit labor from the town's builders, further entrenching the relationships between the merchants that represented the parish in the vestry and the town's artisans. In August

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<sup>290</sup> This committee reflected the close involvement of the settler colonial elite in parochial affairs. The committee included the judge, merchant and sugar planter, Thomas Beckles, as well as two Captains in the island's colonial militia.

<sup>291</sup> St Michaels Vestry Minute Books, Vol. II, BMHS, 104.

1715, the parish settled a contract with Benjamin Crocker who, like Godfrey, was a builder and relatively unknown figure in the town's settler society. Despite this relatively marginality, Crocker, again like Godfrey earned the parish's trust to complete a project of some significance to the island elite. The parish paid Crocker £35 sterling for his work "carrying the steeple five feet higher than his agreement and for making the Cornishes." They made a further set of agreements with Crocker based on their recognition that the builder had "done his work with diligence." They gave him scaffolding material for "his own proper use" after the church was painted and white-washed as had "been usual" as long as any scaffolding material had been returned to its rightful owner.<sup>292</sup> Crocker's case hints at the growing entanglement between the vestry and the town's community of builders in the early eighteenth century. The vestry was building relationships of trust based on their experience with different artisans, establishing practices for compensation, and relying on networks of builders to provide material for parts of the job site like scaffolding.

The work on St Michael's church continued into 1716, bringing more of the town's builders into the parochial project and even changing the way the parish preserved its records. Towards the end of 1715, the vestry directed the committee tasked with finishing the church steeple to find "some good workman to erect a Spire on the steeple of thirty-five feet high and eight or more square as they shall judge convenient." In addition to building a spire, the vestry contracted with another artisan and "other workmen for hanging the Bells and doing whatsoever is necessary for finishing the Steeple forthwith." Later that year, the parish needed more artisans to build a set of wheels to mount the church bells in the steeple. By 1717, the parish had ordered its secretary to

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<sup>292</sup> St Michaels Vestry Minute Books, Vol II, BMHS, 114-117.

include copies of the contracts made with the town's builders in the vestry's minute books creating a more complete record of the parish's relationship to this labor market.

One artisan, the carpenter Thomas Fields, clearly benefited from this new relationship between the parish and the town's builders. Late in 1717, the parish commissioned Field to "raise and erect for the complete hanging five Bells within the tower belong to the sd Parish Church," completing the parish's largest project. Fields, as the lead carpenter on finishing the last step of building a tower and steeple in stages for the parish. By November 1718, Fields would build the frames from which to hang the bells in the steeple, then in January the bells would be installed and the carpenter's work on the steeple completed. Finally, on January 15, Fields would build a set of stairs to the steeple. Unlike earlier contracts, Fields benefitted from a clearly delineated timeline preserved in the vestry records as a matter of parochial interest.<sup>293</sup> Such a contract also preserved the parish's promise to provide the artisan with critical material, "all such Timber, Boards, Bolts, Barrs, Nails, and whatsoever materials shall be wanting for and towards the accomplishing and perfecting the work." Along with having the vestry provide these materials, they paid Fields £200 sterling. The relationship between Fields and the parish appears to have benefitted and satisfied both as Fields continued to accept works from the vestry well into the 1720s. Fields exemplifies the ways in which these parish projects changed how the parish related to the town's builders.

These projects, persisting into the 1720s further strengthened the relationship between the town's builders and the parish. In the mid-1720s, the parish turned again to Fields repair the town's aging infrastructure. In July 1724, a month or so before the start of hurricane season, the vestry, "taking into consideration the ruinous condition of the Causeway and Bridge over the swamp,"

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<sup>293</sup> St. Michaels Minute Books Vol II, BMHS, 126.

looked to fund some necessary repairs to one of the town's main arteries into the island's interior. They turned to Fields and another carpenter, Philip Constable, to repair the bridge and causeway leading into town for £70 paid in installments.<sup>294</sup> Later, in 1725, the vestry again sought out Fields to oversee work on another part of the town's infrastructure. In May 1725, the parish signed another contract with Fields to secure the road leading from Bridgetown to the governor's residence, Pilgrim.<sup>295</sup> Unlike the church project, however, the work was much lighter and less well paid. The vestry directed Fields to provide planks and field stones to secure the road leading from the town and up through the gulley that led to Pilgrim in return for the modest sum of £10. Finally, in 1727, the vestry drafted another contract with Fields to repair minor damages and paint the church steeple for an unspecified sum tying the carpenter back to the project that started his career working with the parish. This relationship between Fields and the parish had its roots in his work on helping to finish the church steeple and persisted for around a decade cementing the carpenter's place in the island's settler society.

The longevity of this decade-long relationship between Fields and the parish hinged on Fields's ability to earn the trust of the vestry leadership and tap into the island's market in enslaved workers. First, trust played a role. In 1717, Fields's first contract with the parish stipulated that the vestry would not issue full payment unless it was satisfied that Fields had followed the parish timeline precisely and that the work was "accomplished, finished, and perfected." Fields's subsequent employment surely depended on his ability to satisfy parish standards and expectations. Trust, however, was not enough for Fields to cement such a relationship. In 1725, while Fields and

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<sup>294</sup> St. Michaels Minute Books Vol II, BMHS, 175.

<sup>295</sup> St. Michaels Minute Books Vol II, BMHS, 187-188.

another carpenter, Philip Constable were finishing the work on the bridge and causeway leading into town, the vestry assessed the funds needed to settled their debts with the two carpenters. They considered “the sd wharff work negro hire and scaffolding,” while calculating what they owed Fields and Constable. Fields and Constable’s success in securing and finishing the project for the parish turned on their ability to secure enslaved labor through hiring-out from larger slave-owners in Bridgetown and Barbados. These builder’s access to enslaved labor speaks to the broader connections they held in the island’s settler society beyond the town’s parochial elite. Unlike earlier builders like Levi Rezio, a marginal and relatively marginalized figure in Barbados, Fields secured his status as a builder by forging relationships with the wealthy merchants and sugar planters that controlled the island’s largest markets and parish system.

The variety of projects and responsibilities of the parochial government in and around Bridgetown in the early eighteenth century ensured that the parish relied on multiple builders in addition to figures like Fields. For example, Crocker, who had helped build the church steeple, earned another parish contract when the church’s main structure needed repairs. In July 1719, shortly before hurricane season, the vestry struck a deal with Crocker to rebuild the eastern gable-end wall of the church. Crocker had apparently built the first wall but it had been “Crakt and Damnified by the Weather.” Having accessed the damage with the help of “skillfull and understanding workmen,” the parish concluded that this “misfortune was in no wise to be attributed to his want of skill or knowledge in the said work.”<sup>296</sup> Crocker had kept their trust and in return he agreed to rebuild the wall, windows, and arches a second time. Likewise, the carpenter Philip Constable who helped Fields rebuild the weather-worn bridge and causeway into town in 1725

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<sup>296</sup> St. Michaels Minute Books Vol II., 117-118.

earned more work from the parish. In addition to propping up the town's rotted infrastructure, Constable helped the parish uphold the colony's commitment to racial violence. In March 1726, they paid Constable £5 sterling for building "the Gibbet or Gallows to execute the negro condemned to be hanged in chains for having murdered a whiteman."<sup>297</sup> The extensive projects under-taken by the parish in the early eighteenth century cemented the parish's relationships with multiple artisans and builders in Bridgetown.

Building for the parish was more than just good business for Bridgetown's builders; it was an avenue for a group of Bridgetown's artisans to earn a place in Barbados's settler society. Far from early actors like Levi Rezio who left few traces in the archives, these figures translated the parish's need for their labor into a more permanent presence in Bridgetown. For Fields, this relationship and his presence in the town spanned from 1718 well into the 1720s, at least a decade, long after he completed his first project with the parish, the church steeple. In the coming decades, however, builders like Fields gave way to merchants and sugar planters who more effectively turned the town's development and construction into a profitable arm of much larger estates and business enterprises.

### **5.3 Building in Their Own Right: Merchants Turned Builder**

Just as the parish drove the development of the town's building industry, the Royal Navy in Bridgetown and naval warfare of the late-seventeenth and early eighteenth century created a new generation of colonial merchants in the port. This new generation of local merchants built

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<sup>297</sup> St. Michaels Minute Books Vol II., 175.



much of their mercantile wealth on an array of local maritime activities. While a period of intense instability within Barbados's landed settler society, this period of uncertainty created fortune for a group of Bridgetown's inhabitants. For many of this new generation of local merchants, they anchored their wealth in Bridgetown, eventually buying and developing landed estates in the port.

The naval warfare of the late-seventeenth century differed in scale and purpose than the wars that shaped the Caribbean earlier in the seventeenth century.<sup>298</sup> With the establishment of sugar colonies and valuable slave trades from Barbados in the south to Jamaica in the north, the value of the English West Indian trade was well established by the late-seventeenth century. This transformed wars of conquest into wars of commercial competition primarily driven by the need to protect or open up new avenues of trade and reliant upon local privateers in the region. In particular, the French had engineered a strategy driven by privateering in the warfare of the late-seventeenth century. As the oldest established plantation society, Barbados's trade was a key target of the region's commercial warfare between France and Britain, which both increased the presence of the English Royal Navy in Bridgetown and encouraged local solutions to the challenges posed by the new commercial warfare. As early as 1692, the island's assembly outfitted two sloops to patrol the island's coasts to ward off French privateers from Martinique, providing new

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<sup>298</sup> For the impact of this warfare on the structural organization and practices of the Royal Navy in the late-seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries see: N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean* (New York: Penguin, 2004).; and on this period's impact on the Royal Navy's practices of impressment and issues of manning the Royal Navy see: Denver Brunsman, *The Evil Necessity: British Naval Impressment in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013).

opportunities for ship-owners in Bridgetown.<sup>299</sup> Locally-owned and manned sloops were regularly taken up “in the country’s service.” What such “country’s service” looked like varied, providing merchants and ship owners in Bridgetown multiple avenues through which to profit from the uncertainty and instability of nearly two decades of naval warfare in the region.

The pressing need of the colony’s governor and council to communicate with other English colonies to coordinate defense and track the movement of enemy fleets provided one avenue through which ship-owners from Bridgetown and around the Atlantic world could profit. In the 1690s and 1700s, captains of ships regularly petitioned the assembly for compensation after having been commissioned by the assembly or governor to carrying intelligence from island to island. Some petitioners, like Boas Bell came from outside of Barbados. Bell, for example, was a captain and owner of Bermuda sloop pressed into service to circulate intelligence on French movements in 1694. When he arrived in Barbados having delivered new intelligence, Bell petitioned Barbados’s governor to honor a gratuity of £20 sterling promised by the government of Bermuda.<sup>300</sup> Other ships were needed to defend the island’s coasts and keep guard for French privateers waiting offshore. In February 1695, the governor’s council settled its debts with the ships it employed in the island’s service in the previous two years paying reimbursements to three brigantines and a sloop. The sloop *Charles* and its Captain Samuel Browne earned £43 and five shillings while Captain Thomas Sherman of the brigantine *Larmeir* received £25 and five shillings.

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<sup>299</sup> Schomburgk, *The History of Barbados: Comprising a Geographical and Statistical Description of the Island; A Sketch of the Historical Events Since the Settlement; and an Account If Its Geology and Natural Productions*.

<sup>300</sup> CO31/5, Oct 3, 1694 fol 13.

Complicating these efforts to outfit their own ships to defend the island's coasts and shore-up the inadequacies of the Royal Navy in this period, a robust market in privateering from Carlisle Bay drew much of the wealth and opportunity. The concentration of privateers in Bridgetown meant that the market for maritime labor in Bridgetown remained extremely competitive throughout the eighteenth century and that the port became a market for ships, naval supplies, and armaments during times of war. In November 1703, the vice-admiralty court in Barbados, led by the island's governor, documented the arrival of 11 ships and sloops taken as prizes. Each prize represented a windfall for the captains, crews, and investors.<sup>301</sup> In 1707, Captain Willoughby of the sloop *Elizabeth* earned £277 sixteen shillings and nine pence from the sale of a French prize – a sloop - and its cargo of muscovado sugars in Bridgetown's prize court.<sup>302</sup> The sale of ships and sloops added to the value of a prize and provided ample opportunities for local owners to take advantage of a robust market in newly captured ships. Aware of the value of privateering activities, Barbados's governor and assembly approved and revised several acts encouraging privateering from their ports and harbors beginning in the 1690s and 1700s.<sup>303</sup>

The colonial government's attempts to outfit such ships to defend the island's coasts from French privateers depended not only on willing merchants and ship-owners to provide vessels but a pool of maritime labor to draw sailors willing to serve aboard Barbadian ships paid and commissioned by the colonial government. However, most of the sailors on Barbados preferred serving in privateers. Anticipating the resumption of hostilities between France and England in

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<sup>301</sup> CPSC 1704, 348. (CO28/7).

<sup>302</sup> CO31/11 fol 36.

<sup>303</sup> CPSC; William Rawlins, *The Laws of Barbaodos* (London 1699).

February 1702, Barbados's colonial government gave the *Madera*, a brigantine owned by Charles Thomas, a commission of 5 to 6 weeks to patrol the waters around Barbados and protect the island's trade. Barbados's colonial government required Thomas to outfit the ship at his own expense. The colonial government gave Thomas money to maintain a crew of no more than 80 sailors. Thomas, however, struggled to fill his ships with the 80 men provided for in his commission. Shortly after taking his commission, Thomas complained to the governor that few sailors wanted to serve aboard the *Madera*, preferring instead the prize shares earned by privateers leaving from Carlisle Bay.

To help the island's ship owners and merchants engaged in maritime trade, the colonial government resorted to passing new laws meant to keep sailors from deserting ships that arrived in Carlisle Bay for privateers. After 1696, imperial authorities in London had given Barbados's governors the sole power to issue warrants to impress local sailors to serve in the ships of the Royal Navy.<sup>304</sup> Clearly, however, the colonial government and the merchants that served it struggled to man their own ships during times of commercial warfare and lucrative privateering. In 1701, Barbados's governor's council debated how best to prevent the desertion of soldiers from merchantmen. Members of the council noted how, in times of war, the "Seamen as soon as they have received their pay at this port... desert from their Proper Ships." The colonial government recognized that lack of maritime labor delayed ships from sailing from Bridgetown and cost the merchants interested in these voyages.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> Denver Brunsman, *The Evil Necessity: British Naval Impressment in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Charlottesville, US: University of Virginia Press, 2013), 99-100.

<sup>305</sup> TNA, CO 31/6 fol 142.

While the colonial government offered opportunities to profit through holding prize courts for privateers and commissioning merchants to send their ships to defend the coast, times of war paradoxically encouraged Bridgetown's merchants to engage in illicit trade with the French, Dutch, and Spanish colonial neighbors. Alongside the forced exchange of sailors between the two islands in the 1690s, smuggling along the island's coasts increased as pressures on transatlantic trade fostered circum-Caribbean smuggling with Barbados. The island's settlers carried on illicit trades along the island's coasts, beyond the reach of customs officials in ports like Bridgetown where the long-established mercantilist infrastructure existed to track and trace the goods arriving in Barbados's principal port. In his report to London in 1699/1700, Barbados governor Ralph Gray described the difficulty of catching and identifying smuggled goods into Barbados. When questioned about whether the island had received any goods pirated by Captain Kidd, Gray admitted that smugglers could "easily have sent them hither undiscovered by little Vessells who make it a trade to runn Goods here, which tis impossible for me to prevent with one single ship," that Gray had at his disposal at the time.<sup>306</sup>

Despite some settlers' commitment to privateering, merchants in Bridgetown continued to profit from illicit trade with their neighbors in the circum-Caribbean. Prominent figures in Barbados participated in illicit commerce during times of war. In the early 1710s, a prominent clergyman on Barbados, William Gordon went himself to Martinique to buy French wines and brandy to sell in Barbados in a sloop that Gordon was a part-owner of. As a merchant, Gordon apparently had trading interests and connections that spanned from Barbados to Martinique as well as the smaller island of Granada. When a frigate of the Royal Navy captured a sloop flying Dutch

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<sup>306</sup> TNA, CO28/4/fo1 138.

flags and loaded with a cargo of cocoa in 1703, the prize court in Barbados learned the sloop, named *The Charles the Second*, was actually owned by a Bridgetown merchant, Manual Manasses Gillegan.<sup>307</sup> This smuggling and illicit trade stretched from Martinique to Curaçao and the Venezuelan coast, and had prominent members of Barbados's settlers involved by the beginning of the eighteenth century.

While Gray's comments suggest that colonial governors in the 1690s and 1700s generally discouraged smuggling, a lucrative and illicit trade between Barbados and Martinique flourished with the consent and aid of the island's colonial government under the guise of prisoner exchanges. With the continuation of illicit smuggling between Barbados and its neighbors in the circum-Caribbean, the cartels signed between Martinique and Barbados paved the way for Flags of Truce ships to cover for further clandestine trade as part of Barbados's efforts to care for prisoners of the region's commercial warfare. In 1703, governor Sir Bevil Grenville ensured that six pounds of beef or fish and four pounds of biscuit were delivered to each French prisoner held in Barbados every week. He ordered that these prisoners were held in adequate conditions in the almshouse of St George's parish where they awaited a return to Martinique or Guadeloupe in "Flags of Truce," sloops and other vessels commissioned by the colonial government to ferry prisoners back and forth between Martinique and Barbados. At times in the early eighteenth century, there were upwards of 1500 English prisoners in Martinique brought in from around the circum-Caribbean.<sup>308</sup> Barbados's colonial government continued to organize and direct the accommodations,

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<sup>307</sup> Add Ch 76087, British Library.

<sup>308</sup> CPCS, July 27, 1704, 420.

provisioning, and exchange of prisoners even when the practice rose suspicions and sanctions by metropolitan authorities.

This element of Barbados's illicit trade did not go long unnoticed by authorities in London, sparking inquiries but no effective end to the practice. In 1710, the practice of prisoner exchanges through flags of truces began to raise suspicion of clandestine trade with the French despite colonial attempts to justify the prisoner exchanges. When Mitforde Crowe left London in January 1710 to assume the governorship of Barbados, his instructions warned him to look into the practice of carrying "a Clandestine and Illegal Trade" under the cover of flags of truce with Martinique. London's instructions to Crowe included warnings about Barbados's illicit trade with the Dutch and Danish ports of the Greater Caribbean, specifically Curaçao and St. Thomas.<sup>309</sup> Crowe was to "make Strict Enquiry into the Truth of the several Matters of Fact" and when finding the principal settlers involved, he was to bring legal proceedings against them. Despite these orders to investigate, the practice of smuggling and illicit trade carried on both in Flags of Truce and in Barbadian ships, and efforts to curb these practices came to little with few merchants receiving any punishment for the widespread practice.

Beyond fueling the illicit trade carried in Flags of Truce, the presence of French and Spanish prisoners demanded provisions, housing, and above all, care. Since such prisoners fueled illicit trade between the island's, settlers and the colonial government shared an interest in keeping such prisoners well-cared for. In Bridgetown and Barbados, settlers fell into familiar patterns of caring for maritime labor in this new form of commercial warfare in the region. Treated like sick English sailors returning to Barbados from West Africa, the colonial assembly paid for individual

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<sup>309</sup> CO29/12, 76 letter dated Jan 19 1709/10.

settlers to provide care to imprisoned French sailors. Bridgetown inhabitant Hannah Sympson earned £10 Barbados-currency from the colonial assembly “for nursing a frech prisoner for 10 weekes past” in May 1696.<sup>310</sup>

In the early eighteenth century, Bridgetown’s doctors earned contracts from the island’s colonial government to provide medical care to the French and Spanish prisoners that came to the island in privateers and ships of the Royal Navy. Kept in impromptu, improvised prisons in houses scattered through Bridgetown and the surrounding areas, the colonial government took responsibility for maintaining the health of these prisoners from Martinique, Guadeloupe, or France. Drawing from the island’s doctors, physicians, and surgeons, the colonial government found practitioners willing to provide care for these prisoners for a fee. In 1718, Patrick Horne, described as a “Practitioner in Physick and Chirurgery,” presented a petition to Barbados’s assembly “to pay unto Doctor Patrick Horne the Arrears due to him on Account of the French Prisoners dureing the late Warr.”<sup>311</sup>

Provisioning British soldiers and sailors gave some planters and merchants opportunities for reaping the benefits from times of uncertain war. Provisioning contracts and prizes from privateering ventures helped gain the fortunes of some of the wealthiest sugar merchants and planters of the eighteenth century. As S.D. Smith has noted, the pre-eminent West Indian fortunes of the Lascelles family rested on supplying and provisioning naval expeditions organized during the War of Jenkins Ear in the 1730s and 1740s. The patriarch of the Lascelles fortunes, Henry

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<sup>310</sup> TNA, CO31/5/97.

<sup>311</sup> CO31/13/ fol 87.



commented that victualling “through good management... I chiefly made my fortune by it.”<sup>312</sup> Alongside the Lascelles commissioning house in London which carried on the business of the sugar trade, provisioning the navy during times of war supplemented slave trading, ship-owning, and money-lending to Barbadian planters. The relationship between planters, provisioning, privateering, and profits emerged in the last decades of the seventeenth century helping to transform Barbados’s relationship to maritime labor.

David Minvielle and Benjamin Bissell are emblematic of this new generation of merchant who benefited from the maritime opportunities opened up by war and uncertainty early decades of the eighteenth century. In the early eighteenth-century, their turn to the sea hinged on making development and construction in Bridgetown a profitable arm of their commercial enterprises, becoming builders in their own right. Such figures emerged from the uncertainty of the 1690s that provided new opportunities for Bridgetown’s merchants to benefit from a variety of maritime activities. Alongside their growing investment in local maritime activities that emerged from nearly two decades of warfare in the region, figures like Minvielle and Bissell depended on particular infrastructures in Bridgetown. In addition to their mutual investment in urban-maritime property and their relationship as neighbors in Bridgetown, Minvielle and Bissell died less than a year apart, presenting the two as further illustrative of the changing opportunities presented to Bridgetown’s propertied classes in the early eighteenth century. Bissell wrote his will in December 1748 and Minvielle followed a few months later in July 1749. Neither was particularly wealthy by the standard of Barbados’s great sugar fortunes nor politically powerful members of the planter

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<sup>312</sup> Smith, *Slavery, Family, and Gentry Capitalism in the British Atlantic: The World of the Lascelles, 1648-1834*, 73–75.

class that long monopolized the island's Assembly and Council. Both men, however, shared a comfortable position in Barbados's settler society just outside the highest circles of colonial authority and power stretching back to the 1710s.

Despite their differences as merchants and settlers, both Minvielle and Bissell shared an interest in development and construction of urban properties in Bridgetown. Their wills demonstrate the important, if differing, roles they assigned to such urban properties. While previous generations of Bridgetown's builders were shadowy figures occupying the fringes of the island's settler society, Bissell and Minvielle were firmly in the center of this colonial world. Minvielle was a transatlantic merchant, engaged in the slave trade, albeit in a relatively limited capacity. Bissell invested in urban development to supplement his activities as a ship builder and carpenter in Bridgetown support the port's maritime activities The presence of these names in the island's records late in the eighteenth-century attest to the success and longevity of these two families, the Minvilles and Bissells, in Barbados. In the early decades of the eighteenth century, Minvielle and Bissell became builders in their own right, using their investments in urban construction and development, alongside slave-trading, sugar planting, and ship-building, to enrich their families and secure their place in Barbadian colonial society.

The success of Bissell and his family depended on his investment in urban property in Bridgetown as well as his connections to wealthier merchant families. One of the earliest references to Bissell in Barbados, establishes his role as a key proprietor in and around Bridgetown. In 1719, Bissell, identified in the deed as a merchant, sold 40,538 square feet of land on the southern outskirts of Bridgetown, "butted and bounded by the highway leading to Oistins" to

George Lillington, a planter in nearby St. James parish.<sup>313</sup> The unusually large plot of land appears to have stretched along the shore of Carlisle Bay near the ‘Indian Bridge.’ In December 1722, Bissell struck a deal with Henry Lascelles, a key founder of one of Barbados’s most notorious sugar and slave fortunes. Bissell leased Lascelles 4117 square feet of land along a part of town already known as “Bissell Street” for £1000 currency. With the property, Bissell transferred the rights to ten buildings, “or Dwelling houses,” that he had rented out. His connections to the island ran deep. In 1729, Minvielle’s wife, Elizabeth, inherited her widowed mother’s estate in Bridgetown. Bissell established a profitable estate on Barbados grounded in the development and management of not only urban land but buildings and structures he rented to the town’s inhabitants. In this role, Bissell established himself with the island’s colonial elite striking deals with families like the Lascelles and earning the rank of Major in the island’s militia by at least 1729. Bissell’s rank as a major in the island’s militia established the family as a member of the island’s colonial elite, which was indicative of the new opportunities provided by urban development in Bridgetown during the early eighteenth century.

In comparison to Bissell, David Minvielle had a much lower profile in Barbados, but nevertheless turned maritime activities, investment in Bridgetown, and connections to other merchants into means of entering the island’s planter class. Minvielle’s name suggests a Huguenot background that would have set him apart from the island’s predominantly English settler elite. In Minvielle’s will, his strict instructions for a frugal, sparse funeral, suggests a commitment to a religious tradition outside the island’s flashier Anglicanism. Minvielle wished “to be interrd in a plain black'd deal coffin without rings scarfs gloves or burnt wine and with the company only of a

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<sup>313</sup> RB3/28/268-289. Deed of Benjamin Bissell, BDA.

few of my particular friends.”<sup>314</sup> Despite his potential status as an outsider, by the early 1740s, he established himself as an active merchant engaged in the island’s transatlantic trade. In September 1741, the clerk of the Assembly brought forward a petition from “Minvielle and Co.” for half the draw-back on the excise tax paid on a cargo of imported Madeira wine.<sup>315</sup> Minvielle and his associates sought to recover approximately £18 currency paid in customs because they had taken advantage of a Barbadian law that remitted half the customs paid on cargoes re-exported to other colonies in the region. Minvielle had sold the cargo of Madeira to William Whitaker who had in turn loaded the cargo on the sloop *Katherine* for re-export to nearby Dominica. Such maritime activities allowed Minvielle to support his family on Barbados, who in turn enabled Minvielle to operate both a sugar plantation and commercial enterprises in Bridgetown. Minvielle’s family was key to his estate’s operation with his mother, Sussanah and brother Elias residing Bridgetown, while he lived on a sugar plantation with his wife, Mary and six children.<sup>316</sup> By 1749, when Minvielle died, he left members of his family a sprawling estate that included ships, storehouses in Bridgetown, and a sugar plantation in the interior, indicative of Minvielle’s commercial successes on Barbados.

While Minvielle’s profile and connections in Barbados’s settler society did not rival Bissell, a high-ranking officer in the island’s militia, Minvielle’s wealth came from a much wider array of sources, suggesting that Bridgetown’s merchants could derive wealth and power in multiple ways in the early eighteenth century. The year he died, the parish assessed Minvielle’s

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 524.

<sup>315</sup> TNA CO31/22, 220.

<sup>316</sup> RB6/26/524-526. Will of David Minvielle, June 13, 1749, Barbados Department of Archives (BDA).

holdings in Bridgetown on Backchurch street at the modest sum of £30 currency. In addition to these urban properties, Minvielle owned a functioning sugar plantation, profitable enough to ensure that he could leave his widow the lump sum of £1000 currency in the year following his death and the same sum to his daughters when they reached the age of 20. Tied to his ownership of a sugar plantation, Minvielle likely owned anywhere from 50-100 enslaved people despite only naming two enslaved men as part of his bequests. In addition to his likely ownership of a large number of enslaved people needed to efficiently operate a sugar plantation, Minvielle's urban-maritime properties demanded more. His will references multiple categories of enslaved workers tied to his property in Bridgetown: "wherry negroes, fishing negroes and shallop and store negroes." His maritime interests extended farther then the coasting shallops, fishing vessels, and shallops he owned in Carlisle Bay. In 1743, David Minvielle owned a sloop with a crew of six, the *Young David*, that carried 13 enslaved captives from Barbados, to the York River in Virginia and Kingston before returning home to Bridgetown. Likewise, the Minvilles owned shares in a New England-built Brigantine slaver, the *Thomas*. At 70 tons, the *Thomas*, built in 1747, made three voyages to Gambia returning with 114-130 enslaved people per voyage. Some were sold at market in Bridgetown while the *Thomas* went on to take others to Charleston, South Carolina. His interests in slave trading formed the cornerstone of his estate in Barbados.

While Minvielle owned ships, Bissell made most of his wealth building them. When he died, Bissell did everything in his power to ensure that his heirs and executors could continue the trade and work that built his fortunes in life. This effort, in turn, depended on his executors' ability to preserve his estate's access to skilled slave labor.

I do order and appoint that all and every of my negro slaves from and immediately after my decease be kept and employed in their severall trades and occupations as they were wont to be in my life time and that my shop and yards be from time to time kept stockt

with all manner of utensills fitt for the carrying on the ship carpenter's trade as they used to do in my life time...”<sup>317</sup>

Bissell’s land-holding bolstered the wealth acquired from building and repairing ships and boats in Bridgetown. By 1748, Bissell had resumed direct ownership of “all those... ten Tenements scituate lying and being in Bissell street.” Unlike Minvielle, Bissell lived in a house on Carlisle Bay, outside of Bridgetown, but by no means on an operating sugar plantation. While the contours of their estates differed widely, both Bissell and Minvielle similarly engaged in construction and development in Bridgetown.

For a sugar planter like Minvielle, development and construction in Bridgetown was limited to repairs. In his will, Minvielle ordered his executors to “repair my buildings in town but not build new ones without absolute necessity.”<sup>318</sup> In the final account, Minvielle’s priorities were firmly in his plantation estate with construction and maritime activities taking an important but secondary role. He gave his executors free reign to construct any new buildings “as they shall see most to the advantages of my estate” while limiting any development of his estate in town to repairs. Likewise, Minvielle sought to shed most of his estate’s maritime assets. He ordered his executors to sell “all my Wherry's flying fish boats, Shallops, wherry negroes, fishing negroes and shallop and store negroes immediately after my decease.” While Minvielle prioritized his plantation estate, Bissell encouraged his executors to continue his efforts to develop his properties and estate in Bridgetown.

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<sup>317</sup> RB3/28/220, Deed of Benjamin Bissell, March 31, 1719, BDA.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 526.

For a ship-builder and carpenter like Bissell, his interests lay in his ability to profit from the development, construction, and possession of buildings in Bridgetown representing the close linking of maritime activity and urban development, and social status in Bridgetown in the early eighteenth century. Bissell's rents appear to have been, if not his primary source of wealth, a crucial component of it. In Bissell's will, he released only one person from paying rent owed to his estate, William Putnam, for "a certain Tenement which he now lives in belonging to me."<sup>319</sup> In addition to keeping his shops and ship-yard on the waterfront stocked and staffed with enslaved labor, Bissell ordered his executors to invest in the development and maintenance of his urban properties. Recognizing the importance of his rents, he ordered them to keep the houses he owned in good repair and rented out. He went on to express an interest in expansion, ordering his executors to purchase a vacant lot he rented adjacent to his shop and yards in town "for the further and better enlarging the lands I now live upon."

#### **5.4 Xmas Gang and the Building Industry Transformed**

If Bissell and Minvielle are emblematic of this generation of Bridgetown's merchants turned-builders, the sparse records surrounding the town's building industry in their hands raises questions about labor, structure, and organization. How did figures like Minvielle, Bissell, and other merchants organize the island's building industry in an urban setting? Here, the case of Thomas Harper is illustrative of the methods available to this generation of builders in Bridgetown. Enmeshed in the island's slave trade and sugar industry, this generation of merchant-builders relied

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<sup>319</sup> RB6/26/496-501, Will of Benjamin Bissell, December 5, 1748, BDA.

on and organized the urban building industry around the island's predominant labor-organization; the slave labor gang.

Early in 1729, Thomas Harper, a neighbor of Bissell and Minvielle, prepared to leave Barbados for a voyage to London secure in his position within Barbados's settler society. Harper was, like his neighbor Minvielle, a transatlantic merchant and ship-owner who engaged in the island's lucrative slave trade. When Harper left for London, he left without knowing the outcome of his last slave trading venture. In June 1729, Harper's New England-built, 45-ton, 8-gun ship, the *Industry*, captained by Edward Davies arrived in Carlisle Bay carrying 129 enslaved West African captives.<sup>320</sup> Like Bissell, Harper served in the island's colonial institutions that governed the port. In 1717, Harper served St Michael's parish as a Churchwarden and Surveyor of the Highways. Both positions came with great responsibility and presumably, the trust and approval of his fellow parishioners and served a critical role in the ways settlers governed the port town and exercised political power on the island in the seventeenth century. As a Churchwarden Harper settled contracts with workers hired by the parish and handled parochial finances.<sup>321</sup> As a Surveyor of the Highways, Harper organized and oversaw the parish's efforts to maintain its infrastructure, including in Bridgetown itself.<sup>322</sup>

Like many of his neighbors in St Michael's parish, including Minvielle, Harper had an estate in both Bridgetown and a sugar plantation in the surrounding country. His investments in both the town and sugar economy speaks to the diversification of the island's economy in the early

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<sup>320</sup> TNA CO33/16, 16.

<sup>321</sup> Entry Jan 21, 1716/7, St. Michael Parish Minute Books, Barbados Museum and Historical Society, 121.

<sup>322</sup> Entry Sept 19, 1727, St. Michael Parish Minute Books, Barbados Museum and Historical Society, 198.



eighteenth century. By the island's standards, Harper's sugar plantation was on a modest scale, containing only 31 acres. His properties in Bridgetown included valuable sites in Cheapside "near the market place" and Backchurch street.<sup>323</sup> Harper kept houses for rent at these sites and other places described as "stores" and "yards" presumably spaces dedicated to storing and marketing either imported goods for settlers or the enslaved people his ships carried to Barbados. While Harper possessed an estate that spanned the bridge between urban and rural, he made in his will his interest in preserving the solvency of his sugar plantation. His executors were to "sell my two houses in Bridge towne." While Harper designed his will in such a way as to turn his estate in town into liquid capital, he continued to invest in urban development and construction.

While Minvielle's will suggests that planters rarely siphoned labor from their plantations to further their building projects in Bridgetown, Harper expressed an interest in using assets from his sugar plantation to further his projects in urban construction and development. Less than a year before his voyage to London, Harper began the lengthy process of building a wharf on waterfront property he owned in Bridgetown. While the project to build a wharf was not in itself unusual, the detailed instructions he left his executors provide a rare window into the ways sugar planters like Harper organized the labor needed to execute such construction projects.

3dly My will is that xmas Gange be sent up to my plant but xmas to stay in towne to follow the Negro men in ye yard who are to be imploy'd for one year after my decease in finishing the Wharfe. My will is that all my Coopers that will fetch 50 pounds each be sold the others after one year be sent to my plantation and my cask made at the plantation. None of my masons carpenters or sawyers to be sold but after one year to be sent to my plantation and sooner as wanted there, my will is that all my lumbering goods be sold in one year after my decease, if not an allowance must be made to the Tennant until sold for my will is that one year after my decease, my house, stores, yards, and wharfs be hired out for the most that can be got<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> RB6/16/359-361, Will of Thomas Harper, entered March 14, 1728/9, BDA.

<sup>324</sup> RB6/16/360 Will of Thomas Harper, BDA.

From the language in this unusually detailed bequest, we gain insight into how Harper organized the labor and material involved in construction project and the value he placed on urban development and properties. His approach suggests that in the early eighteenth century, the boundaries between plantation and urban-maritime enterprise was blurring further in Barbados, with critical implications for the island's enslaved population, increasing enslaved mobility within the island's economy.

Gang labor flourished in the island's sugar plantations and took root in town through urban projects like Harper's wharf over the course of the eighteenth century. References in this bequest to "Xmas" and "Xmas gang" emphasize the resilience of gang labor beyond the sugar plantation. Like the jobbing-gangs that circulated from plantation to plantation in the last quarter of the century, Harper's slave gang led by Xmas moved back and forth from various parts of his estate; from the urban to the rural and back depending on the needs of Harper's efforts to build a wharf. The movement of enslaved labor, whether from plantation to town, or from Harper's ownership to being sold elsewhere, marks Harper's relationship to the labor necessary for carrying out this project. Likewise, the material used for the project, "lumbering goods," were needed until the project ended; about a year or so from the date of the will. Through Harper's project, we see Bridgetown being increasingly integrated into the island's sugar plantation economy and labor systems in new ways.

Harper's detailed bequest also hints at how Harper evaluated the potential for profit in urban development and construction, underscoring the emerging relationship between sugar plantations and Bridgetown's builders in the early eighteenth century. His instructions to his executors follow the same principles followed in Bissell's will: leave as much of an urban estate

intact to extract rents from Bridgetown's more modest or temporary inhabitants. While Bissell's will focused on the value placed on the collection of rent, Harper hinted at the value in enslaved builders as a source of future productivity in other construction projects on a sugar plantation or in Bridgetown. While Harper expressed a hope that his most valuable enslaved coopers might fetch as much as £50 currency on Barbados's slave market, he ordered his executors to preserve the bulk of the work force that built his wharf. The "masons carpenters or sawyers" were to return to Harper's plantation after the project's conclusion or when necessity dictated. As the case of Harper and the Xmas gang suggests, building in Bridgetown in the early eighteenth century became an activity embraced by a wider variety of actors, further entangling the port's social and economic worlds with the plantation economy.

## 6.0 Conclusion

In 1731, Samuel Kiemer published the first edition of the *The Barbados Gazette* in Bridgetown. It was Barbados's first newspaper, a milestone in the island's settler society and colonial culture. His offices located in Bridgetown, Kiemer had close access to "the freshest Advices Foreign and Domestick;" meaning news from around the Atlantic world and circum-Caribbean of importance to the island's trade and commerce. From the near-by offices of the Royal Navy, Kiemer obtained lists of ships arriving in Carlisle Bay from across the Atlantic world. On November 6, 1731, earliest edition of *The Barbados Gazette* we have, two sloops from New York and Bermuda entered Carlisle Bay that week, while customs cleared six sloops for ports in Virginia, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Bermuda. Kiemer also advertised "Goods lately Imported from London" for local merchants and sold his books on his own account.<sup>325</sup> In this early edition, Kiemer advertised two dictionaries, "A New English Dictionary," and "A Military and Sea-Dictionary;" topics of great interest to merchants participating in transatlantic trade in a port frequented by the Royal Navy.

As a snapshot of Bridgetown's elite mercantile community in the eighteenth century, Kiemer's newspaper presents a familiar picture of a port town entrenched and situated within British Atlantic networks of information, commerce, and mercantile empire.<sup>326</sup> Bridgetown's

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<sup>325</sup> Samuel Kiemer, "Saturday, November 6, 1731" in *The Barbados Gazette* (Bridgetown).

<sup>326</sup> Emma Hart and Cathy Matson, "Situating Merchants in Late Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic Port Cities" in *Early American Studies* Vol. 15, (4), (2017) pages 649-682; On the transatlantic circulation of commercial and state

seventeenth-century history, however, reveals this eighteenth-century picture of a British Atlantic port was far from an inevitable outcome of the town's commercial, political, and social development.

During its first three decades of settlement, Bridgetown acquired the basic commercial infrastructure of an Atlantic port, a process driven by substantial Anglo-Dutch trade. Dutch merchants feature prominently among the port's earliest merchants, builders, and owners of landed-property near Carlisle Bay. The migrations, informal trade networks, and uncertainties of the 1630s and 1640s produced Bridgetown's first commercial landscape and infrastructure but left the structures of colonial governance in the port weak despite the growing power of London-tied planters and merchants in Barbados's emergent sugar plantation and forced labor economy. Cromwell's Western Design and English visions of greater mercantile integration with colonies like Barbados, spurred local actors to construct the physical and legal infrastructure of mercantilism in Bridgetown during the tumultuous years of the 1650s.

Starting in the 1660s, the arrival of multiple Atlantic diasporas transformed the island's settler society and significantly shaped the structures and institutions that governed Bridgetown. Alongside the remarkable growth of the island's slave trade that forcibly brought tens of thousands of enslaved Africans to Barbados, the free migration of Quaker and Sephardim entrenched the cosmopolitanism of the port's free and mercantile communities. Alongside these Atlantic diasporas, local displacement of former indentured servants and poorer whites presented new challenges of governance in Bridgetown. Up until the mid-1670s, the vestry and individual English

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information and communication, Ian Steele, *The English Atlantic, 1675-1740: an Exploration of communication and community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

settlers addressed how an English settler society would regulate such social and cultural difference within a port setting. Colonial crises of the mid-1670s - a hurricane and island-wide slave conspiracy – brought these issues, localized in the port, to the attention of the island’s colonial Assembly, governor and council, laying the foundation for further colonial governance over Bridgetown.

The last decade of the seventeenth century colonial state governance over Bridgetown consolidated significantly. For Barbadian planters and merchants, the end of the seventeenth-century marked a moment of decline and acute colonial crisis in which the colonial government responded by creating a system of governance in Bridgetown that targeted the informal economies and networks of enslaved Afro-Barbadians. Part of a general period of economic decline of the plantation economy and an extended period of regional privateering that damaged the island’s trade, this period of colonial crisis culminated with a serious threat of slave conspiracy in 1692. The 1692 conspiracy revealed the centrality of Bridgetown’s social and physical geography to the informal economies and networks built by enslaved Afro-Barbadians over the course of the seventeenth-century. These entangled crises prompted fierce colonial reaction that trained the colonial state’s power and authority towards re-engineering the port’s built environment and structures of governance. The results of these projects were the creation of a colonial landscape in Bridgetown focused on punishing and controlling the movements of enslaved peoples.

In the eighteenth-century, Bridgetown was the location on the island where the colonial state most clearly and visibly intervened in the lives of the colony’s enslaved peoples.<sup>327</sup> This

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<sup>327</sup> Marisa J Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 20.

relationship to Bridgetown emerged over the course of the seventeenth century, advanced not only by the development of the plantation economy, but also by political struggles local to the port and colonial state reaction to moments of perceived and real crisis. Specifically, the challenges posed to colonial governance by Bridgetown's motley and transient communities shaped the trajectory of this history. In Barbados, crisis, instability, and the growth of urban governance went hand-in-hand.

The town's eighteenth-century history may further bolster the thesis that moments of crisis spurred innovation in colonial governance over Bridgetown. In 1766, fire tore through the tensely built streets of the port, echoing the 1668 fire nearly a century earlier. Unlike the largely ineffective measures taken by the colonial government in the wake of the 1668 fire, in the aftermath of 1766, Bridgetown underwent its most significant restructuring and re-design of its basic lay-out. Out of the ashes of the fire, the colonial government empowered a commission for "opening new streets, and altering others already open; and for prescribing the rules for the manner of building and particularizing the materials with which the houses shalt be built."<sup>328</sup> The new act and commissioners widen the town's narrow streets and got rid of the town's most narrow alley-ways, significantly altering the appearance of the port.<sup>329</sup> Such commissions represented a crucial part of the revolution in urban governance that shaped provincial towns and ports through the British Atlantic world in the eighteenth century.<sup>330</sup> While the context of growing urban governance in the

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<sup>328</sup> Samuel Moore *The Public Acts in Force* (London:Hansard, 1801) 22.

<sup>329</sup> Welch, *Slave Society in the City: Bridgetown, Barbados, 1680-1834*, 44–45.

<sup>330</sup> Aaron Graham, "Towns, Government, Legislation and the 'police' in Jamaica and the British Atlantic, 1770-1805," *Urban History* Vol 47., no. 1 (2020): 41–62; Emma Hart, *Building Charleston : Town and Society in the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World* (Charlottesville, US: University of Virginia Press, 2009).

British Atlantic may be key to explain the differences between colonial reactions to fire in the 1660s and 1760s, the 1760s were a particularly fraught moment for the sugar and slave societies of the Caribbean that introduced a sea of changes in West Indian plantation colonies.<sup>331</sup>

Likewise, in the 1780s, as the American war for independence up-ended the British West Indian economy and disrupted the island's trade causing significant hardship among the island's enslaved populations, colonists fixated on the lives and presence of enslaved and free(d) Afro-Barbadians in Bridgetown. In 1784, a few years after a devastating hurricane destroyed much of the port, the island's newspaper, then called *The Barbados Mercury*, published the writings of Bridgetown's all-white voluntary fire companies. In response to the growing number of small wooden structures rising up along the town's outskirts by the enslaved people jobbing in the port, members of the town's white volunteer fire departments addressed the colony through *The Barbados Mercury* decrying the settlements as a fire hazard, dangerous to the town's health, and calling for the colonial government to tear down and remove the housing; a drastic call for colonial state intervention in the town's built environment.<sup>332</sup> Further study of Bridgetown's eighteenth-century may confirm the dynamic of colonial crisis and urban governance evidenced in the seventeenth-century.

Mirroring the growing intervention of the colonial state in Bridgetown's governance over the course of the seventeenth century, maritime labor came to figure prominently in the island's white settler society. Planters and colonial elite's attitudes towards maritime labor and their

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<sup>331</sup> Burnard, Trevor G; Garrigus, *The Plantation Machine: Atlantic Capitalism in French Saint-Domingue and British Jamaica*.

<sup>332</sup> *The Barbados Mercury* "Saturday, February 14, 1784" (Bridgetown) Vol 1.



eventual embrace of white sailors roughly coincided with developments in the port's systems of governance. The timing of when colonists embraced maritime labor suggests that like systems of urban governance, these changes were driven by moments of crisis.

Closely following the growing intervention of the colonial state in Bridgetown's governance over the course of the seventeenth century, in the early eighteenth-century planters began to re-invest plantation profits into the town itself, reversing scholarly consensus about the relationship between plantation and town in slave societies like Barbados.<sup>333</sup> In the seventeenth-century, Bridgetown's builders came from the island's middling-classes of artisans. Through the patronage of colonial institutions like the parish system, these builders, in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century found a measure of success in urban construction buying into the planter class like the mason-turned-planter Simon Cooper. In the early decades of the eighteenth-century, as the island's plantation economy continued to stagnate, planters like Thomas Harper began re-investing the urban development in the port.

In the seventeenth-century, building Bridgetown introduced novel problems of colonial governance. Driven by the complex port communities and transient historical actors that shaped urban-maritime spaces like the port, the colonial government in Barbados was slow to assert its authority over such spaces. Rather than being driven exclusively by the development of the island's plantation economy, moments of acute crisis and instability drove colonial institutions to create new systems of colonial governance in Bridgetown. This seventeenth-century history underscores

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<sup>333</sup> For a similar inversion of this narrative see: Hart, *Building Charleston : Town and Society in the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World*.

the instability and uncertainty that plagued early Barbados whose historical stability recognizably English colonial landscape led eighteenth-century colonists to call the island “Little England.”<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Greene, “Changing Identity in the British Caribbean: Barbados as a Case Study.”

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