

The British Sugar Planters and the Atlantic World, 1763-1775

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SOCIOECONOMIC and political developments in the West Indies from the end of the Seven Years War to the outbreak of the American Revolution can be linked to political movements in the Mother Country and the North American colonies, as the prosperity and upward mobility of the West Indian planters influenced the Atlantic world, especially the British Empire.¹

On the eve of the American Revolution, there were eleven British West Indian islands and groups of islands with an estimated white population of 58,000 and a black and mulatto population of 416,000. This compares with some 2 million whites and 460,000 blacks in the thirteen mainland colonies. From a mere handful in the 1640s, the number of sugar plantations in the British Caribbean increased to an estimated 1,800 by the early 1770s. They increased not only in number but also in acreage, size of labor force, and amount of capitalization. If the median Jamaican plantation unit of £19,500 was typical, then the aggregate capital investment in the West Indies was about £30 million sterling. The total capital of the British cotton industry did not exceed this figure until the third decade of the nineteenth century.²

The problem of the British Empire in America was one of imbalance among colonies of divergent climates and soils. Arthur Young, English

1. The papers of Colonel Samuel Martin, the famous planter of Antigua, will be used extensively to illustrate the social and political movements in the interwar period. Owing to data and other limitations, this paper is intended to be suggestive and only in part demonstrable.

2. R. B. Sheridan, "The Wealth of Jamaica in the Eighteenth Century," *The Economic History Review*, 2d ser., 18 (August 1965):292-311.

agricultural writer, said that the great benefit resulting from colonies was the cultivation of staple commodities different from those of the Mother Country. He maintained that the staple productions of the colonies decreased in value in proportion to their distance from the sun. The West Indies were the most valuable colonies, followed by the Carolinas, Virginia, and Maryland.³ Unlike the French Empire, which was overweighted on its tropical side, the British Empire was overbalanced in productive power in its temperate zone. The French Caribbean colonies of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and St. Domingue outgrew their British counterparts and also the French temperate zone colonies in North America.⁴ Trade between North Americans and inhabitants of the foreign sugar colonies so antagonized the British sugar planters that they prevailed upon Parliament to enact the Molasses Act of 1733. Little effort was made to enforce the act until the close of the Seven Years War, when the Grenville ministry began its fiscal reform of the Empire. Meanwhile, the British had conquered all of the French colonies in North America and in the Caribbean, with the notable exception of St. Domingue. Beginning in 1760, numerous pamphlets were published on the question of whether to keep Canada or Guadeloupe in the peace settlement, should a choice be found necessary. "It is our sugar islands that raise the value of North America, and pour in such wealth upon the *mother-country*," declared William Burke, a kinsman of the great Edmund. "The more we have of those islands, America becomes from that cause the more important and valuable, and England the richer." He argued that the more nearly proportionate the temperate and tropical colonies were, the better off both would be, and the more England would benefit from their trade and wealth.⁵

By the Treaty of Paris in 1763, Great Britain retained Canada, Louisiana, and Florida on the American continent, Grenada, Tobago, St. Vincent, and Dominica in the West Indies, and Senegal in Africa. Martinique, Guadeloupe, and St. Lucia in the Caribbean and the trading post of Goree in Africa were restored to France, and Spain recovered Havana. The islands acquired at the Peace of 1763 were known collectively as the Ceded Islands. While they offered a wide field for British capital and enterprise, other territories in the Caribbean area also witnessed a

3. Arthur Young, *Political Essays Concerning the Present State of the British Empire* (London, 1772), pp. 274-75, 326-28.

4. Frank W. Pitman, *The Development of the British West Indies, 1700-1763* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917), pp. 189-90.

5. William Burke, "A Letter from a Gentleman in Guadeloupe to his Friend in London" (London, 1760), quoted in Pitman, pp. 348-47.

remarkable expansion of tropical agriculture. After the treaty with the Maroons in 1739, outlying parts of Jamaica became safe for settlement. In the period 1741-75, the sugar exports of Jamaica increased nearly threefold, while minor staples increased substantially.⁶

British penetration of the Caribbean colonies of rival European nations assumed two forms in the eighteenth century. First, there was the informal empire of trade, whereby slaves and British manufactures were either smuggled or, in the case of the *Asiento*, traded legally for bullion and tropical produce of the Spanish and other foreign colonies. Second, numerous inhabitants of the British sugar colonies migrated to foreign colonies to engage in plantation agriculture and trade. From the sugar recession of the 1730s to the outbreak of the American Revolution, numerous planters of Barbados and the Leeward Islands migrated with their slaves to carve plantations out of the wilds of the Dutch mainland colonies of Essequibo and Demerara and the Danish colony of St. Croix. One British planter-entrepreneur was said to have encouraged some 700 Leeward Islanders to migrate to St. Croix, where they came to dominate the sugar economy of that island.⁷

While relations between North American Yankees and West Indian Creoles were exacerbated by the Sugar Act of 1764, the Act of 1766 to establish free ports in the British West Indies was supported by North Americans and West Indians in the House of Commons. These interests were drawn together by the desire to repeal the Stamp Act and revive the Spanish trade at Jamaica, which had been reduced to a trickle by the Grenville ministry's campaign against smuggling. By the Act of 1766, two quite different systems of trade were authorized. The free ports at Dominica were intended to capture the French trade of the neighboring islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, while those at Jamaica were to revive the Spanish trade. The free ports did a thriving trade in British manufactures and African slaves, which were exchanged for bullion, indigo, cotton, and livestock.⁸

Besides their common resistance to imperial fiscal measures, Yankees and Creoles resisted measures which favored merchant-creditors in the cities over debtor-planters and merchants in the colonies. These measures were especially abrasive during the two financial crises of the interwar years, that of 1763, which brought an end to the credit boom

6. Noel Deerr, *The History of Sugar* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1949), 1:198.

7. R. B. Sheridan, *Chapters in Caribbean History* (London: Caribbean Universities Press, 1970), pp. 93-94.

8. Frances Armytage, *The Free Port System in the British West Indies: A Study in Commercial Policy* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1953), pp. 28-51.

4 / Eighteenth-Century Florida and the Caribbean

following the Seven Years War, and the more severe crisis of 1772, which followed a period of remarkable expansion in trade, manufacturing, mining, transport, and investment in plantation agriculture. From Tobago to Maryland, planter-governments resorted to drastic action to stay the hand of the debt collector. Recovery from the credit crisis of 1772 was rapid, even though some of the economic and political repercussions were disturbing.⁹



"Our tobacco colonies," wrote Adam Smith, "send us home no such wealthy planters as we see frequently arrive from the sugar islands." To gain riches in the colonies in order to shine in the home country was an aspiration which more and more planters realized in the moderately prosperous period from 1763 to 1775. Edward Long wrote of the many owners of property in Jamaica "who of late years have flocked to Britain and N. America, beyond the example of former times, and drained their incomes from the Island. . . ." He estimated that there were as many as 2,000 "annuitants and proprietors non-resident."¹⁰

West Indians not only dissipated their wealth in riotous living but also invested in landed estates, trading houses, banks, mines, factories, rotten borough seats in Parliament, and professional careers for their sons. Lord Shelburne declared in the House of Commons in November 1778 that "there were scarcely ten miles together throughout the country where the house and estate of a rich West Indian was not to be seen."¹¹ A close reading of the biographies of members of Parliament in the period 1730-75 reveals at least thirty who qualified as "real" West Indians: those who were born or spent part of their lives in the colonies. Besides these, at least thirty-two members of Parliament were in the "outer ring" of the West India interest: absentee proprietors who came into possession of sugar estates by inheritance or intermarriage, West India merchants in London and the Outports, and agents of colonial governments. Lobbying for planter measures in Parliament was the powerful West India Committee, which consisted of leading sugar merchants and absentee proprietors of London.¹²

9. R. B. Sheridan, "The British Credit Crisis of 1772 and the American Colonies," *Journal of Economic History* 20 (June 1960):161-86.

10. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (New York: Modern Library, 1937), p. 158; Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica* (London, 1774), 1:377, 386.

11. William Cobbett, ed., *The Parliamentary History of England*, 19:1316.

12. Lillian M. Penson, "The London West India Interest in the Eighteenth Century,"

The trade between temperate and tropical colonies was the basis for wide-ranging contacts between North Americans and West Indians. Foodstuffs, livestock, wood products, and miscellaneous wares were sent south in exchange for tropical commodities, specie, slaves, and bills of exchange. Masters and supercargoes often settled in the islands as factors, merchants, and planters, while creoles migrated to the mainland. Seventeenth-century New Englanders such as William Vassall and Samuel Winthrop transplanted themselves to the West Indies.¹³ The Barbadian families of Colleton, Gibbes, Middleton, Sandiford, and Yeamans moved in reverse to found the colony of South Carolina. Also from the West Indies came the Royalls of Boston, Redwoods of Newport, Livingstons of New York, and Dickinsons and Norrises of Philadelphia. North Americans frequently married sugar heiresses, and Creoles entered into marriage alliances with mainland families. Partly as a result of such alliances, Americans owned estates in the West Indies, and West Indians owned property on the mainland.¹⁴

Trade was not the only bond between North America and the West Indies. Sugar planters commonly sent their children to schools and colleges in North America. Numerous West Indians attended Harvard College, the Colleges of New Jersey and Philadelphia, and King's College in New York. In 1772 Dr. John Witherspoon published an eloquent "Address to the inhabitants of Jamaica and West India Islands on behalf of the College of New Jersey" in an effort to solicit both funds and students.¹⁵ The sunny Caribbean attracted cold and ailing northerners such as Lawrence Washington, who was accompanied by his brother George on a visit to Barbados. The brothers were houseguests of Gedney Clarke, Sr., a wealthy merchant and planter who had migrated to Barbados from Salem, Massachusetts. Drooping Creoles, in contrast, fled to bracing northern climates. "Here are always to be seen a great number of vale-

English Historical Review 36 (July 1921):373-92; Douglas G. Hall, *The History of the West India Committee* (London: Caribbean Universities Press, 1972).

13. Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1955), p. 88.

14. Richard S. 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), pp. 111-16; Richard Pares, *Yankees and Creoles: The Trade between North America and the West Indies before the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), pp. 1-16; Frederick B. Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House: The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia 1682-1783* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1948), pp. 43-44, 86, 95.

15. Cited by Agnes M. Whitson, "The Outlook of the Continental American Colonies on the British West Indies, 1760-1775," *Political Science Quarterly* 45 (March 1930): 63-65.

tudinarians from the West-Indies, seeking for the renovation of health, exhausted by the debilitating nature of their sun, air, and modes of living," wrote Crèvecoeur after his visit to Charleston, South Carolina.¹⁶ Similarly, a Barbadian wrote to his friend in Philadelphia that so many of his fellow islanders were declaring for Philadelphia that he would advise having another house built directly "and call it the Barbados Hotel, putting up for a sign, the worn-out West Indian, dying of a dropsy from intemperate living."¹⁷

Most prominent among the West Indian migrants was Alexander Hamilton, who was born in Nevis. From 1768 to 1772 he clerked in the St. Croix counting house of Messrs. Kortright and Cruger, who were both transplanted New Yorkers. The Cruger family business, headed by Henry Cruger in New York, included brother merchants in London, Curaçao, and Jamaica. Both Cornelius Kortright and Nicholas Cruger owned plantations in St. Croix, and Cruger's marriage ties were made on the island.¹⁸

With the possible exception of Barbados and Jamaica, the colony of Antigua had the closest ties with North America. These ties go back to the mid-seventeenth-century period when the island's trade with New England was established. One of the traders was the youngest son of Governor John Winthrop of Massachusetts, Samuel Winthrop, who settled on the island after the Restoration, became a leading planter and deputy-governor, and sent his sons to Harvard College.¹⁹ Abraham Redwood migrated from England to Antigua in 1687. He was a merchant there for some years before he moved to Salem, Massachusetts, and later to Newport, Rhode Island. He married into the Quaker Langford family who were prominent planters in Antigua. Redwood's son, also named Abraham, inherited one-half of a plantation from his Langford grandfather and founded the Redwood Library at Newport in 1747.²⁰

The migration of people was inseparable from that of ideas and capital, and even lowly seeds and plants, and in this respect the Lucas family

16. Ibid., p. 62; J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1908), p. 223.

17. Quoted in Whitson, "Outlook of American Colonies," p. 65.

18. Jean Louise Willis, "The Trade between North America and the Danish West Indies, 1756-1807, with special reference to St. Croix," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1963, pp. 93-100.

19. "Letters of Samuel Winthrop," *Coll. of the Massachusetts Hist. Soc.* (Boston, 1882), 5th ser., 8:234-61; Vere L. Oliver, *The History of the Island of Antigua* (London, 1894-99), 3:250-53.

20. Oliver, *History of Antigua*, 3:43-46.

of Antigua made notable contributions to the northland. In the year 1737 or 1738, Lieutenant Colonel George Lucas, who was stationed in Antigua, came to South Carolina with his wife and daughters. He bought lands with the intention of settling plantations but was recalled to Antigua, where he later served as deputy-governor. Since Mrs. Lucas was in bad health, her husband left their eldest daughter, Eliza, in charge of his affairs in Carolina. In July 1739, Eliza wrote to her father about the pains she had taken to bring the indigo, ginger, cotton, lucerne, and cassava to perfection. She is credited with introducing the idea and demonstrating that indigo could be raised profitably on the upland soils of Carolina. Eliza married Charles Pinckney, a lawyer, and two of their sons were American statesmen and diplomats.²¹

One interesting colony of Jamaicans and Antiguans became established in the Boston-Cambridge area. The founding member was apparently Leonard Vassall, a wealthy Jamaica planter who settled in Boston some time before 1734. Several of his children and grandchildren married Antiguans who also settled in the Boston area. John Vassall married Elizabeth, sister of Antigua-born Thomas Oliver, lieutenant-governor of Massachusetts from 1774 to 1776, while Oliver married Elizabeth, daughter of John Vassall. John Lavicount of Antigua married Lucy, another daughter of John Vassall of Cambridge. Penelope, daughter of Isaac Royall, married Henry Vassall of Boston. In the late nineteenth century the well-known poets James Russell Lowell and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow occupied the fine Cambridge houses that had belonged to Lieutenant Governor Thomas Oliver and Colonel John Vassall.²²

Three of the four governors and subgovernors of North American colonies who were born or reared in the West Indies came from Antigua in the eighteenth century. Sir George Thomas, son of George and Sarah Thomas, was born there in 1695; his mother was the daughter and heiress of Joseph Winthrop. Sir George was deputy-governor of Pennsylvania from 1737 to 1747 and governor general of the Leeward Islands in 1753-66.²³ Sir Henry Moore was born in Jamaica in 1713 and educated at Eton and the University of Leyden. He was a member of the assembly and council before becoming acting governor of Jamaica. From 1765 to

21. *Ibid.*, 2:199-201; Harriet Horry Ravenal, *Eliza Pinckney* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), pp. 1-57.

22. Edward Doubleday Harris, *The Vassalls of New England and Their Immediate Descendants* (Albany: J. Munsell, 1862), pp. 1-23; Oliver, *History of Antigua*, 2:164-66, 346-51; 3:55-58.

23. Oliver, *History of Antigua*, 3:132; *Dictionary of American Biography*.

1769 he was governor of New York. Moore was referred to by John Watts, the merchant prince of New York, as "a West Indian whose Interests clashes with the Northern Colonys & may create a jealousy, still Pepper Pot may make a good Ruler."²⁴ Lieutenant Governor Thomas Oliver, already mentioned, was the son of Robert and Ann (Brown) Oliver of Antigua. He migrated with his parents to Dorchester, Massachusetts, in 1738, and graduated from Harvard College in 1753. His first cousin was Antigua-born Richard Oliver, who became a London sugar merchant, alderman, and member of Parliament for the city.²⁵

The Martin family linked the West Indies to North America and to the Mother Country. The head of the family was Colonel Samuel Martin (1693–1776), whose Greencastle estate contained about 600 acres of land and 300 slaves. Two sons remained in the Mother Country. Samuel Martin, Jr. (1714–88), his eldest son, was a member of Parliament and joint secretary of the treasury. Henry Martin, his second son, had a distinguished career in the Royal Navy, rising to the rank of captain. He was created a baronet in 1791 and represented Southampton in the House of Commons. Another son, William Byam Martin (1743–1806), went to India in the service of the East India Company.²⁶

The colonel was related to North America through the two Josiah Martins, one a brother, the other a son. The brother (1699–1778) was appointed to the council of Antigua in 1735 and served as president of that body from 1743 to 1748. Several years later he settled at Rockhall farm on Long Island, was appointed aide-de-camp to the governor of New York in 1757, and served on the council of that province from 1759 to 1762. Two of the sons of Josiah and Mary (Yeamans) Martin entered the professions. Josiah, a lawyer, was a graduate of the College of Philadelphia and Clare College, Cambridge; Samuel became a physician. Elizabeth, the eldest daughter, married her first cousin Josiah Martin.²⁷

Josiah Martin (1737–86), the colonel's third son by his second marriage, rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel in the army and served as the last royal governor of North Carolina. He was born in Dublin, Ireland, attended private schools in England, and lived with his father in

24. *Dictionary of American Biography; Letter Book of John Watts, Merchant and Councillor of New York, 1762–1765*, in *Coll. of New York Hist. Soc.* 1928 (New York: Published for the Society, 1928), p. 385.

25. Oliver, *History of Antigua*, 2:346–51.

26. *Ibid.*, 2:240–48.

27. *Ibid.*

Antigua for a number of years. During the Seven Years War he took part in the conquests of Guadeloupe and Canada. In 1764 he was transferred to a regiment in Antigua. In addition to his military duties, he was appointed by Governor Thomas to the council of Antigua, a post he held, at least nominally, from 1766 to 1771. Josiah was named governor of North Carolina on December 14, 1770. In a real sense he owed this appointment to his father. Colonel Martin not only urged his eldest son, Samuel, to use his influence with Lord North and other ministers to further Josiah's career, but also supplied money to buy military commissions and to support Josiah's family during the long intervals between appointments.²⁸

Colonel Martin was described by Janet Schaw, a Scots visitor, as "the loved and revered father of Antigua, to whom it owes a thousand advantages, and whose age is daily employed to render it more improved and happy." This unofficial title was conferred in part for Martin's long years of public service as speaker of the assembly (1750-63) and colonel of militia. Probably more important was Martin's leadership in improving the plantation culture of Antigua and neighboring islands.²⁹ During a visit to North America in the winter of 1767-68, Martin was entertained in Philadelphia by Governor John Penn, Mayor William Allen, and Richard Peters. In New York he was extended hospitality by Governor Sir Henry Moore, General Gage, and John Watts. In a letter to a friend on January 23, 1768, John Watts wrote, "Old Coll. Martin is here, the Speaker I mean of Antigo, a clever veteran as can be."³⁰ Martin used the considerable income from his sugar plantation to further his sons' careers, to entertain visitors from North America and the British Isles, and to finance his visits abroad. He wrote frequently to his eldest son on matters of plantation business, family affairs, and politics. He commented on events and issues and urged his eldest son to use his influence in Parliament to further the cause of family and empire.³¹

He urged the expansion of Britain's tropical empire, and thought it

28. *Dictionary of American Biography*.

29. Evangeline W. Andrews and Charles M. Andrews, eds., *Journal of a Lady of Quality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923), pp. 103-6, 259-73; R. B. Sheridan, "Samuel Martin, Innovating Sugar Planter of Antigua 1750-1776," *Agricultural History* 34 (July 1960):126-39.

30. *Mass. Hist. Soc. Pub.*, 4th ser., 10:601.

31. *The Martin Letter Books* are in the British Museum, *Additional Manuscripts* 41, 346-41,353. The writer is indebted to the heirs of General Sir Francis J. Davies for permission to quote selections from the Martin Papers. All of the letters referred to in this article are taken from B.M. *Add. MSS.* 41,347 and 41,348 and were written by Colonel Samuel in Antigua to his eldest son, Samuel Martin, Jr., M.P., in London.

scandalous that ministerial decisions were influenced by "Jamaica-politicks, which were ever averse to ye extension of our Sugar Colonies, for fear of depreciating their islands."³² After the conquest of Martinique in 1762, he urged the conquest of Cuba, Mexico, or "at worst ye conquest of Porto Rico which is of little value to ye Spaniards, and yet the finest Island in the world for a Sugar Colony. . . ."³³ Martin predicted the utter destruction of the sugar trade and islands if some of the principal French and neutral islands were not annexed by Great Britain. On February 12, 1762, he wrote to his son that "if our Sugar Colonies are not extended in proportion to our African trade, and the extension of our N. American settlements, the French Colonies will have all ye benefit of that extension, as it has now, in time of war, the principal benefit of our N. American trade at Hispaniola."³⁴

Martin took a keen interest in the Ceded Islands and on two occasions visited these islands with the intention of establishing plantations for the good of his family. Returning from his first visit, he wrote to his eldest son that these islands did not fulfill his expectations. Dominica was said to be well settled by the French upon the seacoasts, but nine-tenths of the island was still in forest. Both Dominica and St. Vincent were very rough and mountainous. Furthermore, St. Vincent was occupied by a numerous and hostile race of Black Caribs, while Dominica was vulnerable in wartime because of its close proximity to Martinique and Guadeloupe.³⁵ Not easily discouraged, Martin employed an agent to purchase 500 acres of land in Tobago. Together with his Scots manager and 70 slaves, he took a voyage to Tobago in December 1766, but the site and quality of the land were so poor that he sold out and abandoned any thought of further plantation settlement.³⁶

The idea of a settlement in North America was broached in a letter of July 3, 1767, in which he wrote of his intention to visit his brother and son Josiah and their families on Long Island: "Another view I have in a trip to New York is to take some view of that Province, and Philadelphia, and to make a little purchase there, as the basis of a family settlement in a country that will be ye Seat of the English Empire in half a Century."³⁷ Again, Martin was disappointed by what he saw of the country and decided against a purchase of landed property.

32. B.M. *Add. MSS.* 41,347, f. 131, March 23, 1762.

33. *Ibid.*, f. 125, February 15, 1762.

34. *Ibid.*, f. 122.

35. *Ibid.*, ff. 201-2, 207, June 11, August 27, 1765.

36. *Ibid.*, ff. 255-56, January 1767.

37. *Ibid.*, f. 272.

While he made no purchase himself, Martin encouraged his son Josiah to purchase land in the mainland colonies. In a letter of August 13, 1770, Martin wrote: "I have advised him to take a strict view of East Florida, which blooms in description, like the Garden of Paradise, because there he can have land for nothing, and may employ ye £1500 Sterling I propose to give him in the settlement of it, and if you can obtain that Government for him the concurrence would make him happy."³⁸ Though the outcome of Josiah's trip to East Florida is uncertain, it is clear that his father's expectation of a landed settlement for his son remained strong. Upon learning that Josiah had been appointed governor of North Carolina, the colonel wrote to his eldest son, "I suppose there are large tracts of that Country, not yet granted away, where he may serve himself."³⁹

Besides his concern for expanding frontiers and opportunities for his sons, Martin kept abreast of the conflict between Great Britain and her colonies. He feared that the Stamp Act would ruin Antigua by swallowing up all current cash and hindering the North Americans from supplying the island with provisions and lumber.⁴⁰ He referred to the Townshend Act, which levied heavy duties on tea, glass, lead, and paper, as a strange piece of policy. It would drive the North Americans into the manufacture of those taxable goods, he predicted, and also encourage the smuggling of foreign manufactures. It was unfair, he thought, to include the West Indies in the Stamp Act and Townshend Act, since the islanders were already heavily taxed while the North Americans paid little or nothing of the revenue.⁴¹ Martin called the Boston Tea Party a mere pretext, "for they smuggle all their Tea from Holland."⁴² Upon learning of the non-exportation agreement of 1774, Martin wrote to his eldest son, "I suppose you have seen in the News Papers the several resolutions of the Boston people to starve the Sugar Colonies out of spite to Great Britain. Most inhuman and unchristian resolutions!"⁴³ He believed that the North Americans had done great injuries to the British sugar colonies by engaging in illicit trade with foreigners. He felt a final solution would be an act of Parliament absolutely prohibiting all trade between North America and the foreign sugar colonies.⁴⁴

38. B.M. *Add. MSS.* 41,348, f. 129.

39. *Ibid.*, f. 139, March 1, 1771.

40. B.M. *Add. MSS.* 41,347, f. 211, December 20, 1765.

41. *Ibid.*, f. 285, September 29, 1767; B.M. *Add. MSS.* 41,348, f. 28, October 18, 1768.

42. B.M. *Add. MSS.* 41,348, f. 197, October 8, 1774.

43. *Ibid.*, f. 189, July 6, 1774.

44. *Ibid.*, f. 197, October 8, 1774.

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Samuel Martin was an able and ambitious West Indian, a man of some culture, and reputedly a humane master of slaves. He believed in a hierarchical social order, an established church, government by and for the rich and well born, and an empire of expanding opportunities for his family. He had little in common with artisans, traders, and small-scale farmers of nonconformist faith and republican principles. Martin's beliefs point up the fact that North Americans and West Indians were divided on many issues. "Despite the many family connections between the islands and the mainland," writes Agnes M. Whitson, "the clash of their economic interests and the differences in social backgrounds had fixed a wide gulf between them."<sup>45</sup> West Indians were criticized by visiting Englishmen and North Americans for tolerating shocking social conditions. They were accused of sucking in the principles of tyranny, together with those of slavery. West Indian extravagance, frivolity, and dissipation stirred the blood of the often hypocritical Yankee. West Indian political influence in England had been used to shape and buttress a selfish economic policy, it was believed. John Watts, the New York merchant, asserted that the people "have always looked with an evil eye on the West Indian interest as clashing with and opposing their own."<sup>46</sup>

Sharp contrasts between Yankees and creoles become muted when southern planters are brought into the picture, and it is not so easy to draw the line between the colonial North and South. Did the mainland and island planters have more or fewer characteristics and circumstances in common? Without exploring this question at any length, it can be said that mainland and island planters carried heavy debt and fiscal burdens which alienated them from the Mother Country. On the other hand, island planters were so far outnumbered by their slaves that they feared slave revolt if their ties with the Mother Country were severed. To a much greater degree than their counterparts on the mainland, creoles were vulnerable to slave revolt and military conquest. Moreover, they were dependent upon imported foodstuffs and other supplies. Partly for these reasons, they identified with metropolitan society and government and sought to influence and shape imperial policy in conformity with their own interests. Yet their wealth and power turned English opinion against the West Indians. Arthur Young, who before the American Revolution had valued the tropical colonies more

45. "Outlook of American Colonies," p. 73.

46. *Letter Book of John Watts*, p. 388.



highly than their temperate zone counterparts, wrote in 1784: "It is not foreign to the present observations to remark, that all the evils of the late war were totally owing to the interested politics of West Indians being listened to by ministers and parliaments, in the negotiations that followed the war of 1756. When it became a question whether we should retain Canada, or the sugar acquisitions, our old islands, fighting for the monopoly of the British market confined to as small a circle as possible, were loud for our keeping Canada." Young cursed the folly that had resulted from the West Indians' "interested but senseless clamours—that cancelled the bond for American obedience—and gave a full field for the exertion of American gratitude."<sup>47</sup>

It has been the purpose here to delineate some of the activities and demonstrate the importance of the British sugar planters to the British Empire in the period from 1763 to 1775. "The decline of the West Indies has too often been anticipated by historians," writes Peter Marshall.<sup>48</sup> He observes that while social and economic imbalances may have been apparent by the third quarter of the eighteenth century, there were nevertheless many adventurers who remained anxious to grow wealthy from the islands. We have seen that British planters expanded into foreign sugar islands as well as those acquired by conquest during the Seven Years War. Moreover, Jamaica experienced remarkable growth in plantation agriculture and trade. Part of the growth in trade can be attributed to the Free Port Act of 1766 which gave legal access to trade with Spanish and French settlements in the Caribbean. Britain's trade with Africa expanded until the foreign colonies absorbed as many slaves as did the colonies in the formal empire.

Concurrent with territorial expansion and prosperity in the islands was the growth of absentee proprietorship and upward social mobility. Profits derived from slave-grown sugar found numerous outlets. These included town houses and country mansions, countinghouses, ships, military commissions, elective offices and appointive posts in government, and careers in the professions of law, medicine, and the church. From its base in Antigua, the Martin family converted its plantation wealth into military commissions, seats in Parliament, a colonial governorship, and a post in the East India Company's civil service. Though the Martin family was no doubt exceptional, the West Indians constituted a powerful interest group that posed a threat to other groups in

47. *Annals of Agriculture* (1784), 1:384.

48. "The British Empire and the American Revolution," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 27 (February 1964):135-45.

the British Empire. John Adams quoted James Otis to the effect that British acts of trade and navigation had conspired to make the people of North America hewers of wood and drawers of water for plantation governors, customhouse officers, judges of admiralty, common informers, naval commanders, and West India planters.<sup>49</sup>

49. John Adams, *Novanglus, and Massachusettensis; or Political Essays, Published in the Years 1774 and 1775* (Boston, 1918), p. 293.