

ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT

“A Place of Refuge to Republicans and Royalists”: The French Revolution in British Dominica

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Abstract

During the French Revolution, thousands of revolutionaries and royalists fled the turmoil in French islands. Many went to nearby islands, from which they could observe events. Situated between Martinique and Guadeloupe, Dominica had a majority French population and a long history of connection with its French neighbors. This article uses the case of Dominica to explore the effects of the French Revolution on a non-French island in the Eastern Caribbean. From the start, its proximity to the French islands led to its entanglement in revolutionary politics. It was the first British island to receive refugees, and the influx of people of all racial, social, and political backgrounds into Dominica posed challenges for island officials. Officials had to determine on what terms to admit emigrants, whether they posed a threat to the colony, and how to feed and house them. They also worried about the influences of foreigners and revolutionary ideas on their own disaffected free and enslaved populations. This article argues that Dominica’s location, heterogeneous population, and internal instability allowed it to become a node for regional migration and information networks that embroiled it in the turmoil that engulfed its neighbors and ultimately threatened British control of the island.

On 12 September 1790, Acting Governor James Bruce of Dominica wrote to Home Secretary William Wyndham Grenville to alert him that both Guadeloupe and Martinique were in a state of “anarchy and confusion.” The merchants of Dominica could not recover large sums from the French islands’ inhabitants, he explained, and “several of the richest families are come over here, untill [sic] matters are settled.”¹ Neither the refugees nor their hosts anticipated the years of turmoil that would follow. It had been a year since news of the French Revolution had arrived in the Caribbean and the diverse inhabitants of the French islands that surrounded Dominica used the rhetoric of equality and revolution, the new representative assemblies, and the overall political uncertainty to push for their varied and often divergent interests, creating “competing conceptions of legitimate authority.”²

¹ The National Archives of the UK (hereafter TNA): CO 71/17, Lieutenant Governor James Bruce to Secretary William Grenville, 12 September 1790; TNA: CO 71/18, Bruce to Grenville, 10 November 1790. The governors of Grenada and St. Vincent reported similar experiences. See TNA: CO 260/12, Governor James Seton to Secretary Henry Dundas, 11 January 1793; TNA: CO 101/32, fol. 265, Acting President Samuel Williams to Secretary Dundas, 4 July 1792.

² The French Antilles included Guadeloupe, Martinique, St. Lucia, and Marie-Galante. Colonial assemblies were established in the French islands in 1787. William S. Cormack, *Patriots, Royalists, and Terrorists in the West Indies: The French Revolution in Martinique and Guadeloupe, 1789–1802* (Toronto, 2019), 54.

Other islands in the Lesser Antilles—many, but not all, of them British—watched these developments closely, knowing they were vulnerable to the influence of revolution because people moved easily and frequently between islands in this part of the Caribbean, which facilitated the spread of revolutionary ideas, news, and rumors.

Revolution and war disrupted politics, trade, plantation agriculture, racial hierarchies, and the daily lives of men, women, and children across the Caribbean. In the eastern Caribbean, political turmoil and civil war between competing factions in the French Antilles drove thousands of people to flee across the sea. Because of the long-standing connections between islands in the Lesser Antilles, they often did not go far. Dominica was the first British Caribbean colony to accept revolutionary refugees and received more than any other British island in the Lesser Antilles. It was the first stop for many refugees—white and non-white, free and enslaved—before they moved on to other islands.³ This mobility reveals the importance of examining the impact of the French Revolution beyond the larger and better-studied islands of Hispaniola, Jamaica, and Cuba.⁴ Dominica's location in the Lesser Antilles, its heterogeneous population, and its internal instability resulted in it becoming a critical node in regional migration and information networks. If Britain's proximity to France made it an obvious refuge for emigrés, so too was its eastern Caribbean colony embroiled in the revolution and civil wars that engulfed its neighbors. Dominica's role during this revolutionary period reveals Britain's tenuous hold over this part of its Caribbean empire and the inherent difficulties of governing an island colony whose society not only co-existed alongside, but was entangled with, the politics, economics, and cultures of multiple empires.

The islands of the Lesser Antilles are all in close proximity, as can be seen from [Figure 1](#). The numerous small boats and canoes that were a vital part of the regional infrastructure facilitated constant travel between them. Larger merchant ships and naval vessels also carried sailors, goods, and news throughout the Caribbean. Caribbean peoples and sailors connected islands across empires by constantly crossing watery borders between them.⁵ Jeppe Mulich describes the Leeward Islands as an “inter-imperial microregion” because of the “high density of relations and interactions between and across the formal boundaries of these polities.”⁶ These islands often communicated with and relied upon one another for news, supplies, and aid in times of crisis, such as during slave revolts, hurricanes, and food shortages. Similarly, Tessa Murphy frames the Windward Islands as a “creole archipelago,” which she defines as a “hybrid community” that emerged as inhabitants of the region

³ Patrick Harris, “Transimperial Exiles: Emigration and the Making of the Revolutionary Caribbean,” *French History and Civilization* 10 (2021): 186–98; R. Darrell Meadows, “Engineering Exile: Social Networks and the French Atlantic Community, 1789–1809,” *French Historical Studies* 23, no. 1 (2000): 67–102.

⁴ Jannik Keindorf, “Confusing Labels: French ‘Emigrants’ and ‘Prisoners of War’ in Jamaica during the Haitian Revolution,” *Age of Revolutions*, published online 22 June 2023. <https://ageofrevolutions.com/2023/06/22/confusing-labels-french-emigrants-and-prisoners-of-war-in-jamaica-during-the-haitian-revolution/>; Rebecca J. Scott and Jean M. Hébrard, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge, MA, 2012); Ada Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (New York, 2014); Jan C. Jansen, “Aliens in a Revolutionary World: Refugees, Migration Control and Subjecthood in the British Atlantic, 1790s–1820s,” *Past & Present* 255, no. 1 (2022): 189–231; Kit Candlin, *The Last Caribbean Frontier, 1795–1815* (Houndmills, 2012), chs. 5, 8; Paul Friedland, “Every Island Is Not Haiti: The French Revolution in the Windward Islands,” in *Rethinking the Age of Revolutions: France and the Birth of the Modern World*, ed. David A. Bell and Yair Mintzker (New York, 2018), 41–79.

⁵ Julius S. Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (Brooklyn, 2018); and Julius S. Scott, “Crisscrossing Empires: Ships, Sailors, and Resistance in the Lesser Antilles in the Eighteenth Century,” in *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion*, ed. Robert L. Paquette and Stanley L. Engerman (Gainesville, FL, 1996), 128–43; Ernesto Bassi, *An Aqueous Territory: Sailor Geographies and New Granada's Transimperial Greater Caribbean World* (Durham, 2017), 4; Gunvor Simonsen and Rasmus Christensen, “Together in a Small Boat: Slavery's Fugitives in the Lesser Antilles,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (2023): 611–46. For more on entangled empires, see, for example, Eliga Gould, “Entangled Histories, Entangled Worlds: The English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Periphery,” *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 3 (2007): 764–86.

⁶ Jeppe Mulich, *In a Sea of Empires: Networks and Crossings in the Revolutionary Caribbean* (Cambridge, 2020), 2, 16.

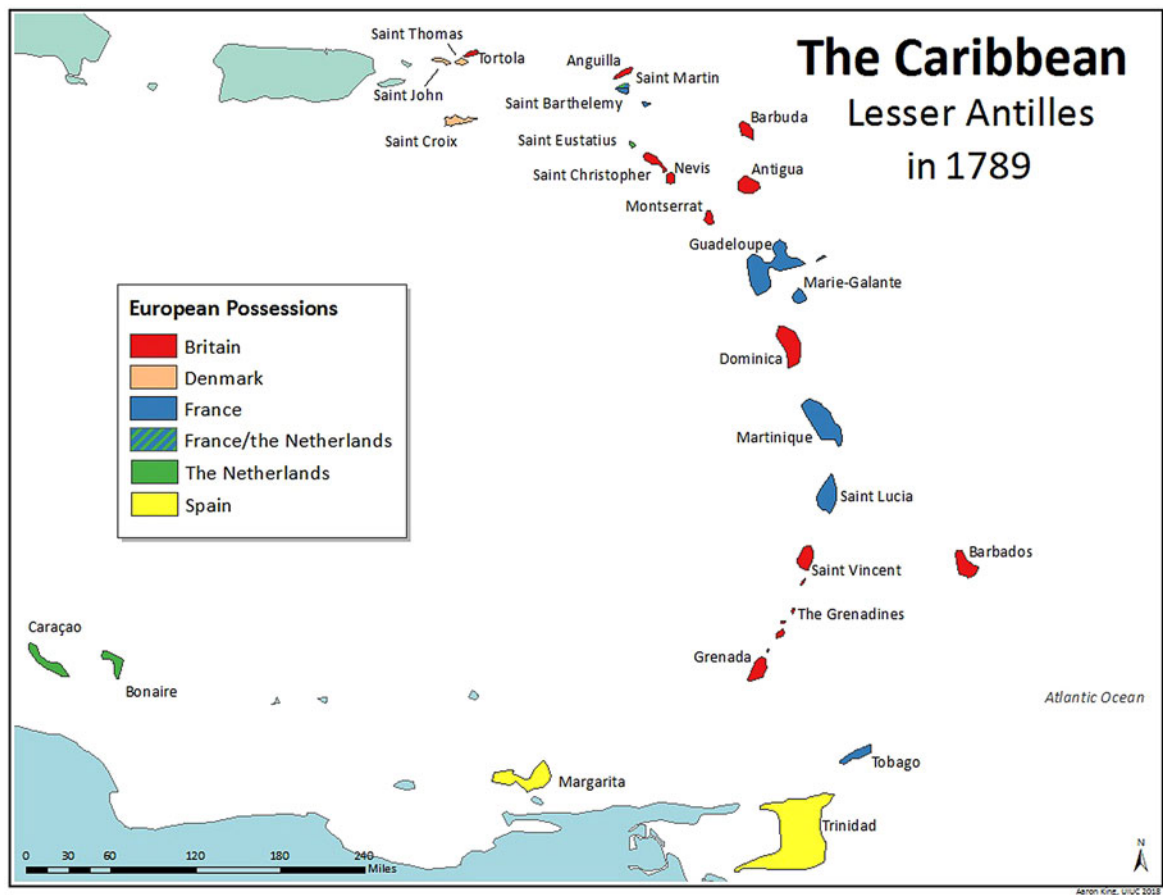


Figure 1. Map of the Lesser Antilles in 1789.

Source: Map created by Aaron King, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and revised by the author.

“engaged in exchange, interaction, accommodation, and contestation.” Murphy traces a range of connections between the islands that transgressed imperial borders and thus challenged the “imagined geography of empire.”⁷ The relationship between the French Antilles and British Dominica was part of these broader inter-island and thus inter-imperial connections. The French Revolution, however, destabilized this “hybrid community.” In Dominica, tensions erupted in its aftermath among all classes of inhabitants, creole and not, and this volatility had serious repercussions for its governance.⁸

As the French islands grappled with news of the revolution, British officials watched with concern for the security of their own islands, but also sympathy for their neighbors, especially white proprietors. Most British islands received French emigrants. Despite a long history of enmity, British governors who sheltered French governors and royalists recognized their visitors as fellow supporters of the established order and people of a similar socioeconomic background. French royalists saw in the British islands places where their lives, property, and rights would be protected while they waited to go home.⁹ Many officials saw the destitute newcomers who had fled their homes as deserving of charity, but governors also hoped they would move on quickly. They described the first royalist emigrants in positive terms and seemed to inherently trust them, suggesting that most of the earliest emigrants were white planters. Many islands soon blocked the entry of both mixed-race Caribbeans (known as people of color) and enslaved people as suspected revolutionaries, particularly after the outbreak of the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue. White colonial elites thus appeared to perceive the upending of racial hierarchies, not political revolution, as the greatest threat.

Dominica’s location, no more than 25 miles from Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Marie-Galante, made it a vital conduit for migration, news, and military operations, entangling it in French affairs, even as officials were told to stay neutral. It had a long history of geographic, economic, and familial links with the French islands, which led to a more ambivalent response toward the revolution and its exiles than was found in other islands. The new arrivals nonetheless posed several challenges for their hosts. Island officials had to determine who would be admitted or turned away; on what terms they could remain on the island; how to feed, clothe, and house them; whether the individuals represented themselves truthfully as royalists or were in fact enemies trying to provoke slave rebellion or upend British rule; and how the presence of these foreigners might affect the already fragile island dynamics.

Dominica was riven by fissures rooted in politics, class, race, and religion that hindered the government’s ability to respond to crises both before and after the outbreak of the French Revolution. The island had a history as a refuge on the margins of several empires that continued after the British took possession in 1763, and its officials struggled to govern a population that was majority French, Kalinago, and African rather than British. This created an environment where royalists, revolutionaries, and Maroons all found refuge as Dominica’s administrators attempted to respond to changing revolutionary and counterrevolutionary regimes in the French islands. Initially British governors aided the French officials who were trying to maintain order. Meanwhile, the Franco-English inhabitants of Dominica took this opportunity to seek greater liberties. Because British governors received

⁷ For the purposes of this article, the British Windward Islands are Dominica, St. Vincent, and Grenada. The Leeward Islands lie to the north and west of Guadeloupe. Tessa Murphy, *The Creole Archipelago: Race and Borders in the Colonial Caribbean* (Philadelphia, 2021), 6, 12, and ch. 2.

⁸ For Britain’s broader relationship to the French Revolution, see Hannah Weiss Muller, “The Wilmot Committee: Redefining Relief and National Interest in Britain during the French Revolution,” *Journal of British Studies* 61, no. 2 (2021): 1–30; Kristy Carpenter, *Refugees of the French Revolution: Émigrés in London, 1789–1802* (London, 1999); Juliette Reboul, *French Emigration to Great Britain in Response to the French Revolution, War, Culture and Society, 1750–1850* series (Cham, 2017); Maya Jasanoff, “Revolutionary Exiles: The American Loyalist and French Émigré Diasporas,” in *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760–1840*, ed. David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (New York, 2010), 37–58.

⁹ British governors variously referred to their French guests as refugees, emigrants, exiles, and émigrés. Émigré often signified royalist but was not used before 1792. In this article, I mostly use refugees or emigrants.

orders from London to remain impartial toward events on the French islands, Dominica's governors were unable to stop local printing presses from disseminating revolutionary propaganda or to prevent the arrival of thousands of people who sought refuge from the upheaval, some of whom helped spark slave revolts. After the outbreak of war between Britain and Republican France in February 1793, Dominica remained a sanctuary for royalists and revolutionaries, even as it faced threats of invasion. The French Revolution thus destabilized an already fraught colonial society. The influx of so many emigrants of unclear loyalties into an island whose diverse inhabitants had competing ideas of national and imperial belonging, identity, and sovereignty drew attention to the fragility of British control over one of its relatively new colonies.

An Ungovernable Island

Before the 1763 Treaty of Paris, Dominica was Indigenous Kalinago territory and one of the Neutral Islands, not governed by a European power. The Kalinago had tolerated the settlement of some poor white people, free people of color, and free black people. Dominica had available land, with none of the discriminatory laws against black people and people of color.¹⁰ Many of the settlers had been pushed out of Guadeloupe and Martinique by wealthier white planters. By 1763, there were 1,718 white Europeans, 300 free people of color, and 5,872 enslaved people living on Dominica. As Murphy shows, settlers in Dominica maintained familial and business ties to the French islands even after it fell under British rule, traveling to Guadeloupe and Martinique to celebrate marriages and baptisms.¹¹ Some inhabitants left when the British arrived, but many stayed, so that the microregion of Dominica and the French islands mostly continued to be a “creole archipelago.”¹²

Dominica was difficult for the British to govern because its British, French, Kalinago, Maroon, and enslaved inhabitants had competing visions for the island's future. New British settlers wanted to clear land for large plantations, but the mountainous topography made this difficult and expensive; many went bankrupt and left. The creole population, especially free people of color, were already invested in the island and mostly cultivated smaller plantations. They and the Kalinago likely saw the island as theirs. The Maroons and fugitive slaves controlled much of the interior. The lack of natural-born, landowning Britons made it difficult to find qualified people to serve in the representative Assembly, Council, and other offices of trust. Dominica's strategic position between French islands made it a good place from which to spy on French activities in the region, but this also meant France coveted the island. The constant threat of war undermined island security and hindered its development as a plantation society, since investing in a plantation was expensive. Dominica was the first British island to be captured by the French once they joined the war for American independence on the side of the Americans in 1778, signaling its value and its vulnerability. The French “new adopted subjects”—the British term for the non-British inhabitants of the island after 1763—aided in the invasion and capture of the island. To the surprise and displeasure of the French military governor and inhabitants, Dominica was returned to Britain at the end

¹⁰ The islands declared Neutral were not always the same, but St. Vincent and Dominica were designated as Kalinago territory from the 1660s, as per the treaty between England and France. The other Neutral Islands after 1748 were Tobago and St. Lucia.

¹¹ Thomas Atwood, *A History of the Island of Dominica* (London, 1791), 219; Murphy, *The Creole Archipelago*, 12, 40, 49, 57–65; Patrick L. Baker, *Centring the Periphery: Chaos, Order, and the Ethnohistory of Dominica* (Montreal, 1994), 49; Lennox Honychurch, *In the Forests of Freedom: The Fighting Maroons of Dominica* (London, 2017), chs. 5, 9; Léo Elisabeth, “The French Antilles,” in *Neither Slave nor Free: The Freedman of African Descent in the Slave Societies of the New World*, ed. David W. Cohen and Jack P. Greene (Baltimore, 1972), 134–71.

¹² Heather Freund, “When French Islands became British: Law, Property, and Inheritance in the Ceded Islands,” in *Voices in the Legal Archives in the French Colonial World: “The King Is Listening,”* ed. Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau (New York, 2021).

of the war. Afterwards, British inhabitants regarded the “new adopted subjects” with suspicion, leading many to migrate to Trinidad.¹³

After the peace, Dominica was desperate for loyal white subjects who would help defend the island from internal and external threats. To bolster the white British population after the war, Governor John Orde welcomed several hundred American Loyalists, who proved willing to fight in the Maroon War of 1785–86. This conflict was a repercussion of the occupation period, during which the military governor had allied with and armed Maroon communities, even when the Maroons attacked British plantations and killed a white man.¹⁴ Planter John Mair referred to Dominica as “an asylum for the refuse of all the others.” He and other British planters generally wrote disparagingly of the French inhabitants as “illiterate” and “unprincipled,” and French creoles as “originat[ing] from the very dregs of the people, or from ruined adventurers.” British inhabitants also lamented the lack of imperial investment in the island because settlers were not being attracted to it.¹⁵ George Rose, planter and agent for Dominica, wrote to Orde that the French did not mix with the British and “there is reason to fear assistance is given from whence resistance ought to come.” He believed the only way to secure the island was by “military Force.”¹⁶ His comments were partly in response to the depredations caused by bands of Maroons during the recent war, but in general the French inhabitants were charged with not assisting in searches for enslaved fugitives, and even with aiding them. Thomas Atwood, a judge and author of *A History of the Island of Dominica* (1791), wrote that most of the free people of color were “of French extraction, and most of them came from the islands of that nation.” He further noted that Roman Catholic priests were appointed from Martinique and “feel themselves under that government.”¹⁷ These demographic, religious, social, and economic factors put Dominica at high risk for infiltration after the French Revolution broke out in 1789.

Dominica’s position between two French islands also made it difficult to control smuggling. Governor Orde was exceedingly unpopular with the inhabitants for his trade policies. He imposed additional restrictions on the free port of Roseau, tried to enforce customs duties, and attempted to stop rampant smuggling, which had been tolerated by previous officials. A petition from the colonial Assembly requested that the Crown remove him from office, alleging that he had provoked “violent Disputes and Animositities...amongst the Inhabitants of this Colony” and his administration “hath in general been highly disgusting and obnoxious to the Inhabitants and in many Instances arbitrary and oppressive.” They claimed to support Lieutenant Governor James Bruce, although in fact they were no more compliant under his command, or indeed under any other governor in the 1790s.¹⁸

Trade officials who tried to uphold the laws were targets for violence. John Blaire was tarred, feathered, and beaten by a mob for allegedly providing information about smuggling to a customs officer. Several months later, a revenue officer was verbally abused and threatened for confiscating five butts of wine.¹⁹ After the outbreak of revolution on the French

¹³ Murphy, *The Creole Archipelago*, ch. 6; Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, 2000), 38–39, 169–170; Atwood, *History of Dominica*, 280–81; B. W. Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807–1834* (Baltimore, 1984), 44; Kit Candlin, *The Last Caribbean Frontier, 1795–1815* (London, 2012), chs. 1, 3.

¹⁴ Atwood, *History of Dominica*, 227–30; Wallace Brown, “The Governorship of John Orde, 1783–1793: The Loyalist Period in Dominica,” *The Journal of Caribbean History* 24, no. 2 (1990): 146–77; Murphy, *The Creole Archipelago*, 173, 197–98.

¹⁵ Transcript of the Journals of John Mair, MS.50267, 34, National Library of Scotland (hereafter NLS).

¹⁶ Letter from George Rose to Sir John Orde, 16 December 1785, Acc.13685, NLS.

¹⁷ Atwood, *History of Dominica*, 216–19.

¹⁸ TNA: CO 71/16, Extract of Minutes of the House of Assembly, 2 September 1789; TNA: CO 71/16, Resolution of His Majesty’s Council, 9 September 1789.

¹⁹ TNA: CO 71/16, Bruce to Grenville, 15 April 1790; TNA: CO 71/18, Bruce to Grenville, 10 November 1790; TNA: CO 71/18, R. Wells to Orde, 13 December 1790. For more details on the charges against Orde, which were dismissed, see TNA: PC 1/3177. A butt is about two hogshead. Ronald Edward Zupko, *A Dictionary of Weights and Measures for the British Isles: The Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia, 1985), 304.

islands, the Collector of customs reported the clandestine introduction of French sugars into Dominica, doubling the island's usual sugar exports. Magistrates falsified customs certificates, identifying exports of sugar as coming from estates that did not even grow it.²⁰ Dominica lacked the resources to have vessels cruise the coasts or to protect customs officials, so there was no way to stop this infiltration, even though vessels carrying contraband also transported free people of color from the French islands who, it was argued, aimed to spread seditious ideas of freedom and equality among Dominica's free and enslaved populations.²¹ Thus, with the connectivity of the "creole archipelago" came difficulties in policing mobility.

Even as neighboring French islands struggled with the political upheaval that was beginning to creep into Dominica, the inhabitants persisted in their efforts to rid themselves of Governor Orde. Thomas Anketall, a member of the Assembly, led a campaign that either convinced or coerced 400 people to sign a petition for Orde's removal, even plotting to bar him from landing in December 1790 when he returned from a trip to London. There is also evidence that the island's attorney general, Charles Winstone, sympathized with the French revolutionaries. John Lowndes, printer of *The Caribbean Register or Dominica Gazette*, frequently published pieces critical of Orde. Because Winstone and Lowndes also served in the recalcitrant colonial Assembly, they held not only social authority but real political power at this fraught moment.²²

By 1791, there were 2,000 white people, 500 free people of color, and 15,400 enslaved people in Dominica. But only about 600 of the white inhabitants were British or American (Loyalists), and this number included children.²³ Coffee and cocoa, rather than sugar, plantations dominated as these were well suited to the physical geography of the island. The more productive and valuable of these, however, were owned by French inhabitants.²⁴ The island's interior continued to provide refuge for fugitives from slavery, as the forests concealed many Maroon villages whose inhabitants had fled Dominica's own plantations as well as those on neighboring islands. Because Maroons had connections to the island's plantations, they were able to obtain necessary resources and information. Mair lamented in the aftermath of the Maroon War that "the mountainous broken surface of the island," which was covered with woods, "must ever make a sure place of retreat for the discontented." Mair was happy to leave an island he described in 1790 as full of "dissension."²⁵ The challenges of controlling the various populations of Dominica grew even more vexing for colonial officials as revolution, counterrevolution, and civil war erupted on neighboring French islands and foreigners began to arrive in droves.

The French Revolution Arrives in the Lesser Antilles

Thomas Orde of Dominica was in Martinique when a French merchant ship arrived in September 1789 bringing official news of the revolution. He reported back to Governor John Orde that the ship brought tricolor cockades, which quickly sold out; everyone was wearing one.²⁶ Governor Baron de Clugny in Guadeloupe had banned enslaved people from wearing cockades. Governor General le Comte de Vioménil in Martinique tried to

²⁰ TNA: CO 71/18, Orde to Grenville, 28 January 1791. For more on Dominica as a smuggling haven and free port, see R. Grant Kleiser, "An Empire of Free Ports: British Commercial Imperialism in the 1766 Free Port Act," *Journal of British Studies* 60, no. 2 (2021): 334–61.

²¹ Scott, *The Common Wind*, 132–33.

²² TNA: CO 71/20, *The Caribbean Register or Dominica Gazette*, 26 March and 2 April 1791. Depositions by those who signed the petition are in the same volume (n.p.); TNA: CO 71/28, Governor Hamilton to Secretary Portland, 25 March 1796.

²³ TNA: CO 71/20, 14 February 1791; Atwood, *History of Dominica*, 208–09.

²⁴ Atwood, *History of Dominica*, 72, 216. He notes that about 30 sugar plantations had been abandoned.

²⁵ Journals of John Mair, 44, 47.

²⁶ TNA: CO 71/17, Thomas Orde to Governor John Orde, 27 September 1789.

ban them until he received official instructions from Paris, but pressure from the inhabitants forced him to relent. Vioménil and Clugny feared the repercussions of disseminating the message associated with the cockade in a slave society. Revolutionary ideas of social equality were appealing not only to the enslaved but also to poor white people and free people of color, who soon challenged the authority of the planter class. Historian Laurent Dubois identifies three wars in the colonies: between *gens de couleur* and white people, between white people of different political persuasions, and against enslaved insurgents.²⁷ For royalists in slave societies, the message of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* did not align with their values or way of life; indeed, it posed a threat to the hierarchical social structure if the enslaved and other marginalized groups violently demanded rights and freedoms that revolutionary leaders in Paris never intended for them.²⁸

The revolution in the French Antilles was divisive, and the political situation on the ground changed frequently and varied among the islands in response to events in Paris and island dynamics. Some in Dominica greeted the revolution enthusiastically, while others feared what it would mean for commerce and regional stability, not to mention the dangerous example it set for the enslaved population. In communications with London, governors underscored their concern about the disorder in the region. They requested more troops and naval vessels to cruise the archipelago to prevent dangerous intercourse between the islands.²⁹ In November 1790, Governor Orde of Dominica described the “Deplorable” situation in Martinique to Secretary Grenville in London: “a confirmed & rancorous Civil War exists in Martinico, in which Whites, Blacks and Mulattoes are included. In the other Islands things are not so bad, but all Government is at an end in them, and their tranquility depends upon the caprice of the moment.” He described the uncertainty that plagued the whole region. He reported that soldiers were mostly aligned with the patriots. Governor General of the Windward Islands Charles de Damas had the support of planters, free people of color, and free black people.³⁰ Orde also wrote that 80,000 enslaved people in Martinique were armed, with the goal of emancipation.³¹ He was obviously concerned about the influence of such agitation on the enslaved in Dominica and the potential for agitators to escape to Maroon societies in the interior.

The factionalism in each French island fueled mobility between them. When patriots challenged colonial authority in Martinique at the beginning of revolution, those in Guadeloupe and St. Lucia came to support their fellow *citoyens*. Waves of emigration mirrored the shifting political situation on the ground in the French Lesser Antilles, but individuals also entered Dominica at other times. In 1792 when royalists reclaimed Guadeloupe and Martinique, patriots moved to Dominica and other islands. When French Republicans reclaimed Guadeloupe in 1794, many royalists and moderates fled. British military victories and defeats also spurred mobility. People of all political affiliations fled into exile both near and far, while others sought to spread the revolution. Many of those displaced by the revolution passed through Dominica.

²⁷ See the example of Saint-Pierre, Martinique, which formed a committee in opposition to the governor and the planter class that comprised the colonial Assembly. They even corresponded with governors of neighboring islands. TNA: CO 101/31, fols. 11, 17. Cormack, *Patriots, Royalists, and Terrorists*, 54–65; Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution & Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787–1804* (Chapel Hill, 2004), 115–19.

²⁸ Laurent Dubois, “An Enslaved Enlightenment: Rethinking the Intellectual History of the French Atlantic,” *Social History* 31, no. 1 (2006): 1–14.

²⁹ TNA: CO 71/17, Grenville to Orde, 16 December 1790; Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens*, 117. For a succinct description of the effects of the French Revolution in the Windward Islands, see Murphy, *The Creole Archipelago*, 203–06.

³⁰ TNA: CO 71/18, Orde to Grenville, 13 December 1790.

³¹ TNA: CO 71/18, Bruce to Grenville, 10 November 1790; TNA: CO 71/18, Orde to Grenville, 13 December 1790 and 8 January 1791; Cormack, *Patriots, Royalists, and Terrorists*, 64; David Geggus, “The Slaves and Free Coloreds of Martinique during the Age of the French and Haitian Revolutions: Three Moments of Resistance,” in *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion*, ed. Robert L. Paquette and Stanley L. Engerman (Gainesville, 1996), 280–301.

The revolution on the neighboring French islands inspired some Franco-English subjects in Dominica to assert the power of their majority and agitate for greater participation in colonial government. Like Catholics in England, they were barred from membership in the colonial Assembly, the Council, and other offices of trust, but they could vote, own land, and serve on juries.³² The “adopted subjects” constituted the largest voting bloc and were able to exercise influence by voting for people who obstructed policies they opposed. This could render the Assembly incapable of doing business and cripple the colonial government. In June 1790, seventy-two “Franco English Freeholders” petitioned the King, Lieutenant Governor Bruce, the Council, and the Assembly to “become, without any offensive Exclusion, happy Citizens.” While emphasizing their loyalty and love for their king, the “Franco English” petitioners also wrote: “As long as arbitrarily represented they cannot legally concur, in the Council and Assembly, by the free Act of their enlightened Will, in the Good of your Service, and in the Support of a Constitution which is become the Model of all Nations that aspire to Freedom.”³³ As subjects and property holders, they desired the right to sit in the representative Assembly and Council and have a say in the passage of colonial laws and taxes, just as proprietors in French colonies now did.

The petition reveals the continuing importance of the large French presence in Dominica. One signatory, Jean Baptiste Serrant, noted that he had lived on the island for 32 years, meaning he was there before the British took possession. Other surnames match those on the first lists of French proprietors under British rule.³⁴ Many people identified themselves as proprietors. Several surnames are repeated, indicating members of the same families. The petition was in both French and English, suggesting help from British supporters (or a notary) for both language and style. The French “*co-sujets*,” as they referred to themselves in a series of small pamphlets—*Lettres Creoles ou Le Constitution [sic] des Colonies Anglaises* (1791)—claimed that they deserved better treatment and rights, particularly the right to serve in the legislature and in other offices of trust.³⁵ It is easy to understand the timing of this push for expanded civic participation. British inhabitants openly questioned the loyalty of the French population, so the *co-sujets* needed to prove their dedication to the British crown. British rule was stable and property rights protected. It was in the best interests of the French freeholders to support fellow monarchists and rulers who would uphold slavery, but they required further incentives to remain loyal. They recognized that the British needed their numerical strength to defend the island and control the enslaved population. They had bargaining power.

Dominica’s Council agreed with the reasoning of their *co-sujets*. The island was approximately two-thirds French, which was unlikely to change, and this produced many problems for governance because there was a constant shortage of people invested in the future of the island who were eligible to serve in colonial offices and the legislature. As proprietors, the French inhabitants came from the appropriate social class to serve in government. The Council determined that it would “consolidate the general Happiness and prosperity of this Colony if the Incapacity of holding Offices of Trust and sundry other Restrictions within this Island were removed from His Majestys [sic] Roman Catholic Subjects.”³⁶

³² Before the passage of Catholic emancipation in 1829, Roman Catholics in Britain did not hold the same rights and privileges as Protestant subjects, but in some colonies, such subjects were granted limited liberties. For example, in Grenada, the French Catholics temporarily won limited membership in the Council and legislative Assembly. See, for example, Hannah Weiss Muller, “Bonds of Belonging: Subjecthood and the British Empire,” *Journal of British Studies* 53, no. 1 (2014): 29–58; Caitlin Anderson, “Old Subjects, New Subjects and Non-Subjects: Silences and Subjecthood in Fédon’s Rebellion, Grenada, 1795–96,” in *War, Empire and Slavery, 1770–1830*, ed. Richard Bessel, Nicholas Guyatt, and Jane Rendall (New York, 2010), 201–17.

³³ TNA: CO 71/17, Miscellaneous papers, 4 June 1790.

³⁴ John Byres, *References to the Plan of the Island of Dominica, as Surveyed from the Year 1765 to 1773* (London, 1777).

³⁵ TNA: CO 71/19, *Lettres Creoles ou Le Constitution des Colonies Anglaises*; TNA: CO 71/21, Minutes of the Council of Dominica, 18 June 1791.

³⁶ TNA: CO 71/21, Minutes of the Council, 18 June 1791.

Likely they also hoped this would make their *co-sujets* more compliant in supporting colonial needs. The King received the petition, but there is no evidence the composition of the Assembly changed to include the French freeholders.³⁷ Perhaps this lack of action made the “Franco-English” more amenable to revolutionary ideas in the coming years. Indeed, Dominica only became more ungovernable in the 1790s as it emerged as an important node in networks of people, both enslaved and free, trying to escape threats to their lives, liberty, and property, and those intent on spreading revolution.

A Haven for Refugees

All the British governors in the region were instructed to remain neutral regarding events in France and its colonies. Secretary Grenville told Governor Orde to “observe the most perfect impartiality towards all Parties” and avoid anything resembling interference.³⁸ Connected as the islands of the Lesser Antilles were, this put officials in a difficult position as they struggled to keep out revolutionary emissaries. As Governor General Damas wrote to Orde, “The situation of things in Martinique cannot be ignored by anyone in the English Antilles.”³⁹ A rupture in one island could quickly spread to others. Just as with other types of colonial turmoil, French officials requested help from their British neighbors to handle challenges to their authority. The governors of both Dominica and Grenada conveyed Damas’s correspondence through London to Paris. In June 1790, Damas wrote to Lieutenant Governor Bruce asking him to watch out for men trying to enter Dominica “without passports signed by me” because some “bad subjects” might try to seek refuge in the island. Bruce agreed to return any “banditti” he found. They made their agreement public, demonstrating a unified monarchist front between the British and French islands. No doubt any alleged bandits would have tried to enter through the many out bays of the island rather than through official ports, making them harder to discover. Indeed, *Lowndes’ Caribbean Register* published a short piece in June 1790 complaining about the “the deluge of Vagabonds poured in upon us from a neighbouring Colony.” Dominica was already being affected by the turmoil in neighboring islands. A few months later, Lieutenant Governor Bruce reported that Dominica had started receiving French refugees.⁴⁰

British governors clearly supported royalists from the beginning of the revolution and expressed pity toward them and their situation. People were granted entry into Dominica if they swore an oath of allegiance to King George III. This first wave of exiles seems to have comprised the wealthy.⁴¹ They were people with the economic means to move, so were perhaps less of a burden on their hosts, and some probably brought with them valuable possessions to sell. There were no initial restrictions on the entry of enslaved people, so it is likely that many royalists brought their domestic servants with them. The island’s officials and inhabitants generally received the newcomers with trepidation, worried that some people misrepresented their political allegiances. But Governors Orde and Bruce continually conveyed a reluctance to turn them away while Britain was neutral. Indeed, because of the peace between the countries, historian Anne Pérotin-Dumon argues that British officials could not stop the flow of refugees.⁴²

Both royalists and revolutionaries sought refuge and co-existed in Dominica, particularly in the capital of Roseau. It is unclear how this worked on the ground, but the experience of

³⁷ TNA: CO 71/20, *The Caribbean Register or Dominica Gazette*, 2 April 1791.

³⁸ TNA: CO 71/17, Secretary Grenville to Governor Orde, 16 December 1790.

³⁹ “Le situation des choses à la Martinique ne peut être ignorée de personne dans les antilles anglaises.” TNA: CO 71/20, Damas to Orde, 10 January 1791.

⁴⁰ “sans passport signé de moi” and “mauvais sujets,” TNA: CO 71/17, Letters between Bruce and Damas, June and July 1790; TNA: CO 71/17, Bruce to Grenville, 10 October 1790; TNA: CO 101/30/90, *Lowndes’ Caribbean Register*, 19 June 1790.

⁴¹ Harris, “Transimperial Exiles,” 188; Anne Pérotin-Dumon, *Être patriote sous les tropiques: la Guadeloupe, la colonisation et la Révolution: 1789-1794* (Basse-Terre, 1985), 164.

⁴² Pérotin-Dumon, *Être Patriote Sous les Tropiques*, 164.

exile may have overshadowed ideological differences, and refugees likely stayed quiet so they would not be removed from the colony. In November 1792, Leeward Islands Governor William Woodley wrote from St. Christopher that the Frenchmen who had sought refuge in that island “seem all to have retained their attachment to the National Flag, except two Officers...but [they] were obliged to abscond and go to St. Eustatius at the Peril of their Lives.”⁴³ Some British and French inhabitants in Dominica supported the French revolutionaries, so Dominica probably provided a friendlier environment for emigrants of all kinds.

At the outbreak of the French Revolution, Dominica’s internal tensions made it ill-equipped to host an influx of outsiders. It nonetheless received thousands of French refugees, who outnumbered its own free population. Many new arrivals likely had family or business contacts in Dominica. As R. Darrell Meadows notes, social networks were important for determining where migrants fled to, since they were reliant upon the generosity of hosts, whether they were staying with family or friends of friends.⁴⁴ French was commonly spoken in Dominica and migrants could easily stay abreast of developments in Martinique and Guadeloupe.

It was impossible for Dominica to stay out of French affairs because the islands were in regular communication through print, illegal and legal trade, and the movements of families and sailors. Dominica also became an important printing and distribution center for the newspapers and political literature that circulated in the region.⁴⁵ Both royalists and patriots printed material for circulation outside Dominica, and the island received French newspapers, such as the *Gazette de Saint-Lucie* and the *Gazette de la Martinique*. Governor Orde sent many French and English newspapers and political pamphlets to Secretary Grenville to demonstrate the extent to which the revolution had infiltrated the region and the island: “your Lordship will see how uncomfortably we are involved, and open to be considered as abettors in all the Seditious Proceedings and Views of Parties in the Neighbouring Colonies,” he wrote in April 1791. Newspapers and pamphlets carried revolutionary news from Paris and Europe, extracts of the deliberations of the colonial assemblies and their decrees, letters (including from those in exile in Dominica), and news of slave rebellions; some publications encouraged people of color and the enslaved to rise up and claim their rights as citizens.⁴⁶

Dubuc Marentille emigrated with his family from Martinique to Dominica, bringing a printing press and using it to spread revolutionary propaganda. His political gazettes were directed at the French colonies and the enslaved.⁴⁷ From Dominica he printed *Aux Colons Français de l’Amérique* and was perhaps the anonymous editor XYZ for *L’Ami de la Liberté, et L’Ennemi de la Licence*.⁴⁸ *L’Ami* was “not only read with avidity by free People of colour, but Negro Slaves were Subscribers to it, and it is well known that Negroes on a Sunday have frequently clubbed together a quarter dollar to purchase it, in order to have it read to them.” Authorities told him to stop printing it because it was emboldening the enslaved population, but he refused.⁴⁹ A deposition by Jean-Baptiste Valiere, Marentille’s printer, stated that Marentille received many “Mulattos [sic] and Negroes [who] generally landed to

⁴³ TNA: CO 152/73, Governor Woodley to Secretary Dundas, 21 November 1792.

⁴⁴ Meadows, “Engineering Exile.”

⁴⁵ TNA: CO 71/20 and CO 71/21 have many examples of newspapers. Scott, *The Common Wind*, 131.

⁴⁶ Examples of French papers printed in Dominica include: *Moderateur Omni-Nationale de L’Amérique*, the *Courrier des Petites Antilles*, and *Le Furet Colonial*. TNA: CO 71/20, Orde to Grenville, 15 April 1791. For examples of letters, see TNA: CO 71/20, *Gazette de Saint-Lucie*, 11, 25 Janvier 1791; Roderick Cave, “Early Printing and the Book Trade in the West Indies,” *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 48, no. 2 (April 1978): 167; and Roderick Cave, *Printing and the Book Trade in the West Indies* (London, 1987), 35.

⁴⁷ Cormack, *Patriots, Royalists, and Terrorists*, 89–90; Scott, *The Common Wind*, 129–30.

⁴⁸ He had previously written *De L’Esclavage des Negres Dans les Colonies De l’Amérique*, printed in Guadeloupe. An extract of a letter in the *Gazette de Sainte-Lucie* mentions “La gazette XYZ (Dubuc Marentille).” The editor could also be Jean-Baptiste. The editor of XYZ fled Dominica, as did Dubuc Marentille. TNA: CO 71/20, *Gazette de Sainte-Lucie*, 4, 25 Janvier 1791; Scott, *The Common Wind*, 135–36.

⁴⁹ TNA: CO 71/20, *The Caribbean Register or Dominica Gazette*, 26 March 1791.

Windward of this Island, and might very probably on their way across the Country to Mr. Dubuc's House, poison the Minds of the Slaves with whom they might meet, with the Ideas of Liberty."⁵⁰ Marentille had sought refuge in Dominica, yet he also took advantage of the demographics and political divisions in the island to spread incendiary messages in print and in person, finding a receptive audience.

Enslaved people who escaped to Dominica from French islands headed to the Maroon camps in the interior.⁵¹ The Assembly and Council passed acts in 1787, 1789, 1793, 1794, and 1798 "to establish a company of Rangers for the suppression of runaways" and others relating to the "more effectual apprehending of runaway slaves," demonstrating the persistent ability of enslaved people to take advantage of an island and region in turmoil to claim their freedom.⁵² The circulation of seditious print, the refugees, contact with French islands, and the Maroons were blamed for two insurrections among the enslaved in January 1791. Historian David Geggus links the rumors that sparked these revolts to Martinique and the circulation of news about abolition debates in London and Paris; this is supported by rebel testimony. The New Year's Day rebellion was rooted in a rumor that Governor Orde had granted the enslaved three days to work their provision grounds instead of the customary one- and-a-half days. Another rumor claimed that Orde brought an emancipation decree from the King of England. Enslaved messengers coming from Roseau overheard Orde's opponents plotting to prevent the governor's ship from landing. The messengers interpreted this to mean that the planters wanted to stop the governor from enacting the royal order. Orde quickly issued a proclamation explaining that the rumor was false and pardoning all rebels who returned to work. The rebellion was over quickly, but the island did not stay quiet for long.⁵³

While the first rebellion had been about improving working conditions for the enslaved, the second rebellion, which began soon afterwards, was about freedom. Two of the leaders were foreign free men of color: Jean Louis Polinaire, who had come from Martinique with his family, and Jean Baptiste, from Guadeloupe. Polinaire worked as a carpenter in Roseau, but he soon began conducting secret meetings with Maroon leaders and the enslaved, recognizing that Dominica was ripe for revolt because of its factiousness. There were also leaders throughout the island among the enslaved.⁵⁴ Polinaire's published testimony stated that "all the Negroes of the Island were concerned in the Plot" and included details. Since this account was recorded by a white man after Polinaire had been sentenced to death, and was written in English rather than French, its veracity cannot necessarily be trusted. Many of the rebels were also interviewed and they testified that the plan was to kill the whites. Nedd, an enslaved man of Charles Bertrand, testified that "When the free mulattoes first came over from the disturbances in Martinique they induced the negroes to ask of their Masters three days in the week...but finding it would not be granted, then they contrived the scheme to obtain it by force, and to obtain their perfect freedom by the destruction of the whites." Several testimonies highlighted the enslaved people in the French quarter of the island as the main rebels, though they were not the only ones who rose up.⁵⁵ The accounts

⁵⁰ TNA: CO 71/20, Deposition before Alexander Stewart, in *The Caribbean Register or Dominica Gazette*, 26 March 1791.

⁵¹ Gabriel Debien, "Le Marronage aux Antilles Françaises au XVIIIe siècle," *Caribbean Studies* 6, no. 3 (1966): 28. For a good overview of the Maroons of Dominica, see Neil C. Vaz, "Dominica's Neg Mawon: Maroonage, Diaspora, and Trans-Atlantic Networks, 1763–1814" (PhD diss, Howard University, 2016); and Neil C. Vaz, "Maroon Emancipationists: Dominica's Africans and Igbos in the Age of Revolution, 1763–1814," *Journal of Caribbean History* 53, no. 1 (2019): 27–59; Honychurch, *In the Forests of Freedom*, chs. 9–11.

⁵² TNA: CO 73/9, fols. 44, 103; TNA: CO 73/10, fols. 6, 94; TNA CO 73/11, fol. 5.

⁵³ TNA: CO 71/20, 7 and 12 February 1791; Honychurch, *In the Forests of Freedom*, 100–01; Geggus, "The Slaves and Free Coloreds of Martinique." For more on rumors and slave revolts, see Wim Klooster, "Slave Revolts, Royal Justice, and a Ubiquitous Rumor in the Age of Revolutions," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (2014): 401–24, <https://doi.org/10.5309/willmaryquar.71.3.0401>.

⁵⁴ TNA: CO 71/20, "The Examination of Polinaire."

⁵⁵ TNA: CO 71/20, *The Caribbean Register, or Dominica Gazette*, 26 March 1791; TNA: CO 71/19, Examination of Nedd, 17 January 1791. The testimonies and related letters go on for many pages.

from white planters estimated the number of rebels at anywhere between 100 and 300. The insurgents expected arms and support from Maroon chiefs Pharelle and Panglos, but nothing materialized, perhaps because of disagreements over strategy. The rebellion was thus swiftly put down by colonial troops.⁵⁶

Polinaire was convicted of treason because he had taken a loyalty oath to King George III when he entered Dominica. He was executed as a traitor around the same time as another free man of color, Vincent Ogé, was executed in Saint-Domingue for leading a rebellion that was a precursor to that led by Toussaint L'Ouverture, symbolically linking the revolts on opposite sides of the Caribbean.⁵⁷ Writing to Secretary Grenville after the rebellion had been quelled, Orde conjectured that the uprising “was the effect of an Idea of Liberty which has for some time past prevailed amongst [the enslaved population], of the present Situation of the Foreign and Neighbouring Islands, and of the bad example and general relaxation of the laws that have lately been given and permitted here.”⁵⁸ He blamed both internal and external factors for creating an opening for the enslaved people of the island to try to improve their working conditions or gain their freedom. The Assembly and Council mainly blamed the presence and influence of the French refugees, publications (especially *L'Ami*) spreading rumors of emancipation and encouraging rebellion, the upheaval on neighboring islands, and the “constant and improper intercourse of Foreign Vessels” at French-dominated Point Michel and Colihaut, where the rebellion began.⁵⁹ In the aftermath, Orde sought increased authority to detain foreign vessels communicating with the coast, to regulate tickets of leave of absence, to require the registration of absent enslaved people, and to “[empower] the executive Government to regulate the entry and residence of Foreigners.”⁶⁰ The legislature seemed willing to police the entrance of foreigners, but would not control smuggling, even though the two seemed to be linked. The ties with French islands would not be severed, even in the interests of security.

Proclamations and laws designed to control the influx of refugees were based on legislation passed before the outbreak of the French Revolution, demonstrating that Dominican officials considered inter-island mobility a problem even in times of peace. In March 1787, the legislature passed “An Act to oblige foreigners coming to this island to remain for any considerable time, to make themselves known to the Governor or Commander-in-chief for the time being.” It gave foreigners forty days to obtain permission to be in the island or to take the oaths of allegiance and supremacy to King George III. If they chose to stay in the island, they were required to serve in the militia, signaling how desperate the colony was for men to defend it.⁶¹ The act from 1787 served as a framework for a proclamation issued by Governor Orde in February 1791, which required: “Foreigners [to] conform themselves to certain reasonable Regulations.” No foreigner was allowed to remain for more than forty days without permission, in writing, from the governor or commander in chief.⁶² The refugees continued to arrive because of the “disturbed state of the neighbouring colonies.” Orde reported that some emigrants “seem to wish to settle in the Island and cultivate Lands.” Residents of the island asked him if they could lease part of their lands to the newcomers; the heavily indebted proprietors would have benefited from the income. With no end to the turmoil in sight and perhaps with nowhere else to go, the migrants

⁵⁶ TNA: CO 71/20, “The Examination of Polinaire.” TNA: CO 71/19 and CO 71/20 deal extensively with the rebellions. Pharelle and Polinaire are spelled in several different ways both in contemporary documents and the historiography.

⁵⁷ TNA: CO 71/20, “The Trial of Polinaire,” March 1791.

⁵⁸ TNA: CO 71/19, Orde to Grenville, 3 February 1791.

⁵⁹ TNA: CO 71/19, Privy Council Minutes, 17 and 20 January 1791.

⁶⁰ TNA: CO 71/19, Circular letters sent to proprietors, 15 January 1791; TNA: CO 71/19, Council Minutes, 21 January 1791.

⁶¹ TNA: CO 73/9, fol. 38.

⁶² TNA: CO 71/20, 9 February 1791.

may have been keen to earn some money or grow food. Reluctant to admit more foreigners, Orde requested instructions from London. While more good subjects could be useful, the loyalties of the foreigners were unclear.⁶³ Several months later, the island's Council reported that some foreigners were "disturbing the Peace of the Colony" and overstaying the forty days without reporting to the governor.⁶⁴

Orde's proclamation seems to have been largely ineffective because he did not feel he could enforce it. Writing to Secretary of State Henry Dundas in June 1792, he alleged that some British inhabitants actually encouraged people to ignore his proclamation against foreigners. He could not prevent the arrival of foreigners nor force their departure "without a strong exertion of the Prerogative." He "thought it most political to leave them unnoticed by any Public Measure and to limit my concern about them, whilst they remain quiet, or untill [sic] I am favored with your orders." Ignoring the problem did not meet with approval from London. Dundas responded that "the residence of so large a body of strangers of the description you mention within your government is a circumstance that requires the immediate interference of the civil authority in some shape or other, and...appear to me to call for a strong exertion of the authority with which you are entrusted, to remove them at all events," or at least those who aroused suspicion.⁶⁵ A few months later, Orde wrote that the island was now "nearly four fifths French." He described the Franco-English inhabitants as "infected with the mania of the...Democratic," and the refugees from Guadeloupe and Martinique as "a Swarm of People of the most desperate character...who possibly may prove troublesome guests." Orde continued to claim that he could not force them to move on (even though other governors did) because the colonial Assembly refused to meet to pass legislation and his orders often went unheeded.⁶⁶ Dominica's governors described themselves as helpless to prevent indigent and potentially dangerous emigrants from arriving on their shores and unable to secure the island because of a lack of both resources and willing participation from their own subjects.

French exiles and their leaders recognized Dominica as a refuge. By August 1792 the royalists controlled Guadeloupe and Martinique, and a wave of 1,200–1,500 patriot refugees "of all colors" fled into exile in Dominica; some brought gunpowder. A refugee from Martinique found Dominica hospitable because it promised the protection of legal equality. He noted that 500–600 people of color had left Martinique and at least 200 of them were in Dominica, signifying that the island did not bar their entry. Although generally well-behaved, Lieutenant Governor Bruce was concerned about the lack of "necessary Laws" to police the newcomers.⁶⁷ While other islands imposed restrictions on foreigners, Dominica had few controls. On 28 October, about 700 patriots from Martinique and Guadeloupe even held an "election in exile" for their representatives for the National Assembly, electing Jean Littée, the first man of color to hold this office. Of the 209 electors, 15 percent were recently enfranchised people of color, voting in a colony where people of color had no political rights.⁶⁸ Although France had only granted political rights to *gens de couleur* in April

⁶³ TNA: CO 71/22, Orde to Dundas, 14 February 1792.

⁶⁴ TNA: CO 71/23, Council Minutes, 3 September 1792.

⁶⁵ TNA: CO 71/23, Orde to Dundas, 13 June 1792; TNA: CO 71/23, Dundas to Orde, 4 August 1792; TNA: CO 71/23, Privy Council Minutes, 19 September 1792.

⁶⁶ TNA: CO 71/23, Orde to Dundas, 3 October 1792.

⁶⁷ Joyau (Louis) et Lavau à Arnaud de Corio (Roseau), 10 octobre 1792, COL C8^a 100, fol. 184, Archives Nationales d'Outre Mer (hereafter ANOM); TNA: CO 71/23, Depositions before James Blaire, October 1792; TNA: CO 71/23, Orde to Dundas, 14 October 1792; TNA: CO 71/24, Bruce to Rear Admiral Sir John Laforey, 2 December 1792; Frédéric Régent, *Esclavage, métissage, liberté: la Révolution française en Guadeloupe: 1789–1802* (Paris, 2004), 235; Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens*, 117; Pérotin-Dumon, *Être patriote sous les tropiques*, 156, n. 57.

⁶⁸ The French National Assembly granted free people of color the same rights accorded to white people on 4 April 1792. Cormack, *Patriots, Royalists, and Terrorists*, 211; Régent, *Esclavage, Métissage, Liberté*, 235; Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens*, 119.

1792, the vote likely sent a powerful message to people of color in Dominica about the possibilities of supporting the revolutionaries.

In December 1792, Republican commissioner Captain Jean-Baptiste-Raymond La Crosse brought news that France was now a Republic to the Lesser Antilles. In light of the counter-revolution on royalist Guadeloupe and Martinique, he was unable to land there. The French frigate instead sailed to Dominica because he knew many patriots were exiled there. Lieutenant Governor Bruce did not have instructions about whether to recognize the Republic, so, wary of his visitor, he allowed La Crosse to stay anchored for two days to make repairs, but barred any men from going ashore. La Crosse was warmly greeted by cockade-wearing patriots—there were 2,000 in the island at the time. In a letter published in *The Royal Danish American Gazette* in St. Croix, a “French Gentleman in Roseau” wrote to a “Gentleman” in St. Eustatius that he had gone on board La Crosse’s ship and received news of the progress of the revolution in Europe and a report on the state of Martinique, rejoicing that “the whole Universe will shortly be free.”⁶⁹ Bruce quickly decided that La Crosse’s presence was “detrimental to the tranquility of the colony” and ordered him to leave after only a day. La Crosse objected, but left for patriot-held St. Lucia peacefully, taking fifty patriot volunteers with him for his expedition to regain the other French islands for the Republic.

But La Crosse secretly left his aide, Raymond Devers, in Dominica. Devers’s task was to organize resistance to the counterrevolution from Dominica through print propaganda meant to unite the Frenchmen of the islands. In appeals to “all the French patriots,” he threatened the colonists who continued to rebel against metropolitan authority. Once Bruce realized that Devers was there and what he was doing, he ordered him to leave and stop printing incendiary material; Devers stalled long enough to print one last piece.⁷⁰ La Crosse’s campaign to divide the royalists was successful and he retook both Guadeloupe and Martinique for Republican France, likely sending royalists into exile in Dominica and attracting patriots to return.⁷¹ Dominica was thus intricately intertwined with the political divisions within France’s eastern Caribbean colonies and the inter-island traffic they generated.

England and France at War

In the 7 June 1794 issue of *The Martinico Gazette and General Advertiser*, an article by the French émigrés to Dominica thanked Governor Bruce for all he had personally done for the indigent refugees, supporting them generously from his purse with good rations. The writers stated that: “there is no English colony where affability, honesty and assistance have been lavished on [the emigrants] with more grace and generosity than Dominica has by the government and the inhabitants.”⁷² War between Britain and Republican France broke out in February 1793, which ended British neutrality, but not the harboring of refugees. Acting Governor Bruce appears to have been more trusting of the royalist refugees than other governors

⁶⁹ TNA: CO 71/24, Bruce to Dundas, 21 December 1791; *The Royal Danish American Gazette*, 26 December 1792, in *Caribbean Newspapers, Series 1*, Readex, access provided through the University of Copenhagen; Pérotin-Dumon, *Être patriote sous les tropiques*, 164–66; Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, 1982), 226.

⁷⁰ TNA: CO 71/24, Bruce to Dundas, 2, 7, 14 and 21 December 1792; TNA: CO 71/24, Addresses by La Crosse and Devers; TNA: CO 71/24, Privy Council Minutes, 4 January 1793; Tome 76, 508, 516–518, 530, *Archives Parlementaires de 1787 à 1860*; Cormack, *Patriots, Royalists, and Terrorists*, 143–46; Régent, *Esclavage, métissage, liberté*, 236, n. 4.

⁷¹ Cormack, *Patriots, Royalists, and Terrorists*, 149–53; Pérotin-Dumon, *Être Patriote Sous les Tropiques*, 284.

⁷² “tandis qu’il n’est aucune colonie Anglaise où l’affabilité, l’honnête & les secours leur aient été prodigés avec plus de grace & de générosité qu’à la Dominique par le gouvernement & les habitants.” *The Martinico Gazette and General Advertiser*, 7 June 1794, issue 12, 56, ANOM, <https://recherche-anom.culture.gouv.fr/ark:/61561/zn401ztxtwyd/daogrp/0/1>.

were, making the island more hospitable. In contrast, when Ninian Home landed in Grenada as its new lieutenant governor at the end of January 1793, he ordered all foreigners out of the island within two weeks. He was one of the original British settlers in Grenada and had long expressed negative views toward its French inhabitants.⁷³ As British forces fought French Republicans in the region and occupied French islands, Dominica's leaders tried to send exiles back to captured colonies while facing threats of invasion and disease.

After Britain declared war on Republican France, émigrés from the Caribbean in London lobbied for the capture of French islands to preserve them for the Bourbon monarchy.⁷⁴ The British allied with French royalists from the Caribbean for the preservation of monarchy, white supremacy, and slavery. They also hoped for profits from captured French sugar islands. Meanwhile, Dundas directed British governors to cease or limit the admission of all refugees from the French islands, except for those who “have fled for refuge from the Democratic faction prevailing in the French islands, and of whose principles and eventual assistance you are secure,” according to a letter to Governor Woodley.⁷⁵ Governors were already doing this because the refugees had become too burdensome and potentially dangerous to their hosts, but clearly there was still a place for royalist refugees in the British islands.⁷⁶ To prepare for war, all the islands bolstered their defenses and revived and revised their militia acts.⁷⁷ They also renewed efforts to control refugees.

The Alien Act regulating French emigration passed in London in January 1793, and the colonies passed their own versions based on the model it provided.⁷⁸ In the meantime, Bruce issued a proclamation in March evicting all foreigners unless they had permission to stay. In May, Dominica's legislature passed “An Act to prevent the residence of his Majesty's enemies in this Island.” The act was published in English and French in all the parishes of the island and copies were delivered to the churches, both Protestant and Catholic. The Alien Act required all French subjects on the island to leave unless they had applied for and received permission from the governor to remain. Any French people newly arriving in Dominica had to make their presence known to the governor and receive written permission to stay. Ships' captains were barred from disembarking French subjects except at Roseau, probably because this port had the most surveillance, and they had to immediately report the “names, surnames, conditions, and sex” of foreign passengers or they would be fined. The act also required every householder who had foreigners living with them or on their property to appear before a justice of the peace and give “an account or oath of such Foreigner or Foreigners specifying therein the names, surnames, conditions and sex of such Foreigner or Foreigners and the date of his, her or their arrival in this Island.”⁷⁹ This suggests that many inhabitants had taken refugees into their homes or allowed them to live on their lands. The act would soon be tested as more émigrés sought refuge.

A failed British expedition to take Martinique in June 1793 led 15,000 emigrants “of all dispositions, ages, sexes, and colors” to leave that island.⁸⁰ Bruce reported that after the British retreat, “not less than Five or Six thousand of all descriptions came over in the

⁷³ Ninian Home to Alexander Campbell, 1 April 1793 and Ninian Home to George Home, 2 July 1793, GD267/7/2: Out letter-book of Ninian Home, National Records of Scotland, Edinburgh, Scotland (hereafter NRS).

⁷⁴ Regent, *Esclavage, métissage, liberté*, 247; Cormack, *Patriots, Royalists, and Terrorists*, 159–167.

⁷⁵ TNA: CO 152/73, Dundas to Woodley, 21 February 1793; TNA: CO 5/267, fol. 26, Circular letter from Dundas to the Governors of the West India Islands; Elsa Goveia, *Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven and London, 1965), 254.

⁷⁶ TNA: CO 71/24, Proclamation, 7 March 1793.

⁷⁷ TNA: CO 73/10, fol. 46, “Act amending militia act.”

⁷⁸ Great Britain, Parliament, “A bill, intituled an act for establishing regulations respecting aliens arriving in this kingdom, or resident therein, in certain cases,” (1793) *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, accessed through the University of Copenhagen.

⁷⁹ TNA: CO 73/10, fol. 18, “An Act to prevent the residence of his Majesty's enemies in this Island”; TNA: CO 71/24, Privy Council Minutes, 23 March 1793; TNA: CO 71/26, Privy Council Minutes, May 1793; TNA: CO 73/10, fol. 26.

⁸⁰ TNA: CO 152/73, Woodley to Dundas, 13 March 1793; Ninian Home to Alexander Douglas, 20 July 1793, GD267/7/2: Out letter-book, NLS.

greatest distress. So very much crowded was the Town that numbers of them were obliged to lye [sic] in open Sheds and under the Galleries of the Houses.” At that point, Grenada had “not above 300” refugees, but Lieutenant Governor Home refused to take anyone from overcrowded Dominica. There were many emigrants in Barbados, St. Vincent, and Trinidad, but it seems that Dominica had the greatest number.⁸¹ Bruce reported to the island’s Privy Council that still more emigrants were pouring in, but

on whose Dispositions or Principles no confidence or reliance can be placed; with this doubtful Force within, and the disorderly state of the Negroes in the French Islands, and the hostile Disposition of the White Inhabitants, he conceived this Island to be in a very critical and dangerous situation; and that the Troops at present here were insufficient to secure the Peace and safety of the colony.⁸²

The refugees seem to have been peaceful, but the incursion of people overwhelmed the government.

Dominica and other islands struggled with provisioning after the declaration of war between Britain and France. In the Leeward Islands, demand for provisions because of the numbers of emigrants drove up prices for everyone, making life much harder for the poor. With war ships and privateers cruising in the region, Dominica imported provisions, including dry goods and livestock, from allies and neutral countries to prevent famine. Purchasing these provisions was expensive and efforts to raise money through a subscription were unsuccessful. Acting Governor Bruce thus asked the “Principal Gentlemen of the Emigrants” who among them was most in need of rations; they sent a list of 1,532 people, including children. Bruce hoped that 6,000 pounds of flour and 3,500 pounds of salt fish per week would be enough to sustain them. He opened up the port of Roseau to friendly ships so the island could obtain other staple provisions. To alleviate the strain on island resources, French officers volunteered to serve King George III in any capacity so as to receive soldiers’ rations. Bruce reported that they “appear a most respectable body of men, of which there are about one hundred.” Bruce’s letter conveys palpable concern for the emigrants, whom he generally described as friendly to the British and in dire need of food and refuge in the wake of the violence in Martinique. Many reportedly intended to go to Trinidad, where they had family, so Dominica was not their final stop.⁸³

Migration also spread disease: an epidemic of yellow fever gripped the archipelago from 1793 to 1796. Dr. James Clark of Dominica published a treatise on the disease and described the outbreak in the island. He noted that in June 1793, the streets of Roseau were crowded with emigrants after 3,000–4,000 people had arrived within three days from Martinique. The refugees claimed that yellow fever was not in Martinique when they departed, but it soon started infecting and killing people. Clark estimates that between July and October, 800 emigrants and about 200 Britons died. The victims included people of all social stations and races: people new to the Caribbean, soldiers, sailors, and the enslaved. Yellow fever was in St. Vincent and Grenada before it came to Dominica, after which it spread to the Leeward Islands and Philadelphia—all sites of emigration. Clark noted that the fever was “rather more violent, and continued longer” in Dominica “owing perhaps to the town being so much crowded by the frequent emigration of the French from the islands that were situated near to us.”⁸⁴ Dominica’s location and relative

⁸¹ Ninian Home to George Home, 13 July 1793 and Ninian Home to Alexander Campbell, GD267/7/ 2: Out letter-book, NRS; TNA: CO 260/12, Governor James Seton to Secretary Henry Dundas, July 1793.

⁸² TNA: CO 71/25, Privy Council Minutes, 23 June 1793.

⁸³ TNA: CO 71/25, Bruce to Dundas, 13 July 1793; TNA: CO 71/25, Proclamation to open the port of Roseau, 24 June 1793. For Trinidad as a place of refuge, see Kit Candlin, *The Last Caribbean Frontier, 1795–1815* (Houndmills, 2012), chs. 5, 8; and Kit Candlin, “The Expansion of the Idea of the Refugee in the Early-Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World,” *Slavery & Abolition* 30, no. 4 (2009): 521–44.

⁸⁴ James Clark, *A Treatise on the Yellow Fever* (London, 1797), 1–6.

openness toward refugees thus impacted not only its political stability but the health of its inhabitants.

Beginning in 1793, Dominica finally began blocking the landing of, and more consistently deporting, the exiles who both directly and indirectly had caused so much turmoil. The Council felt that the governor had the authority to send foreigners “from the Island by Military Force, & confine them if they should return.” The Council also approved of vessels cruising the channels between Guadeloupe and Martinique to prevent “clandestine landing of strangers.”⁸⁵ When more French emigrants, including people of color, tried to land from Martinique in July 1794, Lieutenant Governor Bruce refused them entry; they moved on to Swedish and Danish islands. He allowed some royalists who had come for protection, and whom he judged to be “respectable inhabitants,” to stay. Bruce considered them useful to the colony.⁸⁶ However, when royalists gained the upper hand in Martinique, he tried sending them back.

With the British at war with Republican France and allied with the royalists, Dominica’s involvement in the revolution changed. Bruce sent arms and ammunition to Martinique to aid the royalists—perhaps to prevent more emigration; Dundas approved the action. Dominica also faced threats from French privateers, including attacks on the island’s plantations. Some “banditti” in armed vessels even “threatened to burn the Town of Roseau.”⁸⁷ Members of the colonial Assembly reported concerns of more armed “People of Colour appearing to be Strangers” on the roads, expressing fear that they would mix with the enslaved population. Passports and official permission were required to leave the island so that French people, debtors, and criminals could not escape unnoticed; small boats were taken into custody for security. Foreigners judged to be Republicans were sent away.⁸⁸

The government also sought to suppress the growing fugitive slave population by finding and destroying their camps. The British intercepted a letter from French Jacobins to the Maroon leader Pharelle trying to convince him to join their side by vaguely offering support “for the cause of the Maroons.”⁸⁹ At the same time, French patriots were landing at out bays and “joining with the evil disposed Subjects who are endeavoring to excite the Negroes to rise, promising them freedom and Equality.”⁹⁰ Franco-English subjects comprised most of the militia, but their support for the French islands meant Bruce did “not think it advisable at this moment to put Fire Arms into their hands.” With such a small British population, he could rely on few people to defend the colony in the face of many internal and external threats.⁹¹

In 1794, the British captured both Guadeloupe and Martinique with the help of émigré forces. Many royalists returned home, trusting the British to protect property and slavery. In Guadeloupe, this did not last long, as the region was transformed by the arrival of Victor Hugues, formerly of Saint-Domingue, who had risen to prominence in Jacobin circles in Paris. He recaptured Guadeloupe and enacted the emancipation decree passed by the National Assembly in February 1794, giving him thousands of new allies among the formerly enslaved. He brought a guillotine to use against royalists and dissidents, and ordered the execution of 503 monarchists.⁹² By 1796, “more than 20 per cent of the pre-revolutionary

⁸⁵ TNA: CO 71/24, Council Meeting Minutes, 19 March 1793.

⁸⁶ TNA: CO 71/24, 5 February 1793.

⁸⁷ TNA: CO 152/73, Woodley to Dundas, 13 March 1793; TNA: CO 71/25, Minutes of the Privy Council, September 1793.

⁸⁸ TNA: CO 71/24, fols. 68, 79, 82, Minutes of the House of Assembly of Dominica, December 1794; TNA: CO 73/10, fol. 96, “Act allowing the Governor to order all pettiaugurs and small crafts to be secured.”

⁸⁹ TNA: CO 71/27, fols. 18–24; TNA: CO 73/10, fol. 94, “Act enabling commanders of Ranger corps used in suppressing runaway slaves to use slave guides to find camps of the runaways”; Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 226–27.

⁹⁰ TNA: CO 71/26, Bruce to Dundas, 18 October 1794; TNA: CO 71/27, Minutes of the Privy Council, 17 October 1794; Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 226.

⁹¹ TNA: CO 71/26, Bruce to Dundas, 25 January 1794.

⁹² Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens*, 190. For an account of Hugues and his administration, see Laurent Dubois, “‘The Price of Liberty’: Victor Hugues and the Administration of Freedom in Guadeloupe, 1794–1798,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, 56, no. 2 (1999): 363–92.

free population had fled or been deported.”⁹³ Smuggling and piracy became official wartime policy under Hugues, taking advantage of the existing illicit trade networks that linked the Lesser Antilles.⁹⁴ Hugues recruited troops from among the newly emancipated and urged them to extend freedom to colonies occupied by the English, both recently captured islands like St. Lucia and Martinique, and those taken in 1763: Dominica, St. Vincent, and Grenada.⁹⁵ He found willing allies within the British islands, as his rhetorical and military support for discontented Franco-English subjects and Kalinago helped stoke major uprisings that seriously threatened British rule in those islands.

Dominica faced invasion threats three times in ten years: in 1795, 1797, and 1805. The first was the most significant. In 1795 British forces were embroiled in Saint-Domingue, Grenada, and St. Vincent. Dominica’s government was on high alert, but lacked the naval and military support to keep people out or stop the cooperation between its Franco-English population and foreign revolutionaries.⁹⁶ Governor Henry Hamilton sought the use of the Black Rangers “to secure Maroon Negroes, to take up disaffected Persons, Spies, &c and particularly to watch that part of the Coast opposite Marigalante [sic] to prevent intercourse by Pettiaugres and other Coasters.” With an unreliable militia, this body of armed enslaved men appeared to be the most vital to colonial security. From March 1795, many French inhabitants were called before the Privy Council upon suspicion of corresponding with the French Republicans and having revolutionary cockades and other paraphernalia. Many were imprisoned.⁹⁷ Robert Browne, former Governor Orde’s personal secretary, maintained that Dominica “had, alternately, been a place of refuge to Republicans and Royalists” and “still continued to swarm with Emigrants; the far greater part of those, were Republicans professing themselves to be Royalists, many unquestionably Spies.” There were, he concluded, only “a few, very few indeed, in whom confidence could be placed.”⁹⁸ Clearly, even policies put in place to police the foreigners had been ineffective.

Soon Dominica faced an invasion attempt, orchestrated in cooperation with its subjects. In June 1795, an invasion force of 200–250 men sent by Hugues from Guadeloupe landed at Hampstead Bay on the northeast coast of the island in Saint Andrew Parish; 800 more landed at Pagua. Browne, who helped defend the island, said the invaders “came only to take possession of the Island, to which they were invited,” and included British subjects among them. Meanwhile, on the other side of the island, the militia at Colihaut mutinied. They shouted “Vive la Republique!” and seized the key to the arms and powder magazine. Colihaut was known as a French area full of smugglers through which Maroons were supplied. Hugues had been corresponding with Pharelle through a French inhabitant, and they planned to cooperate upon the invasion. But Pharelle surrendered and aided the British instead.⁹⁹

Amid all the turmoil in the region, several prominent white men had left Dominica. Panicked residents sent their wives and children away and some of the emigrants left. Consequently, there were fewer able-bodied white men to defend the island and fewer people to manage the plantations and enslaved laborers, who were already absconding in large numbers and strengthening the Maroon population.¹⁰⁰ The Council recruited 70 men from among the émigrés to fight. The Council reasoned that even foreign royalists would be

⁹³ Harris, “Transimperial Exiles,” 187; Regent, *Esclavage, Métissage, Liberté*, 277.

⁹⁴ Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens*, 50, ch. 7; Régent, “Émigration et gestion des plantations,” 9.

⁹⁵ Regent, *Esclavage, Métissage, Liberté*, 355.

⁹⁶ TNA: CO 71/27, Hamilton to Portland, 27 March 1795.

⁹⁷ TNA: CO 71/27, fols. 118, 207–11.

⁹⁸ Robert Browne, *A Diary of the Defence of the Island of Dominica* (Dominica, 1795), 1–5; Honychurch, *In the Forests of Freedom*, 108–14.

⁹⁹ Browne, *Diary*, 7–8; TNA: CO 71/27, fol. 180, Hamilton to Portland, 18 July 1795; Honychurch, *In the Forests of Freedom*, 108–14.

¹⁰⁰ Browne, *Diary*, 1. For a map of Dominica, ca. 1776, see John Byres, *Plan of the Island of Dominica* (London, 1776).

more reliable than the French “adopted subjects” in the militia.¹⁰¹ Many people in the colony had “uniformly absented themselves from their Duty.”¹⁰² The colony relied on free people of color and enslaved troops instead, which proved crucial to British defenses. Enslaved troops fought in the hopes that they would be rewarded for their service. The invading forces quickly surrendered or escaped and by the end of the month the threat was over. In the aftermath, some people guilty of joining the French were executed, 94 French inhabitants were exiled, and about 100 insurgents were sent to England as prisoners of war. The property of those found guilty of treason was seized.¹⁰³

External threats did not abate after the attempted invasion, but support for refugees declined. In September 1796, the home secretary, the Duke of Portland, gave instructions to Caribbean governors to end rations and allowances for refugees, except those in dire need. Acting Commander in Chief John Matson, president of the Council, reported that only 50 of 295 refugees would continue to receive rations. He suggested émigrés go to a colony captured by the British, such as Martinique.¹⁰⁴ Guadeloupe remained the only island in French hands, but it continued to foment rebellion. Another plot by disaffected people and French emigrants was uncovered in June 1797. It was led by a former French general, Monsieur Jean LaCoste, who had been in Dominica for several months and aimed to “excite Sedition in the colony, to promote Inquietude among the coloured Inhabitants,” and invite Hugues to attempt another invasion. Matson enacted martial law, LaCoste was tried and executed, and any disloyal French inhabitants were expelled from the island. In the aftermath of these plots, French influence was much diminished and the remaining “adopted subjects” presented a petition to Governor Andrew Cochrane Johnstone asserting their loyalty.¹⁰⁵

Still facing incursions, in 1798 Cochrane Johnstone revived the Alien Act of 1793, requiring those who were not natural born or adopted subjects to leave. He issued an “An Act to prevent the Residency of His Majesty’s Enemies in this Island” that allowed unapproved French people in the island to be jailed, required an oath of loyalty of French arrivals, and imposed a fine on ships bringing French people. More traitors were expelled.¹⁰⁶ By this point, it appears that some emigrants had integrated into the colony. An article in the 30 May 1798 issue of *The Dominica Journal Extraordinary* opposed a proclamation by Governor Johnstone that forced those “persons at present residing in this Island not being naturalized or adopted Subjects” and their families to leave. The Assembly argued that the refugees had become valuable members of the Dominican community, working on plantations as overseers and managers because of the lack of British subjects. They strengthened the militia and were described as “subjects of the King,” many of whom by “their own Industry and endeavors...are in a thriving way and are become valuable Members of our Community.”¹⁰⁷ These useful migrants, the newspaper argued, supplied Dominica with residents who could help secure the island rather than undermine it.

Conclusion

Controlling the movement of people, rumors, information, and propaganda was a vexing issue for all the islands of the Caribbean during the French Revolution. As Douglas Hamilton has noted, it was the interconnectivity of the islands that endangered them.

¹⁰¹ TNA: CO 71/27, fol. 18–24, 102, Minutes of the Privy Council, 9 and 17 October, 10 December 1794; TNA: CO 71/27, fol. 102, Hamilton to Portland, 27 March 1795; Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 227.

¹⁰² TNA: 71/27, fol. 209, Minutes of the Privy Council, 23 March 1795.

¹⁰³ TNA: CO 71/27, fols. 187, 233–258. For an overview of the trials, see Browne, *Defense*, 13; Honychurch, *In the Forests of Freedom*, 131–32. TNA: CO 71/27, fols. 187, 233–258.

¹⁰⁴ TNA: CO 71/28, President of the Council Matson to Portland, 11 September 1796; TNA: CO 71/29, Matson to Portland, 22 November 1796.

¹⁰⁵ TNA: CO 71/30, Matson to Portland, 22 June 1797; 20 February 1798.

¹⁰⁶ TNA: CO 71/30, Johnstone to Portland, 7 June 1798. For a discussion of the 1805 invasion, see Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 229–30; Honychurch, *In the Forests of Freedom*, 151–54.

¹⁰⁷ TNA: CO 71/30, *The Dominica Journal Extraordinary*, 30 May 1798.

Governance issues abounded as the “relative freedom of movement left the British Empire trying to govern colonies that could scarcely be called British.”¹⁰⁸ The heterogeneity of identity, status, and race among the population of Dominica made the island practically ungovernable, and created spaces of refuge for marginalized populations, enemies of British rule, and freedom seekers alike. The crisis of colonial authority in the French islands thus also existed in this British island, as governors struggled to control the truculent British and Franco-English population, free people of color, the enslaved, and Maroons. These challenges to authority predated the French Revolution, but the turmoil on neighboring islands and the refugees and revolutionary emissaries from them brought the dangers of these internal fissures into sharper relief. Victor Hugues fueled insurrections throughout the Windward Islands as part of his mission to take advantage of fissures within the British islands and to try to regain them for France. Dominica experienced more constant, smaller scale conflicts than the wars of 1795 that shook Grenada (Fedon’s Rebellion) and St. Vincent (Second Carib War) and nearly toppled British rule. If Pharcelle and the Maroons had allied with Hugues, Dominica may have looked more like Grenada and St. Vincent.

Very few British subjects in Dominica seemed cooperative or particularly loyal. Dominica’s pre-revolutionary connections with the French islands persisted because it remained populated by people with personal and economic links to those islands. Governors showed contradictory attitudes toward refugees, both questioning their trustworthiness and granting sanctuary, even after Britain and France were at war and island security was threatened by slave revolt and attempted invasions. While some migrants proved useful, others sought to stoke the fires of rebellion. Proclamations and laws designed to control migration and the enslaved population were often ineffective. British governors tended to regard royalists as allies and indeed many fought with the British against revolutionary forces for the preservation of monarchy, racial hierarchy, and slavery. Those willing to help defend Dominica aided an unreliable militia and an overstretched British military trying to defeat insurrections across the Caribbean.

Dominica was both representative of the disruptions caused by revolutionary exiles and exceptional for its willingness to harbor them. The outbreak of the French Revolution revealed the political precariousness of the island and threw into sharp relief the fragility of British rule. The rebellions that erupted across the archipelago in this politically fraught period exposed very real threats to British hegemony in the eastern Caribbean. Although a small island on the edge of empire, Dominica was at the very heart of the revolutionary upheavals. Its experiences during the tumultuous 1790s illustrate the difficulties of governing a far-flung colony in a region characterized not only by imperial entanglements but also by the close proximity and mobility of a range of peoples with competing national and political loyalties.

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¹⁰⁸ Douglas Hamilton, “‘Sailing on the Same Uncertain Sea’: The Windward Islands of the Caribbean,” in *Islands and the British Empire in the Age of Sail*, ed. Douglas Hamilton and John McAleer (Oxford, 2021), 93.

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