

Gelien Matthews

Gelien Matthews pursued undergraduate studies at the University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus, Trinidad where she also obtained a Diploma in Education. She read for her PhD at the University of Hull, England. She has recently published her PhD manuscript with Louisiana State University Press under the title *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement*. She is an adjunct lecturer in Caribbean studies at Caribbean Nazarene College and has recently taken up a temporary post as lecturer of American History at the University of the West Indies St Augustine campus.

gelienn@hotmail.com

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Trinidad – A Model Colony for British Slave Trade Abolition**Gelien Matthews**

Abstract

This essay presents a historical survey of the supply of enslaved African labour in colonial Trinidad during the era of Caribbean slavery. The central thesis of the study is that when the British committed itself to the abolition of the slave trade, Trinidad, a relatively new British colony, was singled out for special treatment. The island became Britain's experimental colony; a position that was greatly facilitated by the fact that Trinidad was never tainted by substantial imports of enslaved Africans. The work chronologically examines the attempts made first by the Spanish, followed by French colonists and then by the British to import African slave labour to Trinidad to man the various agrarian enterprises attempted in the colony during slavery times. It is argued that fortuitous for British slave trade abolition under its Spanish colonizers economic activity in Trinidad was so stunted that no foundation was laid to create a sizeable enslaved African population. With the coming of French planters from neighbouring islands and later the British, Trinidad did manage to enter the embryonic stage of a slave plantation economy. Cocoa, cotton, coffee and, most significantly, sugar estates were established rapidly in various parts

of the island. Trinidad's age of sugar and slavery in spite of its negligible beginnings had finally budded in the nineteenth century. However, by that time, an enslaved society had still not been fully and firmly entrenched. Then, just prior to the British capture of the island the British parliament having already committed itself to the gradual abolition of the slave trade approved several pieces of legislation from 1799 to 1806 which effectively curbed the imports of enslaved Africans to Trinidad.

For most of its colonial history, the island of Trinidad remained in the hands of the Spanish becoming a British colony only by 1797, a mere decade before Britain decided to relinquish its involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. Abolitionists brought into central focus the fact that Trinidad never had a large enslaved labour force and thus was an ideal colony to begin its slave trade abolition project. For almost the entire three hundred years of Spanish colonial rule the colony was neglected because it lacked the mineral wealth of some of Spain's other Caribbean possessions. The Spanish did very little to stimulate either industry or the importation of enslaved Africans to the colony. Thus, British slave trade abolition meant that Trinidad planters were neither able to make do with the enslaved labour they had accumulated in previous years nor did they have the time to amass the numbers that could make the colony another viable British Caribbean enslaved plantation society. The British parliament under the influence of abolitionist agitators regarded the dearth of enslaved labourers in the new colony as advantageous to their general plans for slave trade abolition. Trinidad could be used to run dry tests that would indicate the outcome of abolition in other parts of the British West Indies. Thus, the extended and woeful neglect of Trinidad by the Spanish unwittingly served three hundred years later to secure for the colony the unique historical position of a model colony in the grand scheme of British slave trade abolition.

On July 31, 1498 the Italian explorer, Christopher Columbus, had claimed Trinidad in the name of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain. The Spanish monarchs held possession of the territory until February 18, 1797 when it was surrendered to the British. Throughout the centuries of Spanish colonialism, however, Trinidad was nothing but a backwater within the Spanish Caribbean colonial empire. Trinidad's comparative insignificance to the Spaniards arose mainly from the fact that whereas territories like Panama, Mexico and Peru were overflowing the covers of their mother country with precious silver and gold, Trinidad had no such treasures to offer. The historian Eric

Williams has appropriately concluded that ‘A benighted, poverty stricken island like Trinidad could never hope to compete with this’.¹

Apart from a few scattered glimpses of economic activity in Spanish Trinidad, the dominant picture was one of doom and gloom. By the sixteenth century few Spaniards settled on the island. Few ships visited Trinidad and did so only at irregular intervals. Settlers starved for supplies of food, clothing and other basic necessities. The first governor of the island, Antonio Sedeno, did little to make Trinidad an effectively occupied possession of Spain. Sedeno had been appointed to rule Spanish Trinidad on 12 July 1530. He had arrived on the island in 1532 and left by 1534. During Sedeno’s brief governorship and for some sixty years thereafter, the Amerindians had a free hand in the colony.²

By 1595 Antonio de Berrio was appointed governor of Trinidad. Under his rule, however, only two structures gave some indication that a European nation had colonized the island. These were the townships of San Jose de Oruna and the small fort at the mouth of the Caroni River. Antonio de Berrio did not personally set up the township of San Jose de Oruna which was established in 1592. This was done by Domingo de Vera who was acting on behalf of the governor. Historians have commented, nevertheless, that San Jose or San Josef or St Joseph was far from impressive. ‘... for decades it remained little more than a clearing in the bush’.³ Such an uninspiring description of St Joseph strongly suggests that the first set of enslaved Africans, who, coincidentally, were imported into the colony specifically for the purpose of constructing San Jose, could not have been substantial in number.⁴

By 1635 the Cabildo, a Spanish political structure initially intended to represent the democratic views of the townspeople, was complaining bitterly about the poverty of Trinidad. The Cabildo lamented about

... the thatched building which served as a church because there were no funds to erect a proper structure ... the Cabildo’s need to beg for a supply of oil in order to light the building for church services ... there were only twenty-four settlers in the whole island, without arms or ammunition.⁵

Trinidad languished under Spanish colonialism. The wealth of the colony, like most other West Indian territories lay in the cultivation of the soil but ‘Spain had neither the managerial, financial, commercial, military nor population resources necessary to develop

Trinidad'.⁶ The Spaniards did not saddle its English colonial successors with the burden of an operational enslaved plantation economy. This dearth in Trinidad's colonial history almost prevailed right up to the era of the British abolitionist movement.

While metropolitan Spain did little to foster in Trinidad the model of the Caribbean servile regime that had taken firm root in other Spanish possessions as well as in many British and French colonies, Spanish colonists themselves made at least two significant attempts to introduce economic activities in the island. Firstly, at the beginning of the seventeenth century under a new governor, Don Fernando de Berrio, Trinidad used the enslaved labour of native Indians, Caribs and Arawaks also referred to as Kalinagos and Tainos respectively, to grow tobacco. The Indians were accustomed to the plant which they cultivated like a weed. Both groups of Indians had ascribed religious significance to tobacco. They believed that the trance they fell into after inhaling the weed enabled them to communicate with their gods. Spanish cultivation of tobacco using Indian labour brought an interruption to the ennui that had settled on Trinidad right up to the end of the eighteenth century. Tobacco cultivation stimulated a bustling trade between the Spanish and the Dutch, English and French traders. Spanish colonists warmly welcomed this rare development for it provided a period when a fairly regular supply of their basic necessities was met at long last.

A significant dimension of the Spanish tobacco trade in Trinidad in the early seventeenth century was that it threatened to regularize the trade in enslaved Africans to the colony. The fifteen ships of other nations in Port-of-Spain that Sir Thomas Roe wrote to the Earl of Salisbury about in 1611 did not merely exchange tobacco for food, clothing and other essentials.⁷ A small number of enslaved Africans were exchanged as well. In fact the historian Johannes Postna records that the '... first successful Dutch slaving expedition was recorded for the year 1606 when Isaac Duverne delivered 470 slaves to the island of Trinidad ... the one of only two substantial documented landings by the Dutch before the 1630s'.⁸ This landing of enslaved Africans in Trinidad though small was far more substantial than the first landing under Antonio de Berrio in 1594. The historian T.V. Harlow comments

Wee find nothing considerable at Trinidada until ye yeare 1606 at what time ye Spanyard brought of some Dutch merchants a quantity of negro slaves to be delivered at ye Rive

Carone on Trinidad, being resolved to rebuild their citie of St Joseph ... The Dutch merchants sent their negroes by one Isaac Duverne who anno 1606 landed 470 men and women negroes in Trinidad.⁹

The cultivation of tobacco in Trinidad almost spontaneously opened up the colony's infant economy to the inhumane traffic in enslaved Africans. What chances there were, however, that the Spanish tobacco planters would lay a firm foundation for the development of African slavery in Trinidad were nipped in the bud. As Eric Williams has so clearly delineated in his work *A History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago*, Spain was firmly committed to the economic principle of mercantilism. Trinidad and all other Spanish Caribbean territories were to exist solely for the benefit of the mother country regardless of their state of development or underdevelopment. Spain translated the economic laws of mercantilism into what became known as the *exclusive*. Spain would not tolerate its settlers in Trinidad conducting trade with other nations.

As early as 27 February 1610 the Spanish king issued a Royal Cedula to Governor Don Fernando de Berrio forbidding slave trading with foreign nations. As first Fernando and the Spanish tobacco traders, desperate for an increased labour supply, ignored the Royal Cedula. Royal reaction was prompt. The king ordered an attack against the illegal traders. The tobacco ships in Port-of-Spain harbour were destroyed.¹⁰ The initial show of force was followed by a Residencia, an aspect of the Spanish system of government which functioned very much like an investigation of a political administration. Don Fernando de Berrio and the settlers put up no resistance against the Residencia. They threw themselves at the king's mercy claiming that they had traded with the enemy for the sake of their very survival.¹¹ Spanish insistence on exclusive access to trade with its colonies effectively crushed not only the tobacco trade of the early seventeenth century but also postponed Trinidad's participation in the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans. It was the consensus among European colonists to the New World that the Caribbean colonies could only thrive through the importation of enslaved Africans.¹² Spanish colonial economic policy, however, while it crushed the aspirations of its colonists augured well for making Trinidad a West Indian colony devoid almost entirely of the enslaved.

It should be noted that in addition to Spain's effort to end the contraband trade in slaves to Trinidad, the tobacco industry of the island failed because, like other Caribbean producers

of tobacco, Trinidad could not compete with the quantity and superior quality of tobacco produced in Virginia.

Another significant occurrence in Trinidad's economic history that might have gone a long way in establishing a substantial enslaved population long before the passage of the British slave trade abolition act of 1807 was the emergence of the cocoa industry in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. By 1717 Trinidad's Spanish settlers were producing and exporting from the valley of Santa Cruz, from Maraval and the lands surrounding San Jose the rich and highly valued criollo variety of cocoa. By the eighteenth century, Spain was the number one market for cocoa in the world and the Spanish appreciated the superior quality of cocoa produced in Trinidad. They willingly paid high prices for the agricultural product.

The cocoa plantations of the Spanish farmers in Trinidad were initially worked by Amerindians but soon the demand for enslaved African labour grew steadily. Unlike the turn of events that contributed to the crippling of the tobacco trade of the seventeenth century, the French and the Spanish had entered into agreement to ensure that Spain's Caribbean territories including Trinidad would have the enslaved African labour they demanded to run their various economic enterprises. France had taken the initiative in approaching Spain with this proposition. Spain really had no qualms against using enslaved labour from Africa to develop its Caribbean empire although throughout the era of Caribbean slavery Spain desisted from direct involvement in the African slave trade. Political rather than humanitarian concerns were the underlying considerations of this policy. Spain exercised considerable regard for the Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494 which had solely authorized Portugal to access Africa. Spain, consequently, depended on the *asiento*, a special license, to permit foreign nations to supply her New World colonies with enslaved Africans. Interestingly, Spain thought little of the contradictory impact that the *asiento* would have on her commitment to the economic principle that her colonial empire existed only for her benefit. Thus,

... by a treaty that was entered into on the 27th August 1707 at Madrid between his most Catholic Majesty, by which it was allowed the Royal Company of Guinea, established in France, to supply the Spanish colonists with 48,000 Negroes, of both sexes and all ages, during ten years commencing 1st May 1708 at the rate of 4, 800 Negroes per year.¹³

It was an ambitious project and had it been implemented a sizeable enslaved population would inevitably have been settled in Trinidad during the Spanish era. The French/ Spanish slave trade treaty, however, barely materialised. No enslaved Africans arrived in Trinidad under this contract. Wars between European nations were largely responsible for obstructing the fulfilment of the contract.¹⁴ Instead between 1716 and 1718 a trickling of 40 enslaved Africans were introduced into Trinidad from Barbados and were exchanged for cocoa since colonists did not have the money to pay for them.¹⁵ Furthermore, disaster struck. The Trinidad cocoa industry of the eighteenth century shrivelled up and died without reaching its fullest potential. In 1725, a mere eighteen years after Trinidad's colonists had begun to export the crop, a fungus disease attacked the plant. The cocoa dried up and blackened on the tree. No remedy for the disease was presented. A hardier variety of cocoa was introduced in Trinidad by 1756, forastero, but its quality was inferior to criollo and the revived industry never approached the promise that was evident in the first quarter of the century. After the fungus epidemic gobbled up Trinidad's cocoa by 1725, the island's economy returned to shambles. 'All forms of revenue disappeared and commerce came to a sudden halt. The island was suddenly cut off from contact with the outside world, and was to languish in that state for fifty years'.¹⁶

The folding of the cocoa industry meant that the pattern of importations of enslaved African labour to Trinidad would not be altered. The demise of cocoa made enslaved labour redundant. Planters abandoned their enslaved workers. The historian E.L. Joseph observes that 'In spite of the importation of slaves from the beginning of 1701 ... by 1733 no account is taken of the slaves ... there were so few of them on the island'.¹⁷ Many settlers abandoned Trinidad for the Spanish mainland, taking with them their enslaved labourers and other valuables. Things were so badly off economically that others sold their enslaved Africans to outsiders to get money to buy necessities.¹⁸ Joseph goes on to comment that by 1750 'The prosperity of the colony had by this time sunk to its lowest ebb, and indolence and apathy had seized the inhabitants to a degree that is most incredible'.¹⁹

Under Spanish rule Trinidad experienced at least two major sparks in its economy via tobacco and then cocoa. Had these industries blossomed to their fullest potential, there is little doubt that the colony would have been converted into a regular enslaved plantation entity. Spanish rulers and their policies as well as war and nature, however, all conspired to keep Trinidad at the periphery of the inhumane traffic of enslaved Africans. Consequently,

when Britain gained possession of the territory, just a decade prior to slave trade abolition, abolitionists had no great difficulty of persuading parliament that Trinidad was the ideal place to begin the process of limiting the imports of the enslaved to the island.

The greatest likelihood of Trinidad becoming a fully enslaved plantation economy prior to the British 1807 act began to take shape by 1776 when Spain was persuaded of the dire need to increase Trinidad's scanty population. A Royal Decree was signed by King Charles III on 3 September 1776 permitting under certain restrictions the importation of foreigners from neighbouring islands to Trinidad.²⁰ It was a French planter from Grenada, Phillip Roume de St Laurent, who took full advantage of the Royal Decree. He travelled back and forth between Grenada and Trinidad as well as to French Caribbean islands and Spain from 1779 to 1783. Roume de St Laurent made it his goal to seek to enhance the benefits migrants would enjoy under the 1776 Royal Decree. His explorations of Trinidad's landscape left him fully impressed with the rich possibilities for agricultural development in the island. In comparison to the exhausted soil of Grenada, St Lucia, Guadeloupe and Cayenne, Trinidad was a paradise for French West Indian planters who wanted a fresh start in the production of tropical cash crops. One historian comments that St Laurent was '... struck with the beautiful appearance and fertile soil of the island and was astonished at it being unaccountably neglected, considering the comparatively sterile and exhausted soils of neighbouring islands'.²¹ Eric Williams has also pointed out that Trinidad's value as prime agricultural land extended to include the fact that even other British West Indian possessions such as Barbados, Jamaica, Antigua and St Kitts, could not possibly compete against the virgin soils of Trinidad.²² Furthermore, while the soil in Trinidad was tempting and fertile, many estates in Grenada were afflicted with ant infestations.

Another push factor for St Laurent and other French planters was the political, religious and social discrimination they experienced at the hands of the newly arrived British settlers after Grenada passed from French to British hands at the end of the Seven Years War in 1763. These unbearable conditions in Grenada prompted the first substantial demographic and economic changes in Trinidad since the initial Spanish settlement.²³ St Laurent had also engaged in wild speculations about how the Cedula would stimulate the growth of the enslaved African population of Trinidad. He advocated that '... slaves and skills were exactly what Trinidad badly needed, and that 383 families with 33,000 slaves were on the verge of leaving for Trinidad'.²⁴

Roume de St Laurent's efforts resulted in the Cedula of Population of 1783 which offered bountiful benefits to migrants to Trinidad. The Cedula guaranteed that the new settlers would be exempted from taxation for ten years, unencumbered by the requirement to pay tithes for ten years, entitled to bequeath property, permitted to claim naturalization status after five years of residence and exempted from militia duty and public office. The most irresistible attraction of the 1783 Cedula to French Caribbean planters was the provision that rewarded the importation of African slave labour with the acquisition of land. The greater the quantity of enslaved labourers the migrant transported to Trinidad, the greater the acreage of land that was allotted. Clearly the major objective of the Cedula was not merely to increase Trinidad's population on the whole but to increase the size of the enslaved labour force. Three and one half acres of land was given to every white settler who took up the offer of the Cedula and an additional half acre was granted for every enslaved who accompanied his or her master or mistress. Free coloured migrants were allotted half the quantity of land that was safeguarded for the new white settlers.²⁵

The Spanish's decision to open up Trinidad to foreigners brought the first wave of migrants as early as 1777. They came from St Lucia and the migrants brought with them their enslaved. By 1777 the population of Trinidad was approximately 1410 including about 200 enslaved.²⁶ Regular trickles of enslaved labour began arriving in the island in the 1780s and 1790s. For the first time in its historical experience under the Spanish, enslaved Africans were slowly beginning to become the only significant source of labour in Trinidad.

Apart from the enslaved brought to Trinidad from the French islands, the Spanish crown took decisive measures in this period to augment the enslaved population. In 1784 a contract was awarded to an Irish man, Edward Barry, to bring enslaved Africans to Trinidad. The result of Barry's contract, however, was negligible. By 1785 Barry had brought 40 enslaved African labourers but only 5 or 6 were alive three days later. Around this time also, the Liverpool firm of Baker and Dawson received a Spanish contract to supply 4,000 enslaved Africans per year to Trinidad as well as to other Spanish Caribbean colonies. Trinidad did not become the recipient, however, of the bulk of the Baker and Dawson consignment. In October 1784 Dawson and Baker did ship 640 enslaved Africans to the Spanish Caribbean but only 51 were landed in Trinidad. The rest went to La Guaira.

Lack of port facilities and food succeeded in keeping down the enslaved African population of the island on this occasion.²⁷

The year 1784 saw another mad scramble for African enslaved labour for the colony of Trinidad. This time the source was within the Caribbean region. A minor but significant traffic in stolen enslaved Africans had developed between Trinidad and Grenada. The trade, however, was not permitted to grow out of control. The Grenada legislature passed stringent legislation to stop this illegal traffic and was particularly vigilant and suspicious of all persons arriving from Trinidad. Under the 1784 legislation visitors from Trinidad were generally regarded as vagabonds who were liable to be thrown in jail if they could not secure a bond and securities from some respectable person in Grenada.²⁸

Fighting against the odds to secure a sizeable enslaved population, in 1789 the Spanish government declared that the trade in enslaved Africans to its colonies was open and that for 10 years importation of enslaved labourers was free of import duties. This was an extremely generous concession at the time considering the stringent taxation system that was in force in colonial Spanish America. The concession was a reflection of the extent to which the Spaniards were now intent on boosting its African servile labour. These combined efforts produced a limited increase in the enslaved population of Trinidad in the years from 1789 to 1791 when about 3,307 enslaved Africans were transported to the colony.²⁹

While imports of enslaved labour to Trinidad were slowly and steadily increasing following French immigration to the island, however, mortality rates among the labourers in this period were extremely high. It seemed as if it was Trinidad's destiny to be devoid of servile labour. The labourers were worked to death during the genesis of the slave plantation economy of the island. The demands of clearing virgin forest for the cultivation of tropical produce through non-technological methods, with limited draft animals and exposure to harsh tropical conditions ravished the lives of the newly growing enslaved African labour force. One estimate claims that from 1789 to 1791 the total enslaved population declined from 6,451 to 5,916.³⁰ Overwork was not the only factor responsible for the mortality rate among the enslaved. Many died from unfamiliar diseases, poor food, unsanitary housing and improper medical care.³¹ The 1783 Cedula of Population provided a powerful stimulus for imports of enslaved persons but it also facilitated the wasteful and destructive abuse of human lives involved in the establishment of European type plantation economies in the

Caribbean. Despite the generous provisions the Cedula made to encourage the importation of enslaved Africans, in the long run it did not prove to be a great obstacle in the attempts of British abolitionists to limit imports of the enslaved to Trinidad.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Trinidad had been captured by the British. The capture was part of the outcome of Britain's involvement in the first revolutionary war against France. When Spain entered the war on the side of France, military operations spilled over to the Caribbean. Leading the British expedition to seize Trinidad from the Spanish was Sir Ralph Abercromby. He came up against Don Jose Maria Chacon, the last Spanish governor of Trinidad. Chacon and his forces put up no resistance to Sir Ralph Abercromby and the Spanish capitulated in 1797.

British acquisition of Trinidad almost coincided with the era of the British abolitionist era formally launched with the formation of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787. The main advocate of slave trade abolition operating within the British parliament was the humanitarian William Wilberforce. By 1792 Wilberforce and his few parliamentary colleagues, with the assistance of anti-slave trade agitators outside of the House of Commons, succeeded in committing the British Parliament to the gradual abolition of the slave trade.

Abolitionist activity in Britain was the final but most significant dimension of the continuum of Trinidad's demographic pattern of scarcity in African servile labour. While under the Spanish limited importation of enslaved Africans was the consequence of aborted and failed endeavours, it was the expressed and deliberate objective of British abolitionists to barricade Trinidad against imports of the enslaved. The British anti-slave trade campaign was bad news for Trinidad planters especially those of British origin for they had recently invested great sums of money in opening new lands in the colony that had previously lay uncultivated. Spanish, French and British planters in Trinidad were beginning to show interest in the cultivation of sugar cane for sugar prices on the European market at that time was artificially high. Between 1797 and 1801, the embryonic sugar industry in Trinidad grew from 159 sugar estates to 193. Sugar exports nearly doubled in quantity from 8.4 million lbs in 1799 to 14.2 million lbs in 1802.³² The new pulse in Trinidad's economy was not only manifested in the strides that were achieved in the manufacture and export of sugar. By 1797 altogether there were approximately 452 plantation concerns on the island.

These comprised 59 sugar estates, 130 coffee plantations, 103 cotton plantations and 60 cocoa plantations.³³

British, French and Spanish planters alike naturally relied on and expected more and more enslaved Africans to supply the labour for their agricultural estates. By 1797 with the arrival of the British, the enslaved population of Trinidad had stood at just about 10,000. Vigorous efforts on the part of the colonists almost doubled this figure by 1802 to 19,709.³⁴ Impressive as the increase may seem it was hardly adequate to meet the demand that was necessary if Trinidad was to be cultivated to the fullest level of its agricultural capabilities. Historian Bridget Brereton appropriately points out that 'In 1797 Trinidad was far from being a mature slave colony. It had then less than 1/6 of the slave population of Barbados. Only the western lowlands and scattered peripheral areas were settled'.³⁵ A more detailed depiction of the labour supply and of the limited economic development of the island have been provided by Carlton Otley. Otley mentions that sugar estates on the colony usually had fewer than 100 enslaved Africans. The sugar plantation in Marbella had 100, Union had 85, Harmony Hall had 66 and Les Champs Elysees Maraval had 60 by the beginning of the nineteenth century.³⁶ Trinidad's estate proprietors had only begun to scratch the surface of the archetypal plantation economy but they had anticipated that enslaved African labour would have converted their investments into great fortunes. Anti-slave trade legislation passed by the British Parliament under the influence of the abolitionists frustrated the planters' expectations.

As a prelude to the slave trade abolition act of 1807, Britain passed the Slave Trade Consolidation Act of 1799. The 1799 act outlawed the practice in the colonies of transferring enslaved labourers from one island to another; a great blow to Trinidad's colonists for a high percentage of their enslaved labour force consisted of enslaved Africans brought from the French colonies and British islands as well. The 1799 act was the outcome of feverish abolitionist agitation. Wilberforce, under the urging of fellow abolitionists Stephen, approached Prime Minister Pitt in 1798 to thwart an order-in-council permitting the supply of slaves from the older British islands to Trinidad and other newly conquered British colonies.³⁷ The abolitionist rationale behind this project of limiting slave imports to Trinidad appealed to a wide cross section of interests groups in parliament. It went beyond the old humanitarian argument of the evils of the human traffic. The abolitionists proved that national interests necessitated the repeal of the 1798 order-in-council permitting the supply of slaves to the conquered islands from the older islands. Wilberforce explained that

“... the British ought not to invest much capital in colonies which may probably have to be surrendered on the return of peace”.³⁸

Nevertheless, despite the abolitionists' success in securing the 1799 act, because it made allowance for the transfer of enslaved domestics on attendance of their masters and mistresses, inter-colonial trade in enslaved labourers did occur in Trinidad.³⁹ The law stipulated that enslaved domestics who were migrating with their owners were not to be sold and their domestic status was not to be changed. In contravention of the law, however, enslaved house, field, factory and artisan alike were brought and sold to planters in Trinidad. All the newly arrived enslaved were registered as domestics but some were later alienated from their former owners and sold to plantations where they performed non domestic tasks. Well after general abolition was established, between 1813 and 1821 Trinidad received 3,800 such enslaved of whom nearly 1,000 came from Dominica and nearly 1,200 from Grenada. In 1827, 266 'domestics' were imported into Trinidad from Barbados. Of this number 204 had changed hands and 81 had ceased to be domestics.⁴⁰

Apart from the passage of British abolition, another factor that impacted upon the contraband trade among the islands was the fact that the enslaved in Trinidad fetched very attractive prices. In Grenada, St Vincent and St Lucia enslaved Africans were sold at approximately 30 pounds, 25 pounds in Barbados, 23 pounds in Jamaica, 20 pounds in St Kitts, Nevis and Montserrat and as low as 17 pounds in Antigua. On the other hand, traders reaching Trinidad enjoyed a distinct advantage for as much as 56 pounds could be obtained from the sale of one enslaved African. The shortage of enslaved labour in the colony in relation to the availability of land made the enslaved a more valuable piece of property than in the other islands. The only exception to this general pattern was British Guiana which was in a similar predicament to Trinidad in terms of the ratio of enslaved labour to land availability. The average price obtained for enslaved Africans in British Guiana was 58 pounds.⁴¹

Following the revolutionary war involving Britain and France and Spain in the Peace Treaty of Amiens of 27 March 1802, Britain agreed to retain Trinidad. The abolitionists were greatly alarmed. William Wilberforce anticipated that the acquisition of Trinidad with its abundant availability of virgin soil would inevitably lead to the increased demand for labour and an indefinite delay in the abolition of the slave trade. Consequently, he and his

abolitionist supporters in the British Parliament were resolved that crown lands in Trinidad should not be sold unless proper safeguards to prevent an increase in the African traffic in humans were put in place. The abolitionists questioned whether the new lands in Trinidad should be cleared and cultivated by the enslaved following the pattern in place in other West Indian territories.⁴² Wilberforce had given such priority to the Trinidad question that he deliberately held back on his motion for general abolition in the House of Commons session in 1802 to allow Canning to press the crown land issue in Trinidad.

Canning's deliberations on the Trinidad question were lengthy. He advocated that the nation should gain maximum advantage from its acquisition of Trinidad. The slave based pattern of British West Indian economic development should be eschewed in the colony to avoid the shame and danger inherent in the system. Furthermore, Canning reasoned, to adopt the old system in the virgin territory of Trinidad would require a new trade in the enslaved. Canning remonstrated against taking this course for it would renege on the promise given in the Commons resolutions of 1792 not to create a new slave trade. He reminded West Indian representatives in parliament that their spokesman Ellis in 1797 had committed them to a pledge for gradual abolition till such time that their present labour force would be adequate. Canning insisted that Trinidad's economy could be stimulated by alternative measures such as a vigorous local peasantry and free immigrant labour. To safeguard his motion that Trinidad should not be cultivated by enslaved Africans, Canning requested a delay in selling the colony's crown lands which if executed without proper legislations would unleash aggressive imports of enslaved Africans to Trinidad.⁴³

The abolitionists won the day. Prime Minister Addington assured Canning that no decision had been taken to open Trinidad in the manner that he feared. Commissioners had been appointed to Trinidad to survey crown lands but no directive had been given to sell or allocate grants of land until thorough discussion on the subject had taken place in the House. Canning's misgivings had been assuaged and he felt safe to withdraw his motion. It should be noted that Canning's role on this occasion in protecting Trinidad from large imports of slave labour was not purely motivated by altruistic concerns for the enslaved. One of his uppermost objectives was to undermine the ministry of Addington.⁴⁴

By the beginning of the nineteenth century on the eve of British slave trade abolition, Trinidad colonists were informed that they were not to expect the mother country to fill

their sugar and other agricultural estates with enslaved African labour. The colonists felt sacrificed and neglected by the new British policy just as the earlier colonists under the Spanish had felt. The circumstances, however, were considerably different. Spain had ignored the colonists' demand for enslaved labour primarily because the island lacked the kind of wealth that attracted Spanish colonizers. Britain, on the other hand, denied Trinidad enslaved African labourers that were in great demand at a time when the prospect for economic growth appeared most promising because abolitionist pressure prevailed in dismantling the human traffic. British politician George Canning and abolitionists held the opinion that Trinidad's population was not to be supplemented by slave labour. The laws that were passed giving effect to their laboured speeches perpetuated Trinidad's long historical experience with a low population of enslaved Africans.

The British abolition of the slave trade came into effect in the crown colonies which included Trinidad in 1806. Thus, Trinidad's planters had less time to top up their supply of enslaved Africans than their colleagues, who enjoyed the comparatively greater political freedom provided by legislative assemblies. The planters, nevertheless as mentioned earlier, had found a useful loophole in the 1799 Slave Trade Consolidation Act that allowed migrating masters and mistresses to travel with their enslaved domestics. To curtail this fraudulent inter-island traffic of enslaved 'domestics', soon after the abolition of the slave trade to Trinidad in 1806, the British Parliament, under abolitionist pressure, introduced The Registration Order of 1812. The order was issued to keep track of the census of the enslaved. Planters had vehemently denied abolitionist charges that servile labourers were being smuggled into the island. Yet statistics had proven that although the birth rate among the enslaved had not increased significantly, there was significant increase in the enslaved population. The 1813 Registrar of Slaves in Trinidad listed 25,717, an increase of 4,429 since 1811. The controversy over the registry as well as the evidence that substantiated the abolitionists' charges reflected the desperate situation of labour in Trinidad. Despite the smuggling, nevertheless, there is no doubt that this piece of legislation continued to contain the numbers of the enslaved in Trinidad.

The colony of Trinidad experienced a truly interesting and unique demographic history as far as its enslaved African population was concerned. Three hundred years of Spanish colonization established a continuum in which an island full of potential for exploitation via the importation of enslaved Africans never attained a settled economy based on the

enslaved. The British, who took late possession of Trinidad, turned the scarcity of enslaved Africans to their advantage and made the colony a model for imposing pre 1807 slave trade limitation measures.

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