

Scandal of Colonial Rule

In 1806 General Thomas Picton, Britain's first governor of Trinidad, was brought to trial for the torture of a free mulatto named Louisa Calderon and for overseeing a regime of terror over the island's slave population. James Epstein offers a fascinating account of the unfolding of this colonial drama. He shows the ways in which the trial and its investigation brought empire "home" and exposed the disjuncture between a national self-image of humane governance and the brutal realities of colonial rule. He uses the trial to open up a range of issues, including colonial violence and norms of justice, the status of the British subject, imperial careering, visions of development after slavery, slave conspiracy, and the colonial archive. He reveals how Britain's imperial regime became more authoritarian, hierarchical and militarized but also how unease about abuses of power and of the rights of colonial subjects began to grow.

JAMES EPSTEIN is Distinguished Professor of History, Department of History, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee. His previous publications include *In Practice: Studies in the Language and Culture of Popular Politics in Modern Britain* (2003) and *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790–1850* (1994).

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Scandal of Colonial Rule

*Power and Subversion in the British Atlantic
during the Age of Revolution*

James Epstein



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For Sherry

“... for man always seeks a happiness far beyond that
which is meted out to him. But man’s greatness consists in
the very fact of wanting to be better than he is. In laying
duties upon himself.”

ALEJO CARPENTIER *The Kingdom of this World*

“But chief, ambiguous man, he that can know
More misery, and dream more joy than all ...
Who stands amid the ever varying world,
The burden or the glory of the earth.”

P. B. SHELLEY *Queen Mab*

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Cast of characters

ADDINGTON, HENRY, first Viscount Sidmouth (1757–1844), prime minister. Addington was speaker of the House of Commons from 1789 to 1801. He took over as prime minister from William Pitt in 1801; his ministry fell from power in 1804, and Pitt again formed a ministry. Addington oversaw the peace negotiations with France in 1801, and took an active role in plans for Trinidad. In 1805 he was elevated to the peerage as Viscount Sidmouth. As home secretary under Lord Liverpool, from 1812 to 1822, he won popular radicals' hatred for the state repression of the post-war years.

BARHAM, JOSEPH FOSTER, II (1750–1832), planter and politician. Barham was an absentee owner who inherited Jamaican plantations from his father. He entered Parliament in 1793, and over his thirty-year parliamentary career supported slave abolition. He proposed importing Chinese or Indian free labor to the West Indies, and offered to use one of his own Jamaican plantations for a free-labor experiment. Barham was later to grow disillusioned with the prospects for moral improvement of blacks, maintaining that they would work only under coercion.

BEGORRAT, SAINT HILAIRE (1759–1851), planter. Born in Martinique of a merchant family and educated in Paris, Begorrat moved to Trinidad in 1784, settling in the valley of Diego Martin, where he established a coffee plantation. He later began cultivating sugar at his Reunion plantation, becoming one of the island's largest and most prominent planters. Following the British capture of the island, Governor Picton relied heavily on Begorrat's advice. As well as being a member of the *cabildo* and governor's appointed council, Begorrat drew up Trinidad's new slave code in 1801 and presided over the poisoning commissions that sentenced slaves to death. As *alcalde*, he instigated Louisa Calderon's torture.

CALDERON, LOUISA [LUISA] (1786/88–1825), free woman of color. Calderon was baptized at Port of Spain, the daughter of Maria

del Rosario Calderon, a free woman of color who had migrated from the eastern coast of Venezuela to Trinidad. Tortured in 1801, on Governor Picton's order, accused of being an accomplice to a burglary, she had her case against Picton first tried at King's Bench in 1806 and then retried in 1808; she gave testimony at both trials. Her case became a *cause célèbre*. She returned in 1808 to Port of Spain, where she died in poverty.

DOWDING, WILLIAM, trader and advocate of the rights of free coloreds. Born into a prosperous free-colored family in Barbados, he went to England for education and served in the British Royal Navy. During the 1790s, he was in touch with free persons of color throughout parts of the British West Indies. Before arriving in Trinidad in 1800, he had been banished from Grenada, St. Vincent, and Martinique. He sued Picton in King's Bench for financial losses arising from his banishment from Trinidad, and his subsequent imprisonment. After he was freed by Fullarton, Hislop again banished him from the island in 1803.

DRAPER, EDWARD ALURED (1776–1841), military officer. Draper entered military service in the 1790s, rising to the rank of colonel; he acted as military secretary to Lieutenant-General William Grinfield, commander of the armed forces in the West Indies in 1803. A staunch defender of Picton, in 1806 he published *An Address to the British Public, on the Case of Brigadier-General Picton*. In 1810 he was sued in King's Bench and found guilty of having libeled Fullarton. In 1812 Draper moved to Mauritius, where he held various civil posts, married a Mauritian woman, and founded the Mauritius Turf Club.

DUNDAS, HENRY, first Viscount Melville (1742–1811), politician. Dundas entered Parliament in 1774; he established control over Scotland's electoral system, and eventually formed a partnership with William Pitt. He had a strong interest in empire, and played an important role in shaping policy in India. He held key posts in Pitt's first ministry (1783–1801), including that of secretary of war with responsibility for the colonies, in which capacity he commended Picton for bringing order to Trinidad. He viewed war with France as largely economic, strongly supported war in the West Indies, and opposed slave abolition. In 1802 he was elevated to the peerage, and in 1805, as Viscount Melville, became the last British minister to be impeached by the Commons.

FULLARTON, MARIANNE HAMILTON (1764–1838). The eldest daughter of George, fifth Lord Reay, chief of the McKay clan, and Elizabeth Fairlie, she married William Fullarton in 1792, and accompanied her husband, together with her unmarried sister, Georgina, to Trinidad. She played an active role in Fullarton's political life, and in public correspondence defended her husband's reputation following his death, as well as her own personal reputation.

FULLARTON, WILLIAM (1754–1808), politician, military officer, writer, colonial official. As the only son of William Fullarton, in 1758 he inherited a large estate in Ayrshire at his father's death. He attended Edinburgh University, after which he went on the grand tour, entered the Inns of Court, and then joined the diplomatic service. He was elected to Parliament in 1779; he was named to occasional rank as lieutenant-colonel in 1780, and fought from 1781 to 1784 in the second Mysore war, where he commanded the southern army. In 1787 he returned to Parliament. He and his wife, Marianne, resided at Fullarton House near Troon. Fullarton wrote extensively on government and military reform in India; he also gained a reputation for his writings and experiments on agricultural improvement. In 1802 he was appointed first commissioner of the government of Trinidad, where he clashed with the former governor, Thomas Picton, against whom he brought criminal charges. His determined pursuit of Picton dominated his final years.

GLOSTER, ARCHIBALD (b. 1762), lawyer and planter. Gloster was born in Antigua. He later moved to St. Vincent, where he was attorney general, a position that he subsequently held at Trinidad. As Trinidad's attorney general, he advised the British government on legal and constitutional issues. He supported Picton, gave testimony in 1806 at his trial, and wrote pseudonymously for the *Anti-Jacobin Review*. In 1810 he was appointed chief justice in Grenada. His brother, John Gloster, was among the planters most active in detecting the slave conspiracy of Christmas 1805.

HISLOP, SIR THOMAS (1764–1843), military officer and colonial governor. Born into a military family, Hislop served widely. He was the military commander of Demerara, Berbice, and Essequibo from their capture in 1796 until their restoration to the Dutch in 1802. He was appointed lieutenant-governor (subsequently governor) of Trinidad in 1803, a post he left in 1811. He presided over the investigation of Trinidad's 1805 Christmas conspiracy, and the trial of those thought to have been involved. As commander-in-chief of the army of the Deccan during the third Anglo-Maratha war, Lieutenant-General Sir Thomas Hislop slaughtered a garrison of 300 Marathas in 1818 for their commander's refusal to surrender the fort of Talnar.

HOBART, ROBERT, fourth Earl of Buckinghamshire (1760–1816), politician. Hobart served as a military officer in North America (1778–83) and in Ireland, after which he held various government positions in Ireland. As a member of the Irish Parliament and the Privy Council, he defended the protestant ascendancy. From 1794 to 1798, he served as governor of Madras. On his return to Britain, he sat in the

Lords, and in 1801 Addington named him to his cabinet as secretary for war and the colonies. He promptly appointed his brother-in-law, John Sullivan, as chief secretary; he secured Fullarton's appointment as first commissioner of Trinidad's government, also naming his stepson, George Adderley, provost-marshal. As an abolitionist, he took particular interest in schemes to bring free labor to Trinidad. In 1804 the new town of Hobart in Van Diemen's Island was named for him.

HOOD, SIR SAMUEL (1762–1814), naval officer. Hood entered the Royal Navy in 1776; he fought in the West Indies and North America, being given promotions from his cousin, Lord Samuel Hood; he later served under Admiral Lord Nelson. In March 1803, Commodore Hood arrived at Trinidad to assume his appointment as third commissioner, in charge of naval affairs; he sided with Picton against Fullarton. After his short stay at Trinidad, he assumed command of the Leeward Islands station. In 1805 his right elbow was shattered by a musket ball and his arm was amputated. He stood as the Tory candidate and a naval hero at the Westminster election of 1806; denounced by Fullarton at the hustings for his complicity in Picton's crimes, Hood topped the poll. In 1809 he was created a baronet in recognition of his naval service.

LAYMAN, WILLIAM (1768–1828), naval officer. In 1802 Captain Layman outlined the most ambitious plan for bringing Chinese workers to Trinidad in order to substitute free labor for that of slaves. In 1807 he published his plan under the title *Outline of a Plan for Better Cultivation, Security, & Defence of the British West Indies Being the Original Suggestion for Providing an Effective Substitute for the African Slave Trade*. By that time, however, he had fallen out of favor. A protégé of Admiral Lord Nelson, he was held responsible for losing a ship with secret dispatches for the admiral off the Spanish coast in 1805; although he remained in the navy, he lost his seniority and was never given command of another ship. In 1813 he published a pamphlet dealing with the supply of timber for the navy.

MACARTNEY, GEORGE, EARL MACARTNEY (1737–1806), diplomat and colonial governor. Born in Ireland of Scottish descent, he was first appointed British envoy to Russia and in 1767 ambassador. Having married the daughter of the former prime minister, Lord Bute, he became chief secretary in Ireland; in 1775 he was appointed governor of Grenada, Tobago, and the Grenadines. As governor of Madras (a post worth £15,000 p.a.), he fell out with Governor-General Warren Hastings. During the second Mysore war (1780–84), he became Fullarton's friend and patron, a role he continued to play. In 1792 Macartney headed Britain's unsuccessful

embassy to Peking, with the goal of opening trade with China. In 1796 he accepted the governorship of the Cape.

McCALLUM, PIERRE FRANC (d. 1810), journalist and traveler. Born probably in Glenorchy in Scotland, McCallum went abroad at an early age (perhaps as a sailor), and subsequently worked as a Grub Street journalist in London before heading for North America. In 1802 he sailed to Saint-Domingue as a supercargo on a merchant vessel, and claimed to have made cause with Toussaint Louverture, leader of the Haitian revolution. He arrived at Trinidad early in 1803, allying himself closely with Fullarton and British inhabitants who demanded constitutional reform. His book *Travels in Trinidad* (1805) records the history of British rule on the island; he also published a version of Picton's trial at King's Bench. Back in London, he acted as ghostwriter for Mary Anne Clarke, the Duke of York's former mistress, and before his death he published *Le livre rouge, or, a New and Extraordinary Red Book*, cataloguing Old Corruption's burden on British taxpayers.

PICTON, SIR THOMAS (1758–1815), army officer and colonial governor. Picton was born into a large family from Pembrokeshire's minor gentry. He entered the military at a young age, joining the regiment of his uncle, Colonel William Picton, in 1773 at Gibraltar; in 1783 he was placed on half pay, and he retired to Wales for the next eleven years. In 1794 he sailed to the West Indies, and found a position under Lieutenant-General Sir John Vaughan as his aide-de-camp, a position he then held under General Sir Ralph Abercromby, who placed him in command of Trinidad following the island's capture. He was named civil governor in 1801 and promoted to brigadier-general, but was replaced the following year by a three-man commission in which he was retained as second commissioner. News of his brutal methods had reached London; moreover, as a strong advocate of slavery, he was out of step with government plans. He departed from Trinidad in June 1803, leaving his mistress, Rosette Smith, and four children. As first commissioner of Trinidad, Fullarton brought capital charges against Picton before the Privy Council; after more than three years, he was released from all charges and respited his £40,000 bail. Although he was found guilty at King's Bench in 1806 of having illegally tortured Calderon, after a second trial and a special verdict, the case was allowed to drop. Restored to favor and recruited by Wellington for the Peninsular campaign, he distinguished himself as a stern disciplinarian and military commander. He was knighted and in 1813 returned to Parliament as a military hero. Picton died leading a charge at the battle of Waterloo. His military achievements were commemorated by monuments erected at St. Paul's and later Carmarthen.

SANDERSON, JOHN, lawyer, sometimes referred to as “doctor.” Sanderson was the principal leader, together with the merchants Thomas Higham and John Shaw, of the British opposition to Picton, demanding the introduction of British law and constitutional rights to Trinidad. Said to have been a member of the London Corresponding Society, in 1807 he authored the anonymously published book *A Political Account of the Island of Trinidad*, and in the same year authored the tract *Emancipation in Disguise* (a work usually ascribed to James Stephen). He continued the constitutional campaign, and in 1812 published *An Appeal to the Imperial Parliament upon the Claims of the Ceded Colony of Trinidad*.

SMITH, ROSETTE, proprietor. A French-creole-speaking free woman of color, Smith became the mistress of Governor Picton, enjoying lucrative perks due to their relationship. She and Picton had four children together. Widely disliked, particularly by Trinidad’s British inhabitants who resented her influence, she continued to prosper after Picton’s departure, as a moderate-size slave owner in her own right.

STEPHEN, JAMES (1758–1832), lawyer and abolitionist. Stephen’s conversion to the anti-slavery cause occurred at Barbados in late 1783, when he was attending a trial of four slaves for murder who were sentenced to be burnt alive. He and his family settled in St. Kitts, returning permanently to London in 1794; from 1789 he worked closely with William Wilberforce and emerged as a key abolitionist leader. He helped orchestrate the legislation for the 1807 abolition of the slave trade. In *Crisis of the Sugar Colonies* (1803), he argued against developing Trinidad as a slave colony. He urged the government to maintain Trinidad’s status as a crown colony, in order to keep power out of the hands of planters; in 1811 he spoke in Parliament against introducing British law and constitutional guarantees to Trinidad. In 1812 he drafted the slave registration order for Trinidad, a measure designed to check the illegal traffic in slaves. In 1810 he represented Picton at King’s Bench in argument on the special guilty verdict against the former governor.

SULLIVAN, JOHN (1749–1839), East India Company servant and politician. Born in Ireland, he took advantage of family connections to join the East India Company as a writer at age sixteen. He advanced rapidly, and served as resident at the court of Tanjore during the second Mysore war (1780–84), in which position he worked closely with Fullarton. In 1789 Sullivan married Lord Hobart’s sister, Henrietta Anne Barbara. From 1790 to 1797, he sat in the Commons for the “rotten” borough of Old Sarum. Although Sullivan and Fullarton fell on opposite sides in the Hastings controversy, they maintained a friendship which connected Fullarton to Hobart. From 1801 to 1804, Sullivan served under his brother-in-law as under-secretary for war and the colonies and again cooperated with Fullarton on setting colonial policy for Trinidad.

Abbreviations

Since I have provided full references to the sources used in this study, I have dispensed with a bibliography or list of further reading. The place of publication is London unless otherwise indicated.

Manuscript collections

Add. Ms(s).	British Library, London, Additional Manuscript(s)
Bucks. CRO	County Record Office, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury
NAM	National Army Museum, London (microfilm)
NAS	National Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh
NLS	National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh
NLW	National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth

Public Record Office, National Archives, London

Adm	Admiralty papers
BT	Board of Trade papers
CO	Colonial Office papers
KB	King’s Bench papers
PC	Privy Council papers
PRO	Public Record Office
WO	War Office papers

Contemporary newspapers and journals

<i>AJR</i>	<i>Anti-Jacobin Review</i>
<i>AR</i>	<i>Annual Register</i>
<i>MC</i>	<i>Morning Chronicle</i>

xx List of abbreviations

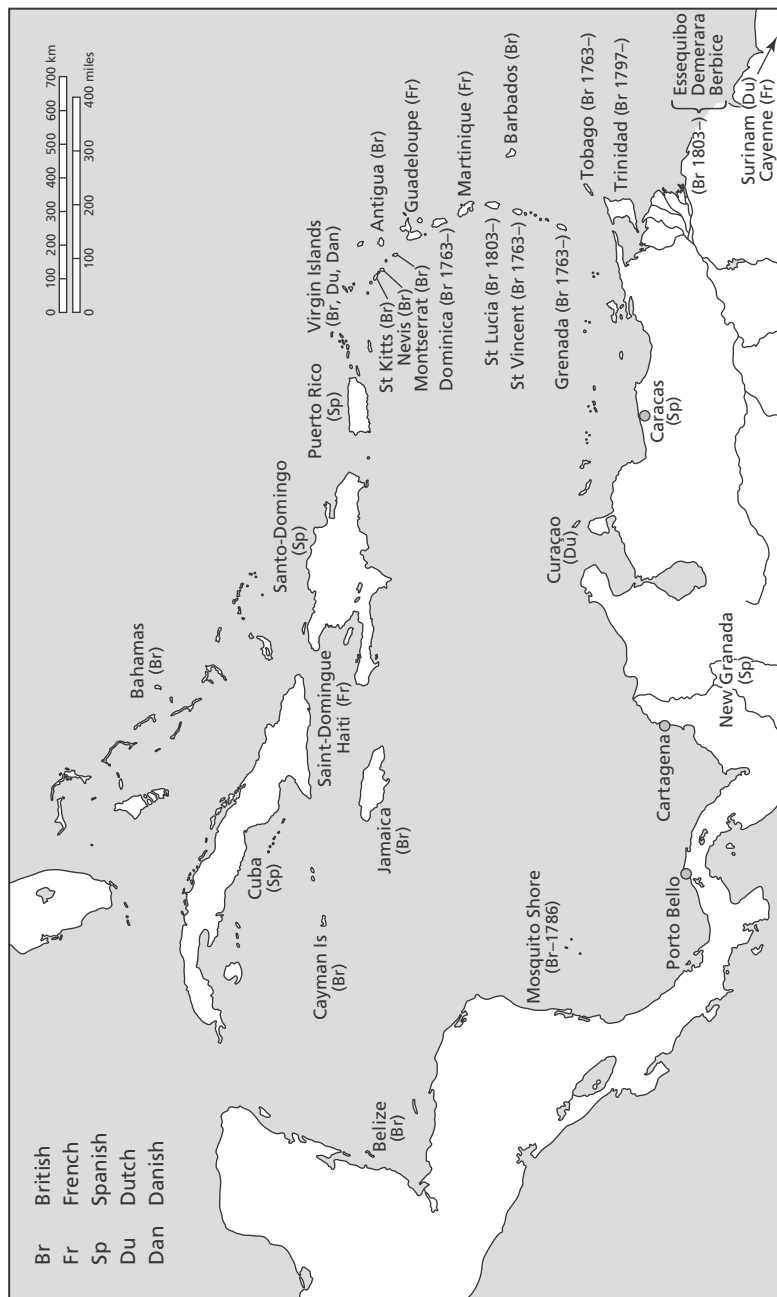
Academic journals

<i>AHR</i>	<i>American Historical Review</i>
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>HJ</i>	<i>Historical Journal</i>
<i>HWJ</i>	<i>History Workshop Journal</i>
<i>IHR</i>	<i>International History Review</i>
<i>JBS</i>	<i>Journal of British Studies</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Caribbean Studies</i>
<i>JICH</i>	<i>Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History</i>
<i>JMH</i>	<i>Journal of Modern History</i>
<i>JSH</i>	<i>Journal of Social History</i>
<i>P&P</i>	<i>Past and Present</i>
<i>S&A</i>	<i>Slavery and Abolition</i>
<i>SH</i>	<i>Social History</i>
<i>TRHS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
<i>WMQ</i>	<i>William and Mary Quarterly</i> , 3rd series

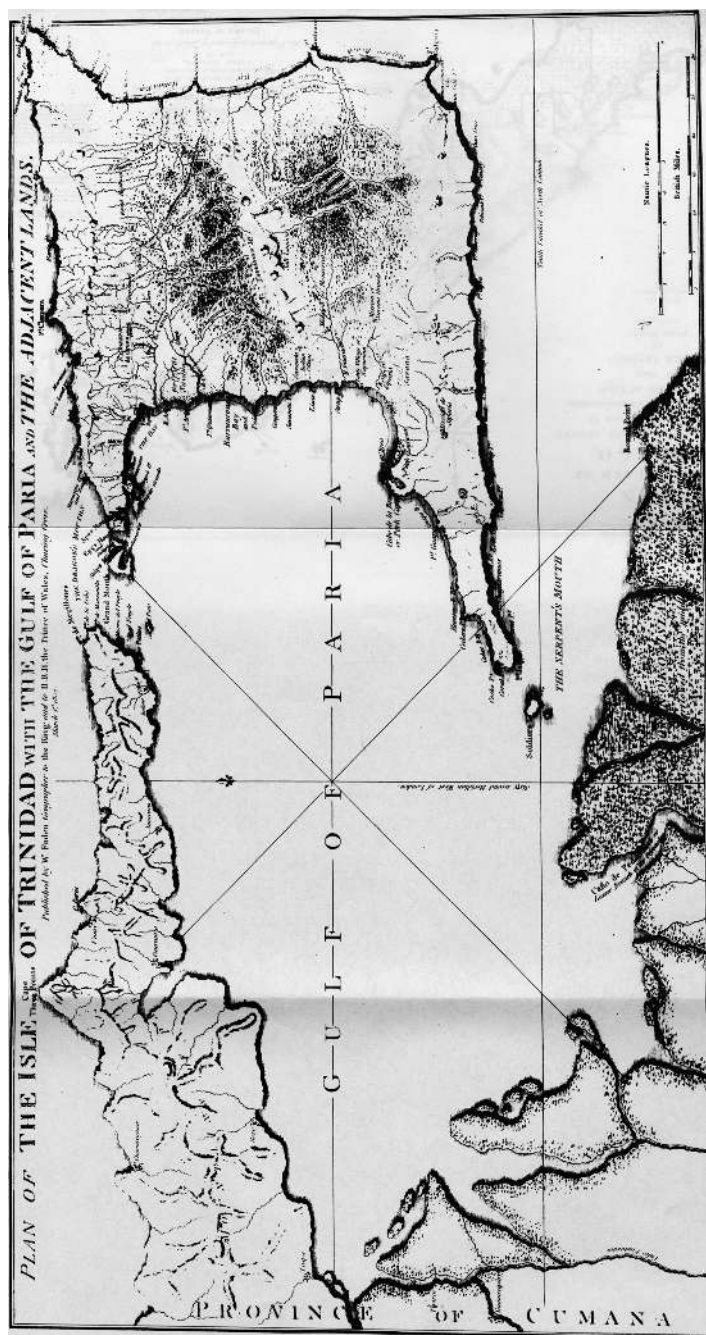
Printed and on-line sources

<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), http://www.oxforddnb.com/subscribed/
<i>OHBE</i> , vol. II	P. J. Marshall, ed., <i>The Oxford History of the British Empire</i> , vol. II: <i>The Eighteenth Century</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)
<i>Parl. Debates</i>	<i>Parliamentary Debates, from the Year 1803 to the Present Time</i> , 1st series (1803–)
<i>Parl. Hist.</i>	William Cobbett and J. Wright, eds., <i>The Parliamentary or Constitutional History of England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803</i> , 36 vols. (1806–13)
<i>ST</i>	T. B. and T. J. Howell, eds., <i>A Complete Collection of State Trials</i> , 30 vols. (1816–20)
<i>TTHS</i>	<i>Trinidad and Tobago Historical Publications</i> , Trinidad and Tobago Historical Society (1935–51), series of documents collected in 4 vols., copy in the British Library, London

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Map 2 William Faden's "Map of Trinidad with the Gulf of Paria," from F. Mallet, *Descriptive Account of the Island of Trinidad* (1802).



Map 3 The expansion of the British Empire in India.