

Prologue

“Scene of a Foul Transaction”

The Languages of Empire and the Carib War in St. Vincent

I

In 1772, the British government launched a military campaign against the so-called Black Caribs of the Windward Island colony of St. Vincent. In March, Wills Hill, earl of Hillsborough and secretary of state for the American colonies, ordered the royal navy to send several ships of the line and General Thomas Gage to dispatch two army regiments from Boston to St. Vincent. Under the command of newly promoted Major General William Dalrymple, the regiments arrived in the colony in early August. Throughout the fall, these forces, numbering more than a thousand but beset by disputes over command and extensive sickness among the soldiery, made little headway against the Caribs, who, though numbering only three to four thousand people and fewer than 500 fighting men, used guerrilla tactics to impede the British advance. By the end of the year, as the author of the most recent study of this expedition observes, “a comparatively vast military effort against a handful of Black Caribs had failed to exterminate them or even make them talk of peace.”¹ As reports of this expedition and its problems filtered back to Britain in the late fall of 1772, they elicited a firestorm of criticism both in and out of Parliament. The ensuing debate over the justice of the war in St. Vincent provided a forum for the many discursive languages contemporary Britons used to speak about empire and revealed some of the earliest manifestations of a growing concern about the moral price of overseas colonialism, a price derived by weighing the economic and strategic benefits of empire against its ethical and moral costs.

¹ Robin F. A. Fabel, *Colonial Challenges: Britons, Native Americans, and Caribs, 1759–1775* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2000), 186. Fabel’s succinct study (pp. 134–205) provides by far the fullest and most balanced modern account of the Carib War. See also Bernard Marshall, “The Black Caribs – Native Resistance to British Penetration into the Windward Side of St. Vincent, 1763–1773,” *Caribbean Quarterly*, 19 (1973): 4–20; J. Paul Thomas, “The Caribs of St. Vincent: A Study in Imperial Maladministration, 1763–73,” *Journal of Caribbean History*, 18 (1983): 60–72; and Michael Craton’s suggestive “The Black Caribs of St. Vincent: A Reevaluation,” in Robert L. Paquette and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996), 71–85.

II

St. Vincent was one of the prizes of the Seven Years' War, having been ceded by France to Britain in 1763 in the Treaty of Paris, along with Dominica, Grenada, and Tobago, three other islands in the Lesser Antilles. Shortly after this cession, Sir William Young, the first commissioner for land sales in the ceded islands, published a substantial tract designed to generate enthusiasm for their colonization and the sale of lands. "Since our conquest of Jamaica from the Spaniards" in the mid-1650s, said Young, waxing enthusiastic, "there has been no such opportunity of improving private fortunes" as the fertile lands of the ceded islands promised. Taking pains to praise colonizing activities as a means for individuals not just to acquire wealth but to contribute to national well-being, Young invoked the celebratory language of colonization, a subset of the related languages of improvement and civility that became increasingly prominent in early modern English social and economic discourse after the late sixteenth century and that remained pervasive well into the nineteenth century. Stretching back to Richard Hakluyt and other Elizabethan writers, the language of colonization had long been conventional in English and then British thinking about empire.² In using this language, Young associated the settlement of the ceded islands with the long and respectable tradition of overseas planting, a noble work that had brought fortune to colonial enterprisers, economic and social betterment to individual settlers, civility and a system of English law and governance to an expanding number of spaces in the New World and to some of the indigenous inhabitants of those spaces, and wealth and power to metropolitan Britain.

Colonization, Young suggested, was a grand enterprise of great national benefit, worthy of the exertions of Britain's most "publick spirited and enterprising men." "The establishment of colonies," he observed, "has in all ages and countries, and amongst men of the highest abilities and rank, been ever esteemed honourable and ornamental to the most exalted characters," and he expressed hope that "at the conclusion of a peace, by which so great an accession of territory hath been made to these kingdoms, . . . there will be found some men of eminence and spirit, who will deign to countenance by their example, and assist in perfecting, so noble a design" as the settlement of the four new colonies in the West Indies. "To nations supported principally by trade and navigation," he declared, employing the language of commerce, the principal language that eighteenth-century metropolitan Britons used to talk about empire,

the establishment of remote colonies (whose wants are constantly supplied by large exports from home, and whose returns of produce and manufactures greatly increase the revenue; and . . . have the further advantage of creating and connecting with it,

² See Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 153–91.

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still other profitable branches of commerce and communication with Africa, and the continent of America) is particularly beneficial and important.

By catering to “the natural wants of men,” stimulating men’s “ingenuity and industry,” and adding new sites for “that busy scene of submission and dependence . . . that compose[s] a great and commercial people,” the establishment of colonies, he suggested, articulating what he called an “extensive view” of imperial enterprise, was overwhelmingly “productive of both national advantage and private interest.” Such “useful and lucrative . . . undertaking[s],” he averred,

deserve[d] certainly to be considered as affectionately by the mother country, as if they were really so many remote counties, separated from it by seas, instead of rivers or land boundaries; and so far from our being jealous, or indifferent concerning their prosperity and contentment, we should acknowledge and cherish them as members of our own body, thus forming one vast Leviathan.

The reference to Leviathan called into play for the reader a third and relatively recent language of imperial grandeur or imperialism, prominent in metropolitan British discussions of empire since the middle of the eighteenth century.³

Young offered flattering portraits of all the ceded islands, but he especially touted St. Vincent for its excellent soil, luxuriant vegetation, and adequate water supply, predicting that it would “very soon be classed amongst the best, and most valuable of our sugar colonies.” Young had to admit, however, that the eastern part of the island was already inhabited by a few thousand “natives” who owed their “tragic origins to a ship freighted with negroes from Africa to Barbadoes, and wrecked on these coasts.” Rapidly adapting to the lush environment of St. Vincent, the survivors intermingled with the aboriginal Caribs, adopted many of their customs, “gradually extirpated, or reduced” the natives “to their obedience,” and thus, Young wrote, “gave birth to a free republic.” Dismissing reports that these Black Caribs were “turbulent and dangerous,” Young depicted them “as a quiet and well disposed people, speaking French, and instructed by Roman catholic missionaries, in the principles of their religion.” Observing that “many of them seemed disposed to quit their little cottages, and spots of provision ground, and to remove to” the French colonies of St. Lucia and Martinique, Young predicted that once they had been “duly apprized of the humanity and generosity of our gracious Sovereign, and assured of the enjoyment of their lands, freedom, favor and protection, they” would “be gained over to our cause, and even rendered useful.”⁴

Specifically how the Caribs might be “rendered useful” Young did not say, but his emphasis upon the humanity of the British Crown called forth the

³ [William Young], *Considerations Which May Tend to Promote the Settlement of Our New West-India Colonies, By Encouraging Individuals to embark in the Undertaking* (London, 1764), 1–3, 11, 34–35.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 9–10, 12; William Young, *An Account of the Black Charaibs in the Island of St. Vincent* (London, 1795), 6–8.

increasingly popular language of humanity that, as applied to British relations with subject peoples such as the Caribs, North American Indians, Catholics in Quebec and other former French possessions, Hindus and other natives in India, and finally, even persecuted Irish Catholics, would increasingly, in the decades following the Treaty of Paris in 1763, become in Britain an important ingredient of the discourse about overseas empire. The Crown having specifically directed that these “poor natives of St. Vincent” were “to remain undisturbed in their cottages and grounds,” Young and the other commissioners took pains during the early years of British settlement in St. Vincent to observe the “humane caution” recommended by the Crown.⁵

As the commissioners for land sales and other new British settlers quickly discovered, however, the Carib lands, as Young reported in 1767, were “far more extensive, more level, and a finer country than” those available for British settlement, and the newcomers soon began to lay plans to open up the Carib territories for British settlement. But the Caribs, knowing that the Crown had ordered the commissioners “not to dispose of or survey any of the lands inhabited or claimed by them,” kept a wary eye for any sign of British encroachment upon their territories, and when in early 1769 surveyors, supported by a small group of soldiers, began to lay out a road into Carib country, “a body of Indians upwards of 200, well armed, [and] firmly resolved, they said[,] to keep their freedom, and preserve their lands,” took the surveyors and their escort prisoner and released them only after they had been assured that the surveying and road building would stop. “Apprehensive,” as one St. Vincent official reported, that the whites were pursuing a design “not only of depriving them of their grounds, but also of reducing them into slavery,” the Caribs made it abundantly clear during this incident that they were determined to avoid their subjection to the British Crown, to “preserve their independence,” and to oppose by force “all interference within the country they called their own.”⁶

In the face of such resistance, St. Vincent’s white establishment quickly embarked upon a campaign to insure that the “fine cream part of this island” occupied by the Caribs should not remain entirely in Carib hands. From 1769 through early 1772, St. Vincent’s land commissioners, executive officials, legislature, and agent peppered metropolitan authorities with letters, addresses, memorials, and reports intended to undermine metropolitan support for the Caribs and to enlist metropolitan aid in their designs on Carib lands. Applying the language of savagery that Europeans had long used to justify the dispossession of native peoples in the New World, they contrasted native savagery with English civility and denounced Carib resistance as a bar to the grand

⁵ [Young], *Considerations*, 16; Young, *Account of the Black Charaibs*, 20.

⁶ Memorial of William Young to Treasury, April 11, 1767, in William Cobbett et al., eds., *Parliamentary History of England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803*, 36 vols. (London, 1806–20), 17: 578–79; President Harry Alexander to Lieutenant Governor Fitzmaurice, May 3, 1769, in *ibid.*, 591–92; Fitzmaurice to Hillsborough, June 10, 1769, in *ibid.*, 597; Memorial of Richard Maitland to Lord Hillsborough, [1769], in *ibid.*, 594.

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work of settlement and colonization. For such a “valuable and extensive tract of land” to remain “almost entirely uncultivated” and in the hands of “an erratic nation of savage warriors and hunters” seemed to whites to be, as a later writer declared, “[in]consistent with the common law of nations, with the general interest of the colony, or with the right of the British crown.” For that reason, it appeared obvious to the settlers that, as the lieutenant governor put it in a dispatch to Hillsborough, as long as the Caribs were “permitted to occupy a large extent of country, without any mixture of white inhabitants, they [would] . . . retain their intractable nature, continue uncivilized, lawless, disaffected, and of no use; and that the rest of the colony” would “be in real danger, and constant apprehensions of sudden attack from them.” As long as the Caribs continued “an armed force in actual rebellion in the heart of their country,” he said, British colonists could scarcely be expected to continue “to hazard their fortunes and their persons, on the casual and capricious forbearance of lawless savages.”⁷

Although the Black Caribs had been in St. Vincent for almost a century, since “about the year 1673,” white interpreters took pains to deny that they were “the original and rightful possessors of the island of St. Vincent” or “an independent nation.” Rather, they endeavored to paint them as “Negro *usurpers*,” who, having been in the colony for only a generation or two, had early shown their true disposition by extirpating the original Carib population and, since the beginning of British settlement, had thumbed their noses at the British Crown’s authority and menaced the lives and property of the settlers, pilfering their possessions, enticing away their slaves, and otherwise acting as the worst species of neighbors. Troublesome enough in peacetime, the Caribs, they predicted, would immediately go over to the French should France and Britain ever go to war. St. Vincent whites thought it obvious that, as the land commissioners wrote to the Crown in October 1771, it would “be impossible that so small an island” could “long continue divided between a civilized people and savages, who are bound by no ties of law or religion.” Charging that the Caribs would neither submit to British government nor “yield up any part of the land they claim . . . without a sufficient force to terrify them to obedience,” they called for military and naval aid “to force these people to obedience” and possibly even to bring about “their absolute and immediate removal” and transportation to some unoccupied island or even to Africa. Europeans had long used the language of civility to justify their actions in relation to indigenous peoples, and, more and more since the 1730s, British imperial projectors had often invoked a language of national security to justify state intervention in colonial projects. Calling upon both of these languages, an anonymous author laid out the essence of the settlers’ plan in a pamphlet published in London in

⁷ Alexander to Fitzmaurice, May 3, 1769, in *ibid.*, 592; Address of the St. Vincent Council and Assembly, [1769], in *ibid.*, 596; Fitzmaurice to Hillsborough, June 10, 1769, in *ibid.*, 602–03; Memorial of Maitland to Hillsborough, [1769], in *ibid.*, 594; Young, *Account of the Black Charaibs*, 21–22, 25.

1770 and written in the form of a dialogue between two Caribs: “though we well deserve it, for extirpating the natives, who gave us shelter in our distress,” said Arioua, the “English Baccaras” were “not cruel,” would “not extirpate us,” and could be expected to “find us land somewhere,” but “they must have possession of ours to secure the quiet of the island, in case of a war with the French Baccaras.”⁸ Through transportation, the writer implied, colonization could go forward without sacrificing the principles of humanity. In response to this mounting agitation, metropolitan authorities in the fall of 1771 ordered General Thomas Gage and the admiralty to dispatch a sufficient force to St. Vincent “to reduce the black Caribbs . . . to a due submission to his Majesty’s authority and government.” At the same time, however, Hillsborough, reemphasizing the Crown’s continuing commitment to the principles of humanity, cautioned St. Vincent authorities to avoid “any unnecessary severities, that may have the appearance of cruelty or oppression.”⁹

The British press followed the expedition with some interest, and news of the setbacks it experienced in the late summer and fall of 1772 soon reached Britain, where the justice of the venture came under immediate scrutiny. At the end of November, an anonymous author writing under the name “Probus” in the *Scots Magazine* reported that “an uncommon scene of cruelty” was “carrying on on the island of St. Vincent, against the innocent, natural inhabitants” for no greater crime than standing up for their own liberty and independence. Applying the well-worn English language of liberty that reached back to the common law theorists Sir John Fortescue and Sir Edward Coke,¹⁰ “Probus” argued that the “cause of civil liberty . . . ought to be held sacred and inviolable in every part of the British Empire” and, using a language of rapacity or oppression usually associated with Turks or Spaniards, charged that by employing “British troops . . . to put these people to the sword,” the British government was guilty of “reviving the Spanish cruelties at the conquest of Mexico, to gratify avaricious merchants, landholders, and venal commissioners.”¹¹

“Probus’s” strictures were a preview of those articulated a few days later in the House of Commons. On December 9, Thomas Townshend, M.P. for Cambridge University, and three other members of the Opposition, including Barlow Trecothick, M.P. and alderman for London and a former New England and Jamaica merchant, Richard Whitworth, M.P. for Stafford, and Isaac Barré, M.P. for Wycombe and a former army officer with extensive experience in America during the Seven Years’ War, subjected the Carib War to

⁸ Young, *Account of the Black Charaibs*, 1, 6, 14; Memorial of Maitland to Hillsborough, [1769], in Cobbett et al., eds., *Parliamentary History*, 17: 595; Report of Commissioners for the Sale of Lands to Treasury, October 16, 1771, in *ibid.*, 606–07; Memorial of Maitland to Hillsborough, [1771], in *ibid.*, 612–14; *A New System of Fortification, Constructed with Standing Timber, &c. Or the Sentiments of a West-India Savage on the Art of War* (London, 1770), 13.

⁹ Hillsborough to Admiralty, April 16, 1772, and to Governor Leybourne, April 18, 1772, in Cobbett et al., eds., *Parliamentary History*, 17: 522–34, 631.

¹⁰ See Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood*, 63–104.

¹¹ “Probus,” in *Scots Magazine* (Edinburgh), 34 (1772): 588.

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a scathing review. Using the ancient English language of justice, they called into question the essential justness of the war, denouncing it, in the words of Townshend, as “a breach of the national honour.” Depicting the Carib insurgents as the descendants of shipwrecked slaves who had “incorporated with the natives,” the “last remnants of the Aborigines of South America,” Trecothick charged that the deployment of such a considerable force suggested that the Administration had decided that the “poor Caribbs . . . should be totally extirpated,” an objective that, if achieved, he said, echoing “Probus,” would be a gross act of inhumanity comparable to “the barbarities of the Spaniards against the Mexicans.” “While such a scene of iniquity and cruelty is transacting at St. Vincent’s on the defenceless natives, under the authority of government,” he declared, “I feel, Sir, for the honour of the British nation.”¹²

Displaying a regard for the sanctity of native rights in the Americas that was, if not entirely unprecedented, certainly unusual among British commentators on empire, other speakers questioned not only the justice but also the legality of the undertaking and in the process employed the language of indigenous rights, one of the many extensions or branches of the language of humanity and one not often invoked in metropolitan discussions of empire before the late eighteenth century. “Before we pretend to extirpate those poor people,” declared Whitworth, “we need to examine our right.” Arguing that the French had lived in association with the Caribs only by treaty and had never owned or exercised jurisdiction over Carib lands, he denied that they had any right to cede those lands to the British. “To dispossess the unoffending natives of their country,” he objected, was “nothing but the most wanton cruelty.” When First Minister Frederick, Lord North, tried to head off further debate by suggesting that the Caribs’ refusal to lay down their arms justified military measures, Barré asked the House whether any members would “pretend to say” that the Caribs were “not in the right?” Praising them for “fighting for liberty,” he again appealed to the language of liberty, asserting that “every English heart must applaud them.”¹³

When they turned their attention to the question of why these allegedly dishonorable measures had been undertaken in the first place, these speakers fixed upon what Townshend called “the rapacity of the planters in St. Vincent’s.” More and more after the mid-1760s, metropolitan analysts used the language of rapacity and oppression, a subset of the language of otherness that they employed to describe people whose behavior they considered morally inferior to their own, such as British nabobs in Bengal, planters in the New World, and slave traders on the African coast. Speaking in behalf of Administration, Welbore Ellis, M.P. for Petersfield, effectively acknowledged that planter demands were behind the expedition, but he traced them, not to their rapacity, but to their fear and vulnerability. Calling for “a word of sympathy for

¹² Thomas Townshend and Bartholomew Trecothick, speeches, December 9, 1772, in Cobbett et al., eds., *Parliamentary History*, 17: 568–69.

¹³ Richard Whitworth, Lord North, and Isaac Barré, speeches, December 9, 1772, in *ibid.*, 569–70.

the poor planters, who have quitted their country and friends, and at a great expence purchased plantations of the public,” he contended that they were “entitled to protection also” and that it was “the duty of government to assist them with troops when their property” was “in danger.” But the Opposition sniffed darker motives, charging, as Whitworth said, that “some of our traders or planters have taken a fancy to” the Carib “part of the island for country-houses to divert themselves” and that to gratify that or other sordid intentions of the St. Vincent establishment, “the British arms” were “to be employed, and the miserable natives . . . to be cruelly dispossessed of their habitations, and driven from their families and friends.”¹⁴

Demanding to know “the urgent reasons, which justify [such] a cruel outrage against humanity,” Opposition speakers called for a parliamentary inquiry “to probe this foul transaction to the bottom.” “Let us know the cause of those hostilities against a defenceless, innocent, and inoffensive people,” insisted Trecothick. When the Carib fighting force consisted of fewer than 500 men, asked Lord George Germain, why are we “sending regiment after regiment to sacrifice, hunt down, and destroy these unfortunate people?” Why, asked Barré, should a force be sent “to attack a handful of men, the natives of the island, who have done you no injury?” Accusing the Administration of mismanaging the expedition, they further charged that the Administration’s inhumanity extended beyond the Caribs to the British troops and demanded to know why soldiers had been “sent upon this disgraceful service” at “the worst season of the year, unprovided” with tents and camping equipment.¹⁵

When the Administration seemed to ignore these demands, Townshend rose again in the House on December 11 to ask for papers from the king that would provide the basis for “a general and impartial examination, that we may know why the poor Caribbs alone should be of consequence enough to engage the resentment of the British government, and employ the attention of the Ministry, when” it took “no notice . . . of the conduct of other powers towards us.”¹⁶ Perhaps to Townshend’s surprise, North offered no objection to this request. On December 23, the first minister provided the House with a lengthy set of documents, going all the way back to 1767 and illustrating the considerations that lay behind the decision to send troops to engage the Caribs.¹⁷ As a measure of how much this expedition had captured the interest of a broader public, the London printer John Almon brought out early in 1773 an edition of these papers under the title *Authentic Papers Relative to the Expedition against the Charibbs, and the Sale of Lands in the Island of St. Vincent*.¹⁸

¹⁴ Thomas Townshend, Welbore Ellis, and Richard Whitworth, speeches, December 9, 1772, in *ibid.*, 569, 572–73.

¹⁵ Thomas Townshend, Isaac Barré, Bartholomew Trecothick, and Lord George Germain, speeches, December 9, 1772, in *ibid.*, 569–70, 572–73.

¹⁶ Thomas Townshend, speech, December 11, 1772, in *ibid.*, 574–75.

¹⁷ These papers are printed in *ibid.*, 575–639.

¹⁸ *Authentic Papers Relative to the Expedition against the Charibbs, and the Sale of Lands in the Island of St. Vincent* (London, 1773).

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By the time the House took up these papers in mid-February 1773, the Carib War, as Barré declared in the House on February 12, had “engaged the attention of all Europe.”¹⁹ News emanating from St. Vincent continued to suggest that the Caribs had effectively stymied the British regulars.²⁰ As one correspondent from the West Indies reported in late January 1773, the regulars were sickly and, behaving as if they were “sensible that justice had not drawn the sword,” seemed “to want that animation, which has hitherto, always appeared on more glorious occasions.” If the British troops were hampered by the injustice of their cause, as this writer asserted in employing the language of justice, the Caribs continued “resolute and seem[ed] determined that the loss of liberty and property shall be accompanied with that of life.” Such a “determination,” he said, was “worthy of a Briton; and as such should be rever’d by one [a Briton], though found in the breast of a poor oppressed Carib.” “The expedition was ill-judged,” he concluded, and was “condemned by every rational being in the West-Indies.”²¹

The House spent much of February 10 and 12 hearing testimony from people who had seen military service or held political office in the ceded islands and from generals who had not heard from the West Indies since mid-November. The Administration’s principal witness, Henry Sharpe, speaker of the St. Vincent Assembly and lieutenant governor of the island, then in London, fully set out the rationale for metropolitan military intervention against the Caribs. Readily acknowledging himself as “the advisor of the project” for removing the Caribs from the island and transporting them to some nearby neutral island or to Africa, Sharpe used the language of security to contend that it “was impossible” for settlers “to live in safety” in St. Vincent as long as the Caribs “were suffered to live independent.” As an important component of Britain’s expanding and economically beneficial overseas empire, the success and integrity of the colonial effort in St. Vincent, he suggested, required state action to subdue any indigenous resistance that stood in its way. Depicting the Caribs in the most unflattering terms, he asserted that they

were a faithless people; that while they continued in the island, neither the lives nor the properties of his Majesty’s subjects could be secure; that murders and robberies were frequent; that his own negroes had been murdered in the field; and that no inducements were wanting to encourage negroes to desert; that the Caribbs were addicted to much drinking, and that their debaucheries were very cruel, and [that they were] abandoned to every species of vice.

At this point, Barré created a moment of levity when he interrupted Sharpe to inquire “what their vices were?” In reply, Sharpe cited their “love of a plurality of women” and their extreme “pleasure in . . . making themselves beasts by drinking,” whereupon Barré inquired whether the Caribs did not also “love

¹⁹ Isaac Barré, speech, February 10, 1773, in Cobbett et al., eds., *Parliamentary History*, 17: 724.

²⁰ *Gentleman’s Magazine* (London), 43 (1773): 45–46, 152–53; *Lloyd’s Evening Post* (London), April 2, 1773.

²¹ “Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman in the West Indies, January 29, 1773,” in *Pennsylvania Packet and General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), March 22, 1773.

liberty and property?” When Sharpe answered in the affirmative, Barré then elicited a roar of laughter by asking, “if they love women, wine, liberty and property, where is the difference, except in the colour, between them and Englishmen?” In this exchange, Barré used the language of English rights, a subset of the language of liberty that Britons used so extensively to identify their own national character, to underline the Caribs’ essential humanity.²²

A full-scale debate over the expedition followed three days later on February 15. Joined by Lord Folkestone, M.P. for Salisbury, and Charles Cornwall, M.P. for Grampound, Townshend, Barré, and Lord George Germain were again prominent in the Opposition attack. Townshend led off, dismissing Sharpe’s testimony as that of “an interested planter,” condemning the Administration’s “almost instant resolution to extirpate those unhappy miserable Caribbs, whom it has become fashionable to call savages,” and introducing two motions. The first declared that “the expedition against the Black Caribbs, in the island of Saint Vincent’s,” had been “undertaken without sufficient provocation on the part of those unhappy people, and at the instigation of persons interested in their destruction, and appears to be intended to end in the total extirpation of the said Caribbs.” The second alleged that sending troops was unnecessary, would prove destructive of the lives of many soldiers, and was unlikely to succeed. The debate over the first resolution is what primarily concerns us here.²³

As articulated by Germain, the Opposition’s central contention was that the Caribs had “behaved themselves quietly as subjects till an attempt was made to reduce them to slavery, without even pretending any crime on their part.” “Will any man in this House, at this time of day,” asked Germain, “pretend to affirm, that standing on their own defence without even a crime imputed to them, was treason, and that they deserved to be extirpated merely to gratify a set of inhuman mercenary planters? No,” he declared, employing the familiar British language of rights, “the constitution forbids such a violation of the rights of the poorest and meanest of society.” Lord Folkestone agreed, arguing that the papers and testimony presented to the House made it “very evident that the first act of hostility was committed by us” through an “invasion of [Carib] property” and declaring that the Caribs were fully “justified in what they have done.” “I should have thought, Sir, that our generosity, as Englishmen, would have taught us to consider the liberty and property of others as sacred, but if that was insufficient,” Folkestone said, shifting from the language of rights to the language of humanity, “I should have thought that motives of humanity might have restrained us from wanton and premeditated acts of cruelty upon a defenceless people.”²⁴

²² Testimony of Henry Sharpe, February 12, 1773, in Cobbett et al., eds., *Parliamentary History*, 17: 727.

²³ Thomas Townshend, speech, February 15, 1773, in *ibid.*, 729–31.

²⁴ Lord George Germain and Viscount Folkestone, speeches, February 15, 1773, in *ibid.*, 731, 735.