

Natural Histories of Indigenous Resistance:
Alexander Anderson and the Caribs of St. Vincent

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I have inclosed to Sir George Yonge some sheets of the plan I intend for a Flora Carribea; I will be happy in being honoured with your advice relative to it.

—Alexander Anderson to Joseph Banks, 1789

The dreadful situation these Islands have been in for near two years past has much interrupted me in my plans relative to the Garden and pursuits...Every Garden Plant & what else in a scientific line, is obliterated wherever the infernal banditti have had access. As to the Catalogue, nothing can be done till a change takes place of our present situation. My Books & papers are all packed up, some in one place & some in another: next to the Garden they were my greatest concern. I have lost many things in the confusion.

—Anderson to Banks, 1796

In 1789, the botanist Alexander Anderson optimistically wrote to Joseph Banks about a plan he had to compose a “Flora Carribea” or catalog of the plants he had collected as superintendent of the royal botanic garden in St. Vincent, a small island in the Lesser Antilles.¹ By 1796, however, these plans had been thrown into disarray or “confusion,” as Anderson called it, by the outbreak of the Second Carib War (1795-1796). The war pitted the British colonists of St. Vincent against its indigenous Carib population and was particularly devastating because it represented the culmination of several decades of intense conflict. Since 1763, when Britain received St. Vincent from France as part of the peace agreement concluding the Seven Years’ War, colonists had settled on the island and attempted to turn its lands into sugar plantations.² They were opposed by the Caribs, however, who had maintained St. Vincent as an autonomous

¹ For epigraphs, see Alexander Anderson to Joseph Banks, St. Vincent, May 3, 1789, Dawson Turner Copies (DTC) 6, Botany Library, Natural History Museum, London, f. 160; Anderson to Banks, Saint Vincent, March 30, 1796, DTC 10 (1), Botany Library, Natural History Museum, London, f. 27. For more on Anderson’s connection to Banks and his biographical history, see Richard A. Howard, “The St. Vincent Botanic Garden—The Early Years,” in Richard Grove, Robert S. Anderson, and Karis Hiebert, eds., *Islands, Forests, and Gardens in the Caribbean: Conservation and Conflict in Environmental History* (Oxford, 2006), 122-31.

² For land policy on St. Vincent and the ‘Ceded Islands,’ as the new Caribbean territories Britain received from France were commonly known, see D. H. Murdoch, “Land Policy in the Eighteenth-Century British Empire: The Sale of Crown Lands in the Ceded Islands, 1763-1783,” *The Historical Journal* 27, no. 3 (1984): 549-74. The Ceded Islands included St. Vincent, Grenada, Dominica, and Tobago.

territory for several hundred years.³ Even in the late eighteenth century, after most of the region's native peoples had been exterminated, the Caribs of St. Vincent still numbered in the thousands and made their home on the island's windward or northeastern half (figure 1). Almost as soon as the British colonists arrived in St. Vincent, they attempted to encroach on these territories because they contained the portions of the island most suitable for sugar planting; in fact, less than ten years after the island's initial colonization, the First Carib War (1772-1773) broke out.⁴ While this earlier war concluded in a stalemate, the Second Carib War led to the almost total destruction of the island's colonial infrastructure, as the Caribs burned down the vast majority of the British sugar plantations.⁵ Although not a plantation owner himself, Anderson deplored the conduct of the Caribs and named them "infernal banditti" for harming the garden and hindering his progress on the "Flora," which he never completed.

Yet in the drafts that Anderson left behind, he adopted a more ambivalent tone regarding the Caribs. The Second Carib War had thrown his life into "confusion," but by the first years of the nineteenth century, he had returned to his writing and was at work on a manuscript detailing the natural history of St. Vincent.⁶ Anderson most likely intended this narrative, which was

³ For an account of Carib resistance to imperial encroachment, see Michael Craton, "From Caribs to Black Caribs: The Amerindian Roots of Servile Resistance in the Caribbean," in Gary Y. Okihiro, ed., *In Resistance: Studies in African, Caribbean, and Afro-American History* (Amherst, 1986), 96-116.

⁴ For a history of the events leading up to the First Carib War, see Bernard Marshall, "The Black Caribs—Native Resistance to British Penetration into the Windward Side of St. Vincent 1763-1773," *Caribbean Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (1973): 4-19.

⁵ The colonists of St. Vincent estimated that their total losses amounted to £815,332. See "Report of the Committee of Legislature, appointed to investigate and ascertain Losses suffered in consequence of the Rebellion and Invasion of the Charaibs and French," February 21, 1797, The National Archives of the UK (TNA): Public Record Office (PRO) T 1/4389.

⁶ Anderson's manuscripts are currently housed at the Linnean Society of London. For the manuscript of his natural history, see MS 606, Linnean Society of London Library. Richard A. and Elizabeth S. Howard published a transcription of MS 606 under the title *Alexander Anderson's Geography and History of St. Vincent, West Indies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983). All further citations to this manuscript will be to the Howards' transcription, which I will refer to in my notes as "Anderson, *Geography and History*." In the body of the article, I have chosen to call Anderson's work a "natural history" and not the *Geography and History* because 1) *Geography and History* is the Howards' title and not Anderson's and 2) Anderson clearly begins his manuscript with the intent of describing St. Vincent's natural features or "geography," even if he then branches off into discussions of politics and "history." As I will argue in the article, the imbrication of these topics is a fundamental feature of the genre of natural history in

comprised of eighty-four handwritten pages, to serve as an overview of the geographical setting of the royal botanic garden and as an introduction to the catalog of its plants.⁷ Yet as Anderson composed his story about the island, he veered off the topic of botany and into an extended treatment of the Second Carib War. In his retrospective account, Anderson still lamented the fact that St. Vincent had been “rendered one field of desolation and smoking ruins.”⁸ At the same time, he noted its traumatic effects on the Caribs themselves, who had been physically removed from St. Vincent after their surrender in 1796. Taken first to Balliceaux, a small island near St. Vincent, the Caribs were eventually transported to Roatán, an island off the coast of Honduras, over a thousand miles away. Moreover, although approximately four thousand Caribs left St. Vincent, only about half that number arrived in Roatán: the rest died on Balliceaux of the combined effects of famine and disease.⁹ The St. Vincent colonists justified their draconian and, indeed, genocidal decision by arguing that if the Caribs had been allowed to remain, they simply would have fomented more wars.¹⁰ In spite of the danger that the Caribs seemed to pose,

the eighteenth century. While it is difficult to date Anderson’s natural history in any exact manner, Anderson does refer in its last pages to the discovery of a small group of two or three Carib families living the woods of St. Vincent “about two years ago.” He also says that their surrender constituted the final chapter of the Second Carib War. This surrender was documented in British state papers and occurred in 1805. It is thus likely that Anderson finished the draft of his natural history in 1807. Anderson, *Geography and History*, 96. For the final surrender of the last group of Caribs, see George Beckwith to Earl Camden, St. Vincent, May 14, 1805, and Beckwith to Earl Camden, St. Vincent, June 10, 1805, TNA: PRO CO 260/19.

⁷ Drafts of the catalog also exist: see “Hortus St. Vincentii,” MS 607, Linnean Society of London Library. Anderson composed a narrative history of the St. Vincent botanic garden as well. See MS 605, Linnean Society of London Library. Although these manuscripts are catalogued separately, it is possible that Anderson intended his natural history of St. Vincent, his history of the botanic garden, and his catalog to be published together as one compendious work of botanical description. Examples of encyclopedic works on Caribbean botany from the eighteenth century include Hans Sloane’s *A Voyage to the Islands of Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica*, 2 vols. (London, 1707-25); Mark Catesby’s *The Natural History of Carolilna, Florida, and the Bahama Islands*, 2 vols. (London, 1731-43); and Patrick Browne’s *The Civil and Natural History of Jamaica* (London, 1756). Anderson owned copies of the above works, as is indicated by the fact that George Caley, his successor to the position of garden superintendent, found them upon his arrival in St. Vincent. Caley to Joseph Banks, St. Vincent, August 27, 1816, DTC 19, ff. 304-305.

⁸ Anderson, *Geography and History*, 19.

⁹ For the removal of the Caribs and the mortality rate on Balliceaux, see Nancie L. Solien González, *Sojourners of the Caribbean: Ethnogenesis and Ethnohistory of the Garifuna* (Urbana and Chicago, 1988), 20-23.

¹⁰ Hilary Beckles makes a strong argument for viewing the British treatment of the Caribs as the execution of a genocidal policy. See Beckles, “The Genocide Policy in English-Karifuna Relations in the Seventeenth Century,” in

Anderson remarked with sympathy of their exile that “they sailed for their destination in the island Rattan, leaving their native woods and mountains never to see again, and every moment disappearing more and more to their longing eyes.”¹¹ Anderson may have mourned the loss of St. Vincent’s sugar plantations, but in these lines, he alludes to a different kind of landscape, one still filled with Carib peoples and “their native woods and mountains.” We could dismiss Anderson’s references to these woods and mountains as the deployment of stock Romantic imagery associating indigenous peoples with nature. But the Carib Lands were, in fact, notable for their mountainous and heavily forested terrain. Moreover, because Anderson was a botanist who spent a considerable amount of time observing St. Vincent’s ecologies, it is also quite possible that he meant this comment to be an accurate and salient description of the Caribs’ homeland. The empathy in Anderson’s comment is notable, as he imagines the Caribs fixing their “longing eyes” on the sight of St. Vincent vanishing over the horizon. In specifying that these woods and mountains were “their native” territories, Anderson furthermore refers to the fact that the Caribs were the original possessors of the island.

In what follows, I will argue that Anderson’s writings and especially his natural history of St. Vincent served as sites not only for botanical description but also for engagement with the problem of indigenous dispossession. Increasingly, scholars of early modern empire have recognized that scientific writing about the Caribbean conflated the description of plants with the contemplation of the effects of imperial expansion on human populations. It was only with the rise of anthropology and sociology in the nineteenth century that the fields of natural and human

Martin Daunton and Rick Halpern, eds., *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600-1850* (London, 1999), 280-302.

¹¹ Anderson, *Geography and History*, 97.

history became clearly distinguished.¹² Additionally, because scientific enterprises of exploration depended so heavily on colonial economic networks—naturalists often traveled in ships carrying either plantation commodities or enslaved Africans—there was considerable slippage between the consideration of such phenomena as botanical transplantation and the migration of peoples. As Christopher P. Iannini has recently argued, the fact that Caribbean natural histories produced knowledge about the newly central plantation economies meant that they circulated widely in the Atlantic world and became one of the most important venues for multi-layered discussions of plants, people, and empire. The examination of botanical and other specimens became in particular a “powerful heuristic lens for contemplating the modernity of the Caribbean plantation.”¹³ Natural histories were thus centrally concerned with the flora and fauna of the Americas, but at the same time, their scientific discourses encoded meditations on the political and ethical problems created by colonization.

The status of indigenous peoples and their claims to Caribbean territories constituted one of these problems. From the earliest days of Spanish occupation of the Americas, observers debated the morality of Amerindian enslavement and the meaning of the demographic devastation experienced by the native population of the Caribbean. These debates resurfaced during the aftermath of the Second Carib War, which the colonists technically won but only at great cost of property to them and human life to the Caribs. Some justifications for British conduct during the conflict characterized the Caribs as merciless enemies and, in doing so, drew on a long history of Carib demonization that began with Columbus’ equation of them with cannibals. It was Spanish policy, in fact, that created the ethnic designation of ‘Carib’ in the first

¹² James Delbourgo has pointed out the prevalence of “ethnographic reportage” in seventeenth-century natural histories of the Caribbean. See Delbourgo, “Sir Hans Sloane’s Milk Chocolate and the Whole History of the Cacao,” *Social Text* 29, no. 1 (2011): 84.

¹³ Christopher P. Iannini, *Fatal Revolutions: Natural History, West Indian Slavery, and the Routes of American Literature* (Chapel Hill, 2012), 19.

place; the Carib label marked any Amerindians hostile towards conquest as legally subject to enslavement, while friendly natives were designated as Arawak.¹⁴ British writers mirrored this binary system of categorization by dividing the St. Vincent Caribs into the two groupings of ‘Black’ and ‘Red.’ The Black Caribs were supposedly descended from African runaways, whereas the Red or Yellow Caribs, as they were also known, were the ostensibly authentic native peoples of the island. Yet by asserting that the vast majority of the St. Vincent Caribs were Black Caribs and that almost all of the Red Caribs were extinct, these authors invalidated any claims the St. Vincent Caribs could make regarding their indigenous rights to the land.¹⁵ The reclassification of the St. Vincent Caribs thus became a central component of arguments about territorial dispossession in the late eighteenth century.

Anderson himself participated actively in prevailing debates over territorial rights by contributing to the scientific construction of a new Black Carib race. The memory of the war clearly still lingered in traumatic fashion for Anderson as he returned to his writing after 1796. Not only did he constantly interrupt his account of St. Vincent’s natural history with descriptions of the conflict but also the pages of the manuscript themselves are crisscrossed with revisions and deletions. These markings make Anderson’s narrative a kind of literary battleground in itself and testify to its incoherence. This incoherence has undoubtedly contributed to the almost complete neglect of Anderson in scholarly considerations of early Caribbean writing.¹⁶ Yet it is

¹⁴ For the European mythologization and construction of the Caribs, see Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London and New York, 1986).

¹⁵ For the development of the Black-Red Carib discourse, see Neil L. Whitehead, “Black Read as Red: Ethnic Transgression and Hybridity in Northeastern South America and the Caribbean,” in Matthew Restall, ed., *Beyond Black and Red: African-Native Relations in Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque, 2005), 223-43, and Peter Hulme, “Black, Yellow, and White on St. Vincent: Moreau De Jonnès’s Carib Ethnography,” in Felicity A. Nussbaum, ed., *The Global Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore, 2003), 182-94.

¹⁶ Richard H. Grove is the one scholar I have found who analyzes Anderson’s writings and, more specifically, his natural history of St. Vincent in detail. See Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge, 1995), 264-308. My understanding of Anderson’s unease with the removal of the Caribs and the manifestation of that unease in his natural history was originally

important to recognize the possibilities that open up if we read into this confusion and look for its sources, as opposed to simply dismissing Anderson as a failed author. As his sympathy for the Caribs indicates, Anderson held contradictory positions regarding indigenous rights. Especially when botanical registers intertwined with the ethnographic and racial, he expressed views that diverged from those of his fellow British colonists and conflicted with his denials of Carib indigeneity. As I will thus conclude, Anderson's history articulates a powerful counter-discourse of Carib territorial possession, as opposed to dispossession, and suggests as well the incomplete dominance of ideological strategies of control. The language of botany could serve as a language of classification, but it also produced in Anderson's natural history a powerful rhetoric of Carib resistance and belonging, regardless of racial origin.

European interest in the lineage of the St. Vincent Caribs stemmed in part from the complex interactions that began occurring between Amerindians and Africans shortly after the arrival of the latter in the Americas. Subjected to harsh regimes of enslavement, significant numbers of Africans nevertheless succeeded in escaping from the plantations of the Caribbean. Furthermore, some of these runaways joined Amerindian communities, including those of the Caribs. Like many other native groups in the Americas, the Caribs had flexible ideas of kinship and regularly incorporated outsiders through such practices as captive-taking and adoption.¹⁷ And although they most certainly held beliefs about ethnic difference before their encounters with Europeans, the Caribs did not ascribe to clear-cut racial distinctions that would have

inspired by Grove's assertion that Anderson was "perhaps at a subconscious level, attempting to expiate the savage colonial repression of the black Carib and Carib population after their successive insurrections." Grove, *Green Imperialism*, 306.

¹⁷ Many early European accounts of the Caribs speak of captive taking and adoption. For instance, see "The Captivity of Luisa de Navarrete," in Peter Hulme and Neil L. Whitehead, eds., *Wild Majesty: Encounters with Caribs from Columbus to the Present Day* (Oxford, 1992), 38-44.

prevented their acceptance of Africans. The Caribs themselves were a heterogeneous mix of peoples who had belonged to other native polities before re-organizing as Carib. As noted earlier, ‘Carib’ was a designation invented by the Spanish and applied in indiscriminate fashion to any native groups hostile to colonization. Amerindians seeking to avoid colonization soon began adopting the name, however, as a proud sign of their anti-European resistance.¹⁸ As various imperial powers began settling the larger islands in the Caribbean, their indigenous inhabitants fled to more geographically remote sites, including St. Vincent. At these sites, they formed new societies with other Amerindian refugees, as well as the Africans who made their way there.¹⁹

European observers found Carib ethnogenesis a fascinating and sometimes puzzling phenomenon. For instance, in the early eighteenth century, French accounts began to speak of St. Vincent as a “Carib Republic” that included both Amerindian and African members.²⁰ Because various groups of French settlers had already built up a history of missionary and trade relations with the St. Vincent Caribs, the descriptions they provided were generally more detailed and perceptive than those of British observers.²¹ The latter also took note of the ethnic diversity that characterized Carib communities, but they tended to characterize St. Vincent’s Caribs as two distinct populations of Amerindians and Africans. For example, when John Brathwaite, the head of an early attempt to colonize St. Vincent, visited the island in 1722, he claimed to have encountered Amerindians and Africans living under separate leaders. Yet as Brathwaite’s

¹⁸ For Amerindians’ self-identification as Caribs, see Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham, N.C., and London, 2005), 40-42.

¹⁹ For more on the creation of refuges in the Lesser Antilles, see Neil L. Whitehead, “The Crises and Transformations of Invaded Societies: The Caribbean (1492-1580,” in Frank Salomon and Stuart B. Schwartz, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*, vol. 3, pt. 1, *South America* (Cambridge, 1999), 864-903.

²⁰ For the “Carib Republic,” see Jean-Baptiste Labat, *Nouveau voyage aux isles de l’Amérique*, 6 vols. (Paris, 1722), 4: 442; translation from I. E. Kirby and C. I. Martin, *The Rise and Fall of the Black Caribs (Garifuna)* (Toronto, 2004), 11.

²¹ Doris Garraway argues for the utility of conceiving of French-Carib relations as occurring across a porous border. See Garraway, *Libertine Colony*, 44.

account also indicates, the two groups were closely allied. Brathwaite had been initially opposed in his attempt to land on St. Vincent by a large party of those he identified as Amerindians, who escorted him into the interior to speak with their chief. When he returned to shore, however, he found that the Amerindian forces there had been augmented and “increas’d by a number of *Negroes*, all arm’d with Fuzees.” Furthermore, when Brathwaite was accompanied on a second occasion by Amerindian guides, they brought him to the “Brother of the Chief of the *Negroes*,” as opposed to the same Amerindian leader.²²

As the circumstances of Brathwaite’s visit to St. Vincent also suggest, European interest in the Caribs was more than purely academic; it was driven by their desire to colonize the Lesser Antilles. That British attempts to classify the St. Vincent Caribs intensified after 1763 only provides further proof of their political motivations. Especially in the wake of the Second Carib War, the British began enumerating the characteristics of the ‘Red’ and ‘Black’ Caribs of St. Vincent.²³ While relating back to the earlier categories of “Indian” and “Negroe,” these color-based designations represented the emergence of a more pointed ideological strategy designed to counter potential objections to the conquest of the island.

William Young’s *An Account of the Black Charaibs in the Island of St. Vincent’s* (1795) serves as a good illustration of how this strategy worked. Young’s account is a paradigmatic one because it was one of the first published works by a St. Vincent colonist to use the Black-Red terminology.²⁴ As the title of his work indicates, Young was particularly interested in the Black Caribs, and he claimed in his *Account* that they, and not the Red Caribs, were the primary

²² For Brathwaite’s observations, see Nathaniel Uring, *A Relation of the Late Intended Settlement of the Islands of St. Lucia and St. Vincent, in America; In Right of the Duke of Montagu, and Under His Grace’s Direction and Orders, in the Year 1722* (London, 1725), 106-107.

²³ For the emergence of the Red-Black binary in post-1763 British discourse about St. Vincent, see Julie Chun Kim, “The Caribs of St. Vincent and Indigenous Resistance during the Age of Revolutions,” *Early American Studies* 11, no. 1 (2013), forthcoming.

²⁴ William Young, *An Account of the Black Charaibs in the Island of St. Vincent’s; With the Charaib Treaty of 1773, and Other Original Documents* (London, 1795).

inhabitants of St. Vincent. He also provided an explanation of how this situation arose by inventing a tale about their origins.²⁵ According to Young, the Black Caribs were the “descendants from the cargo of an African slave ship, bound from the Bite of Benin to Barbadoes, and wrecked, about the year 1675, on the coast of Bequia, a small island about two leagues to the south of St. Vincent’s.”²⁶ The castaways then found their way to St. Vincent because they were discovered by a party of Red Caribs and re-enslaved by them. Eventually rebelling against and killing their Amerindian masters, however, the Africans achieved independence. They also continued to engage in attacks on the Red Caribs, and such was their success that by the time the British took over St. Vincent in 1763, there were, according to Young’s count, only “100 Red Charaibs, or Indians” remaining, “so reduced were that aboriginal people.” In contrast, there were still three thousand Black Caribs living on the island.²⁷

By Young’s logic, then, the inhabitants of St. Vincent were actually African and not Amerindian, and there were hardly any truly indigenous peoples occupying its lands. He also insisted that the name ‘Black Carib’ was an invention of St. Vincent’s African inhabitants, who “themselves arrogated” it in an attempt to usurp the place of the Red Caribs. As he elaborates, “The savage, with the name and title, thinks he inherits the qualities, the rights, and the property, of those whom he may pretend to supersede: hence he assimilates himself by name and manners, as it were to make out his identity and confirm the succession. Thus these Negroes not only assumed the national appellation of Charaibs, but individually their Indian names; and they adopted many of their customs....”²⁸ Instead of recognizing the alliances and new forms of cultural mixing that different Amerindian and African groups in the Lesser Antilles were

²⁵ According to Peter Hulme, Young’s account of the Black Caribs can be understood as merely the latest “instalment” in a long history of colonial fictions about conquest. See Hulme, *Colonial Encounters*, 246.

²⁶ Young, *Account of the Black Charaibs*, 6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

engaging in, Young casts the Black Caribs as deliberate pretenders who played at cultural assimilation in order to lay a false claim to St. Vincent.

There were immediate practical reasons for Young's publication of the *Account* and his insistence on the non-native status of St. Vincent's Caribs. Originally composed as a short memorial to William Bentinck, the Duke of Portland and home secretary, Young's description formed part of a paper war engaged in by the St. Vincent colonists to obtain governmental support for the physical war being fought on the island.²⁹ The importance of Young's memo is indicated by the fact that he traveled to London to present it in person. Young subsequently decided to expand it and turn it into the full-length *Account*, which also became a key component of the colonists' rhetorical campaign. Dedicating the *Account* to Drewry Ottley, another St. Vincent planter who had traveled to London, Young declared in its opening pages that his intention in publishing his work was to "help to decide the public opinion, together with that of his Majesty's Ministers, on the important subjects which you have to submit to their consideration."³⁰ Ottley made use of the *Account* when he wrote in September 1795 to the Duke of Portland reminding him of the need to come to a decision about the St. Vincent colonists' demands, as well as of "a Pamphlet containing the History of the Black Charaibs lately published by Sir William Young."³¹

Young had to assert that the St. Vincent Caribs were not Amerindians because of broader debates occurring about the proper conduct of empires in relation to indigenous peoples. As Anthony Pagden has explained, most early modern theories of imperial expansion recognized

²⁹ For Young's original memorial, see "The Memorial of the Planters and Merchants, concerned in the Island of St. Vincents," May 9, 1795, TNA: PRO CO 260/13, ff. 177-81. The colonists also composed a petition to the government asking for £40,000 in financial assistance for the war. See "To the Kings most excellent Majesty The humble Petition and Address of the Freeholders, Merchants and Principal Inhabitants of the Island of St. Vincent," March 29, 1795, TNA: PRO CO 260/13, ff. 21-25.

³⁰ Young, *Account of the Black Charaibs*, "Dedication."

³¹ Drewry Ottley to the Duke of Portland, London, September 23, 1795, TNA: PRO CO 260/13, f. 200.

that native peoples possessed the lands they lived on (even if the theories were not largely honored in practice), and “however ‘savage,’ however ‘odious’ to European sensibilities the Native Americans might appear to be...few Europeans could accept that they were anything other than human, and as human they clearly possessed both political and territorial rights.”³² Indeed, one could say that because these rights were so widely acknowledged, a primary question of imperial policy became that of how to circumvent valid aboriginal claims to the land. As Pagden also discusses, most Europeans did not consider conquest to be a legitimate means of gaining title to Amerindian territorial possessions. The Iberian Empire may have been founded on the forcible taking of land and the extermination of millions of natives, but such practices were reviled, even by Spanish observers, as exemplifying the worst excesses of power. Desirous of distinguishing their own forms of dominion from these precedents, the British and the French were quick to condemn the use of violence in colonial settlement.³³

Additionally, Young had the burden of addressing specific accusations about the history of British colonization on St. Vincent. In particular, the First Carib War provoked what Peter Hulme has identified as a contentious debate over the conduct of the British government regarding the island. Those critical of the government charged it with supporting the use of violent force against the Caribs and allowing the colonists to tarnish the moral principles of the nation. As one anonymous contributor to *The Scots Magazine* wrote in 1772, “Thus is the British Government reviving the Spanish cruelties at the conquest of Mexico, to gratify avaricious merchants, landholders, and venal commissioners.”³⁴ Even more significantly, the activist

³² Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500-c. 1800* (New Haven and London, 1995), 75.

³³ *Ibid.*, 87. Bartolomé de las Casas’ *Brevissima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (1552) began the tradition of condemning the Spanish treatment of Amerindians and was widely reprinted and recirculated.

³⁴ Hulme, *Colonial Encounters*, 248.

Granville Sharp argued that because the Carib Lands of St. Vincent had been occupied by the Caribs in 1763, the French had had no right to bequeath them to the British in the first place.³⁵

The argument about the fundamental invalidity of France and Britain's agreement resurfaced in 1793 with the publication of Bryan Edwards' *History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*. In his history, Edwards chastised the authors of the treaty for not mentioning the Caribs at all, "as if no such people existed."³⁶ Perhaps because of the popularity of Edwards' *History*, Young felt compelled to respond to its charges and included a footnote in his *Account* claiming that Edwards had been "misinformed" about the situation in St. Vincent and hoping that he would be open to making "some alteration and amendment" to future editions.³⁷ Interestingly, Edwards responded to Young in the 1801 edition of his *History* but only to maintain his position. While identifying Young as a "most respectable friend," he nevertheless emphatically stated that he would "not sacrifice, even on the shrine of friendship, the dignity of historical narration, by asserting that my friend has entirely convinced me that the pretensions of Great Britain were originally founded on any other plea than that of political expediency.—I am here speaking of the British claim, *as against the actual possessors of the country, the black Charaibes.*"³⁸ The italicized words represent Edwards' own emphases and indicate the strength of his belief in the legitimacy of the Carib position. They also indicate that the issue of Carib land rights was anything but a closed topic in British thought and writing.

³⁵ Ibid., 247.

³⁶ Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, 3 vols. (London, 1793), 1: 392.

³⁷ Young, *Account of the Black Charaibs*, 32-33.

³⁸ Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, 3 vols. (London, 1801), 1: 423.

It is unlikely that Anderson initially intended to contribute to ongoing debates over Carib identity and territory, given that he begins his natural history with the aim of providing his readers with “some idea of the situation, structure, climate, seasons and soils of the island.”³⁹ Yet this clear plan of providing geographical context quickly devolved, as his description of the part of the island known as Owia called up memories of the Caribs launching some of their first attacks of the Second Carib War from that point.⁴⁰ Indeed, the more Anderson wrote, the more the war dominated his narrative, which switched at its midpoint to a lengthy account of the Caribs. As he introduces them, “What renders the natural history of Saint Vincent more interesting and curious than that of any other West Indian island...is its being long the residence of a singular tribe of men nowhere else known (the Black Caribs), whose history, manner of gaining possession of greater part of the country, modes of life and manners are at this time but little known in Great Britain...”⁴¹ Referring to the subject of the Caribs as “interesting and curious,” Anderson suggests that his desire to write about them stems from a scientific concern for new and unusual phenomena, such as the existence of the “singular” Black Caribs. Yet in noting that he will discuss not only their “modes of life and manners” but also their “manner of gaining possession of greater part of the country,” Anderson reveals his interest in the issue of competing British and Carib claims to the island.

By naming the Caribs “Black,” Anderson also indicates his participation in the differentiating discourses that Young and other colonial authors popularized. Indeed, Anderson’s account of the Caribs largely matches up with Young’s story about their origins. Repeating the claims about the wreck of the slave ship and the extermination of the Red Caribs by African invaders, Anderson bemoans the fact that the Black Caribs “have been confounded with the

³⁹ Anderson, *Geography and History*, 8.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

aboriginal inhabitants,” when in fact “no two tribes of men are more distinct.” For Anderson, this belief had been erroneously promulgated by people like Edwards, whom he refers to indirectly in addressing the criticisms directed against the British government regarding the First Carib War. According to Anderson, these charges were unjust and made it his “incumbent duty...to exculpate the English inhabitants [of St. Vincent] from inhumanity or tyranny...and [to] do away [with] similar charges against His Majesty’s ministers in sanctioning their extermination.” Anderson may have gestured towards objectivity in claiming that he intended to present only “facts and personal knowledge divested of partiality and prejudice,” but he nevertheless indicates that his sympathies lay with his fellow colonists.⁴²

Indeed, even more than Young, Anderson worked to subject the St. Vincent Caribs to regimes of classification that would render them into two completely distinct races. As Anderson noted to Banks in the same letter that announced his plans for a “Flora,” he was hard at work trying to find examples of the “Craniums of the Yellow Caribs, or Aborigenes.” The skulls were proving difficult to track down, however, since most of the Yellow Caribs (as Anderson called the Red Caribs) had been “extirpated by the Black Caribs.” Further problems were caused by the fact that the Yellow Caribs considered “any attempt to disturb the ashes of their Ancestors...as the greatest of crimes.” Yet Anderson went forward with the violation of their burial sites by recovering the skull of a man who he claimed was a Yellow Carib “chief.”⁴³

Banks most likely deputized Anderson to collect Yellow or Red Carib skulls because European naturalists became increasingly involved in the late eighteenth century in the physical categorization not only of flora and fauna but also of human beings. With the Enlightenment elevation of reason to the status of the most important human faculty, skulls became crucial

⁴² Ibid., 42-43.

⁴³ Alexander Anderson to Joseph Banks, St. Vincent, May 3, 1789, DTC 6, Botany Library, Natural History Museum, London, f. 159.

pieces of evidence in the construction of new theories of difference.⁴⁴ It would have been important for Banks to collect Amerindian skulls in particular because of the advent of Linnaeus and Buffon's wide-ranging and systematic philosophies of nature. To aim at nothing less than an explanation of human variation on a global scale would have been unthinkable, as would have been the non-inclusion of specimens of American humanity.⁴⁵

In addition to being interested in the indigeneity of the Caribs, Anderson also found himself having to identify the plants that were native to St. Vincent. Because St. Vincent had remained uncolonized for so many centuries, its ecologies, as well as those of the Lesser Antilles more broadly, were not well known to the European scientific community. As superintendent of the royal botanic garden, Anderson's duties thus included finding new species, especially if they could serve some practical or commercial use.⁴⁶ In order to carry out his mission, Anderson regularly made expeditions across St. Vincent and even into the Carib territories, to which most colonists rarely, if ever, ventured. In contrast, Anderson spoke in his natural history of climbing the volcanic peak La Soufrière, which lay in the heart of the Carib Lands.⁴⁷ He also spoke of his discovery of "a great variety of indigenous plants on the summits of the mountains, many rare and beautiful, several of which [are] nowhere else seen."⁴⁸ Anderson's comfort with traversing St. Vincent's difficult terrain is obvious here, as is his enthusiasm for the project of discovering "rare and beautiful" native flora.

⁴⁴ For more on the rise of skull collecting in the eighteenth century, see Londa L. Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (Boston, 1993), 149. For nineteenth-century skull collecting in the United States, see Ann Fabian, *The Skull Collectors: Race, Science, and America's Unburied Dead* (Chicago, 2010).

⁴⁵ For an explanation of Buffon's theories of nature, see Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750-1900*, trans. Jeremy Moyle (Pittsburgh, 1973). For discussions of the relationship between Linnaeus and Buffon's philosophies, see Phillip R. Sloan, "The Buffon-Linnaeus Controversy," *Isis* 67, no. 3 (1976): 356-75, and Sloan, "The Gaze of Natural History," in Christopher Fox, Roy Porter, and Robert Wokler, eds., *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth-Century Domains* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1995), 112-51.

⁴⁶ As Londa Schiebinger has argued, "bioprospecting" or the search for new botanical commodities formed a central part of imperial expansion in the eighteenth century. See Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 2004).

⁴⁷ Anderson, *Geography and History*, 7-8.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

Yet in his discussion of his surveys of the island, Anderson seems to have found his understanding of indigeneity challenged, ironically, by his very quest to find botanical exemplars of it. As he further describes the plants he encountered in the mountains of St. Vincent, “What is remarkable, some of the identical species, natives of the forests of Guiana, are natives of its woods. This is the more striking when we regard the great distance, vast difference in the soils and face of the two countries.”⁴⁹ Although Anderson may have identified some species as “natives” of St. Vincent, they also appeared to be “natives” of Guiana on the South American continent. Anderson’s glossing of this fact as “remarkable” and “striking” suggests an underlying unease with the identification of these plants as indigenous to either location. How could a plant be native to two places and thus possess two separate points of origin? If it could only have one true home, how could someone determine which location was the correct one, given that the plant seemed to belong in both? These questions were especially troubling given the distance separating Guiana from St. Vincent, and Anderson does not seem to have been able to answer them fully.

Even more troublingly, the challenges that St. Vincent’s plants posed for Anderson’s classificatory schema pointed back to the problem of the Caribs. Their conduct during the First and Second Carib Wars had identified them as dangerous subjects with a tendency to undermine colonial projects of settlement, and they appear in this section of Anderson’s narrative as the disrupters of his botanical attempts to control nature. Formulating one explanation for the appearance of the same plants in St. Vincent and Guiana, Anderson links the Caribs to the island’s native flora by concluding that “Most of the common fruits in St. Vincent as well as in the other Carribe islands are not then spontaneous productions but originally imported from the

⁴⁹ Ibid.

continent by the aborigines or from the larger islands in its vicinity.”⁵⁰ In doing so, Anderson suggests that some of the confusion about native species originated with the Amerindian transfer of plants between different parts of the Caribbean. From the precolonial era, native groups had spread useful crops like cassava, sweet potatoes, and tobacco from place to place via canoe travel and migration. As they moved and established new settlements, they also brought agricultural practices like conuco or mound cultivation with them.⁵¹ Anderson’s statement therefore had the effect of acknowledging a long history of Carib botanical agency.⁵² It also had the effect, however, of making the study of plant indigeneity inseparable from a consideration of Carib actions and of turning the Caribs into the primary source of Anderson’s dilemma, since their transplantations made it impossible to determine whether certain species were native to St. Vincent.

In fact, as Anderson wrapped up his musings on the roles the Caribs played in shaping St. Vincent’s landscape, his observations became even more direct allegories of Carib resistance to colonization. Turning to an extended anecdote to illustrate the conjoined movements of plants and people, Anderson writes,

The guava, sour sop, papa, sugar apple, altho’ now common in every island, are not indigenous to them. These now being common in pastures and margins of woods may be easily accounted for, as the seeds of fruits if swallowed in turn pass through the intestines of all animals without their vegetative property being the least injured but rather promoted. Some of them are readily spread abroad in fields and woods by agoutis, rats and birds, all of which are fond of all the esculent fruits of the country. The smaller seeds of fruits are propagated by the Indians and negroes more expeditiously from principle of cleanliness, which leads them to cover their foeces with earth, hence the number of young plants of guava and sour sop, for example, that are seen to spring up in a short time from where the seeds have been so deposited.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid., 39-40.

⁵¹ See Carl Ortwin Sauer, *The Early Spanish Main* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966), 51-59, and David Watts, *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture and Environmental Change Since 1492* (Cambridge, 1987), 41-77.

⁵² Richard Grove points out that this acknowledgment is “not surprising in view of the fact that [Anderson] himself was concerned with transfer projects.” Grove, *Green Imperialism*, 303.

⁵³ Anderson, *Geography and History*, 40.

On the one hand, this passage could quite easily be read as evidence of Anderson's demeaning conflation of the Caribs with animals. It also could be taken as evidence of his ultimate devaluation of the Caribs as botanists, since he equates their acts of planting with the excretion of seeds by "agoutis, rats and birds." On the other, the passage signals the way in which Carib uses of the island undercut colonists' attempts to subdue their surroundings. The guava and other fruit trees that the Caribs propagated, after all, contributed to the reforestation of the "pastures and margins of woods," which planters would have been working to clear in order to expand their cane fields. As early as the seventeenth century, Richard Ligon complained in his history of Barbados that the guava tree "doth much harm in our Plantations; for the Cattle eating of them, let fall their loads every where, and so they grow in abundance, and do much harm to the Pastures, and much pains and labour is taken to destroy them."⁵⁴ Monique Allewaert has argued that colonial texts about the Caribbean often assimilated their discussions of non-European rebellion into meditations on the unruly and uncontrollable nature of the environment.⁵⁵ Anderson's observations about the guava and other fruits thus imply a deep-seated fear of the Caribs' effects, as much as they do a condescending dismissal of them.

The above passage is also revealing because it departs from the Black-Red Carib terminology that Anderson uses in the more directly ethnographic portions of his natural history. As he writes instead, it is the "Indians and negroes" who are disrupting the colonial landscapes of the island's planters. Yet in doing so, Anderson again raises questions with the potential to negate his racial classifications of the St. Vincent Caribs. For does the phrase "Indians and negroes" refer to the Red and Black Caribs respectively, or does it refer instead to the Caribs and

⁵⁴ Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (London, 1657), 71.

⁵⁵ M. Allewaert, "Swamp Sublime: Ecologies of Resistance in the American Plantation Zone," *PMLA* 123, no. 2 (2008): 340-57.

enslaved Africans working for the British? If it is the latter case, then is Anderson including the Black Caribs, if only implicitly, within the category of the Indian or indigenous? Notably, in the passages of the natural history that discuss botanical issues, the terms ‘Black’ and ‘Red’ or ‘Yellow Carib’ never appear. As such, these passages gesture towards alternative views of Carib raciality.

In fact, when the language of botany surfaces at the conclusion of the natural history, it does so to present an explicit challenge to Anderson’s earlier construction of two distinct categories of Carib. The terminology of Black versus Red again disappears as Anderson comments that “The St. Vincent Caribs were a peculiar race and from accidental causes different from all other tribes of men. Altho’ originally Africans, from the mixture and connection with the American Indians they were what we may call a hybrid race from the two.”⁵⁶ Anderson still contends here that the Caribs were “originally Africans,” but he no longer says that it was only the Black Caribs who had these ancestors. Instead, it was the “St. Vincent Caribs” or all the Caribs of the island who could trace their ancestry back to Africa. Furthermore, Anderson allows that the Africans who arrived in St. Vincent engaged in “mixture and connection with the American Indians” until they formed a “hybrid race from the two.” Jill H. Casid has usefully pointed out the origins of the concept of hybridity in late eighteenth-century discourses of botany promoting the crossbreeding and creation of novel plant species. Casid also argues that the category of the hybrid played a key role in the emergence of new ideas of human difference, as it “naturalize[d] claims that there were not only distinct races but that these ‘races’ constituted separable and unmixable species.”⁵⁷ We can certainly see that the “hybrid” helps Anderson to portray the St. Vincent Caribs as a distinct or “peculiar race.” At the

⁵⁶ Anderson, *Geography and History*, 98.

⁵⁷ Jill H. Casid, *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization* (Minneapolis, 2005), 3.

same time, Anderson's characterization of the Caribs as mixed also works to acknowledge the complex processes of ethnogenesis that occurred as Amerindians and Africans banded together to create new societies on the island.

The alliance of diverse peoples against imperial domination is what ultimately deconstructed British rhetorics of racial separation in St. Vincent. Colonists wove complex stories about the origins of the Caribs in order to deny them indigenous status and weaken any territorial claims that they might have made based on aboriginal possession. Strategies of racial classification became a central component of attempts to defend British colonization of the island after 1763. The use of violence against the Caribs, however, raised questions about the legitimacy of colonial actions, as well as about the rights of native peoples to resist conquest. As a colonist himself, Anderson abhorred the threat that the Caribs posed during the Second Carib War and used his scientific endeavors to promote their racialization. Yet in composing his natural history of St. Vincent, Anderson found himself confronting issues of indigeneity in a different, botanical register, and his study of plants forced him to recognize the contradictions inherent in his attempts to classify the Caribs. The Caribs were human beings, not objects, and their actions served as reminders of the fierce resistance they had put up to cooptation by imperial states. As Anderson begrudgingly found himself acknowledging of the Caribs' forebears, "An act of Providence liberated [them] from the chains of slavery. After that event they long maintained their independence, ingratitude and cruelty to their protectors. They certainly had a prior right to any European power to the island."⁵⁸ Finally admitting their possession of St. Vincent, Anderson also memorialized the Caribs' long-standing desires for independence and freedom.

⁵⁸ Anderson, *Geography and History*, 51.

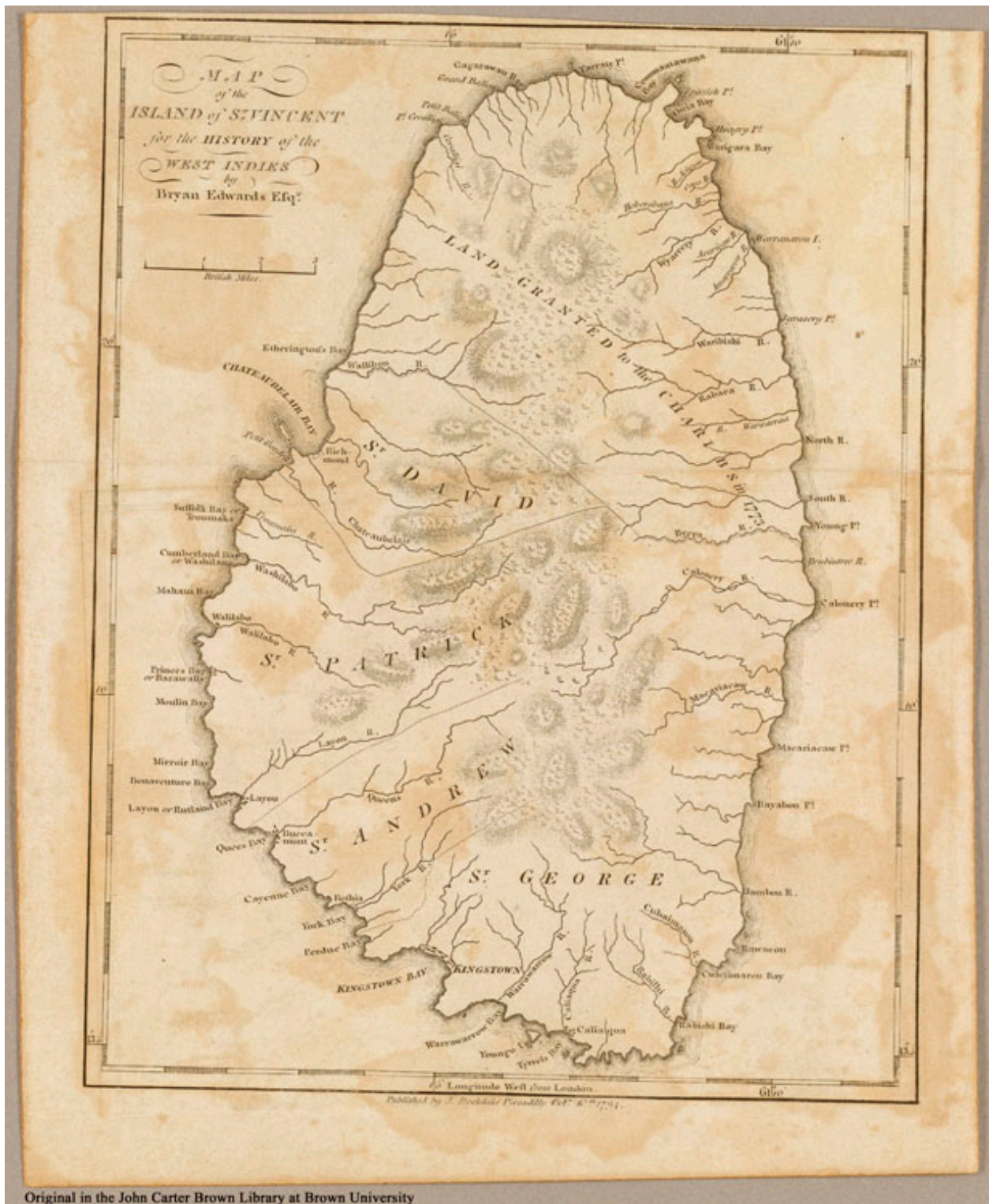


Figure 1. "Map of the Island of St. Vincent for the History of the West Indies by Bryan Edwards Esqr.," with "Land Granted to the Charibs in 1773" in the north (Piccadilly, 1794).