

Our African Legacy: Roots and Routes

The National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago invites you to follow the various journeys through which people of African descent - enslaved, liberated, or free, came to Trinidad and Tobago, during the 17th to 19th centuries.

Whether they were enslaved, landowners, former soldiers or indentured labourers, people of African descent have left a rich legacy which has shaped our unique Trinbagonian identity.



Africa and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

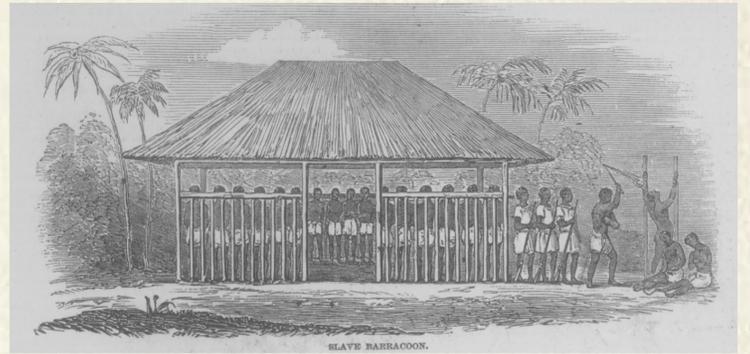


The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade or Triangular Trade existed between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries and it connected the economies of three continents – Europe, Africa and the Americas or “the New World.” Ships from Western Europe traded their goods for African captives, who were then transported to the Americas. In the Americas, valued agricultural products, such as sugar, tobacco and cotton, were produced using the labour of the enslaved, and then shipped back to Europe.

As a result of this trade, an estimated 15 million Africans were forcibly removed from their home and sold in the New World. Many also died as a result of slave raids, transportation and imprisonment and unsatisfactory conditions on the journey to the Americas- the Middle Passage. Some African scholars refer to the trafficking of the enslaved as the “Maafa” (‘great disaster’ in Swahili).

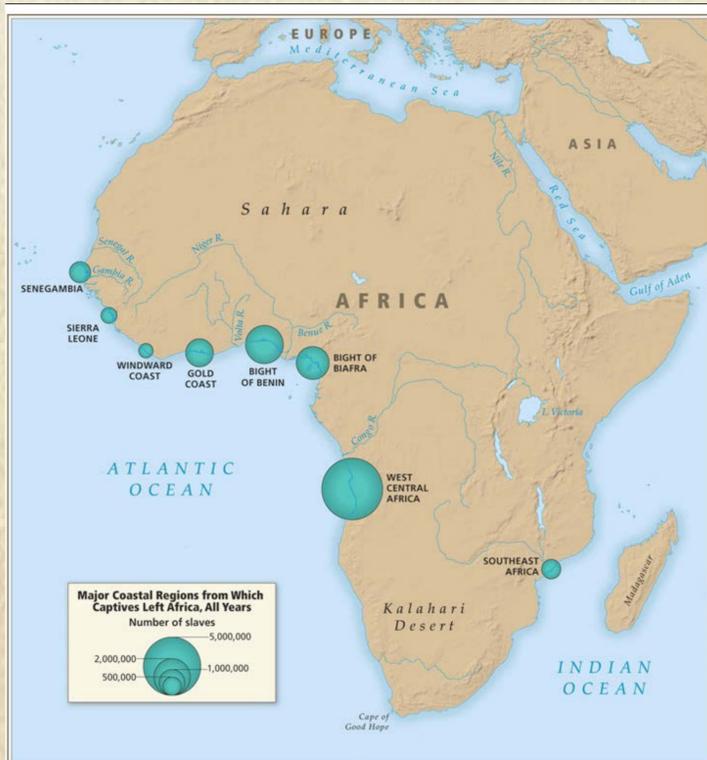
Slaves were procured for this trade from the following regions:

1. Senegambia – Senegal and Gambia
2. Upper Guinea – Guinea-Bissau, Guinea and Sierra Leone
3. Windward Coast – Liberia and Ivory Coast
4. Gold Coast – Ghana and East of Ivory Coast
5. Bight of Benin (Slave Coast) – Togo, Benin, Nigeria west of the Niger Delta
6. Bight of Biafra – Nigeria east of the Niger Delta, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon
7. West Central Africa – Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola
8. South Eastern Africa – Mozambique and Madagascar



Slave barracoons were a common feature along several points of slave embarkation on the African coast.

In 1807, British and US Governments made the trade illegal. Beginning in 1810, the British established a network of treaties that allowed their naval vessels to detain the slave ships of other nations. Emancipation finally came in 1838.



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Free People of Colour and Africans

Under Spanish rule, Trinidad remained underdeveloped for many years. It was not until 1783, under the Cedula of Population, that the Spanish Government encouraged immigration to facilitate the development of a plantation economy. Offers of free grants of land and tax concessions were made to French Catholic planters who were noted for their expertise in the sugar cultivation.

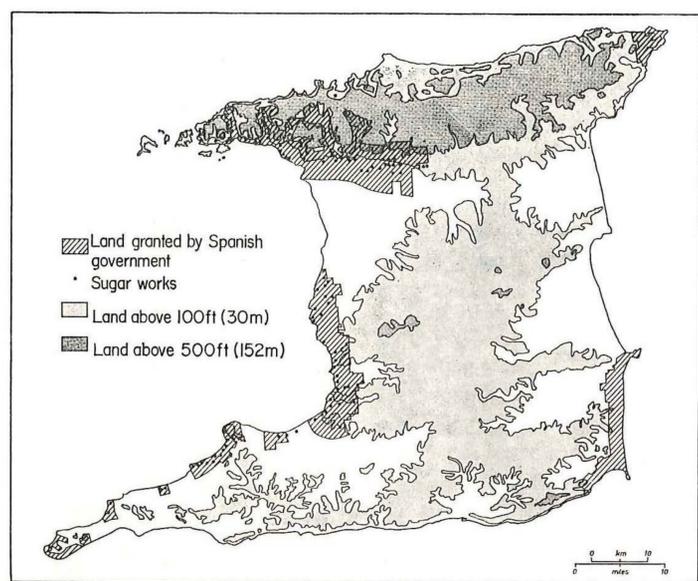
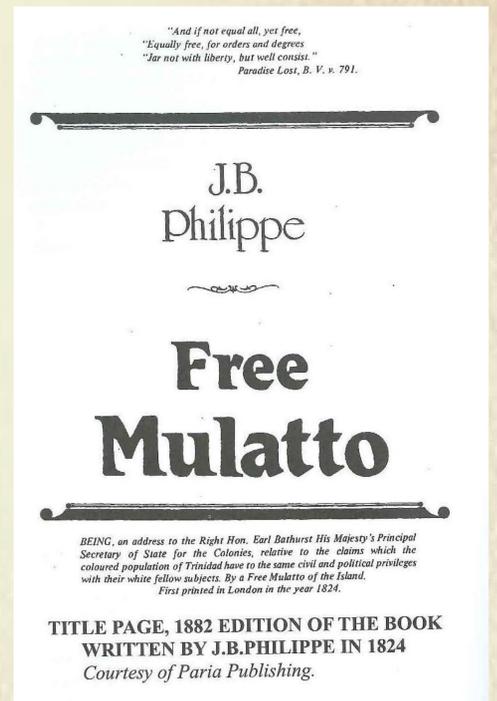


Fig. 12. Spanish land grants.

Among the planters who took up the opportunity were free people of colour (or mulattoes) as well as Africans who had been manumitted. They came from Martinique, Guadeloupe, Ste. Domingue (now Haiti), Grenada, and St. Lucia, with their capital, enslaved Africans, expertise and agricultural skills. As landowners and owners of enslaved Africans, they established flourishing estates of sugar, cocoa, and other products mainly in the Naparimas in south Trinidad.



A unique feature of the Cedula was the granting of equal civil and legal rights and privileges to all settlers including people of colour. But this was to be challenged after British conquest of Trinidad in 1797 when there was enforcement of anti-coloured rule which had existed elsewhere in the Caribbean. This was no doubt fuelled by the larger numbers of people of colour on the island, and by fears that some of them may have been supporters of the Haitian Revolution.

In 1823, led by Jean-Baptiste Philippe, the people of colour petitioned the Colonial Office for reinstatement of their rights, eventually leading to the March 1829 Order in Council granting complete equality. Trinidad became the first British Caribbean colony where people of colour gained their civil rights. They paved the way for the development of an educated middle class in Trinidad.

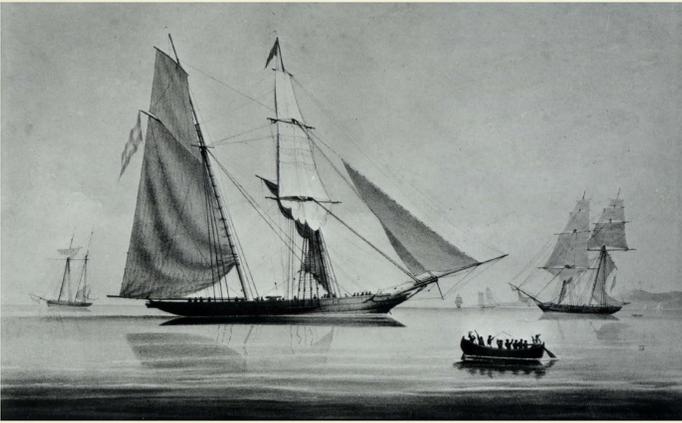
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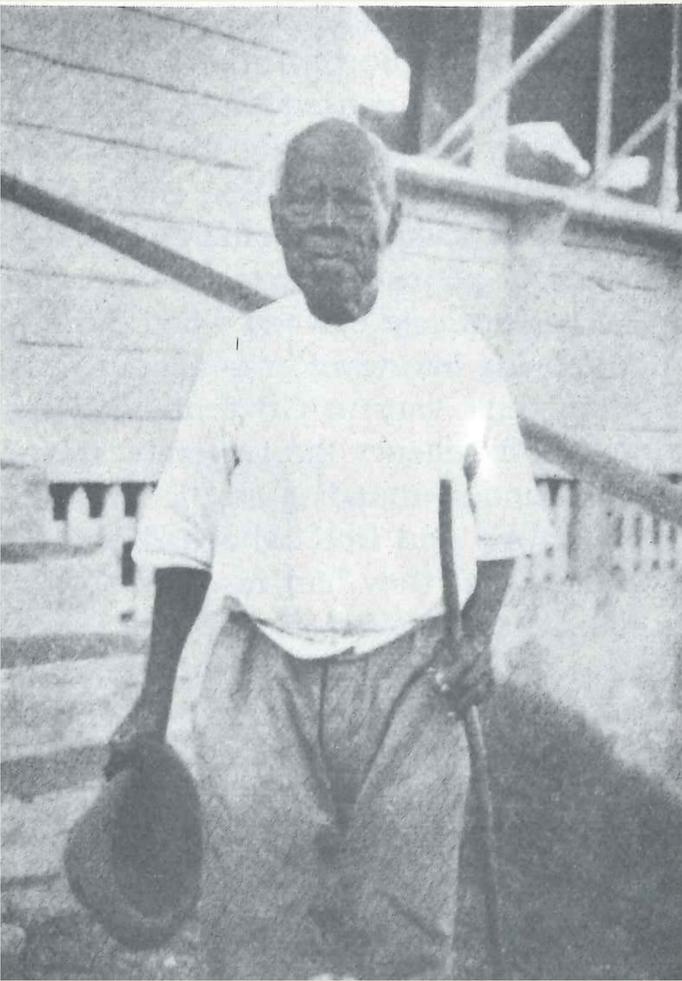


Camille Dédierre, a Martiniquian mulatto who settled in Trinidad. Photo courtesy Paria Publishing Co. Ltd.

Liberated Africans



After the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1807, the British Royal Navy sought to stop the illegal trade in enslaved Africans. Thus, they patrolled the coast of West Africa and the Caribbean Sea, stopping and searching any ship they suspected of being a slaver and seizing those ships guilty of participating in the illegal trade. Africans who were rescued in the Caribbean Sea, were transported to different British islands whilst those captured in the slave ports of Havana and Rio de Janeiro were left under the care of selected planters and merchants in those territories. Simultaneously, those captured on the West African coast were repatriated to either St. Helena or Sierra Leone.



William Panzoo Campbell c.1828-1938, the liberated African who survived the longest in Tobago. *Photo courtesy Paria Publishing Co. Ltd.*

After the end of 1820, six bilateral commissions were set up by the British, Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch governments. The purpose of these commissions were to declare whether or not the seizure of a slaver was proper or improper and where the vessels were properly seized they were empowered to declare the ship a prize of war and they could liberate the Africans onboard. With the granting of full Emancipation to the enslaved Africans of the British West Indian colonies in 1838, a labour shortage was soon realized and the colonial government decided that the liberated Africans were one avenue through which this problem could be solved.

Beginning in 1841, there was the planned emigration of liberated Africans to Trinidad. The liberated Africans became indentured servants as they were a convenient source of labour. Between 1841 and 1861, over 8,000 Liberated Africans arrived in Trinidad

from Sierra Leone and St. Helena. Tobago received 517 liberated Africans from St. Helena in 1851 and 1862.

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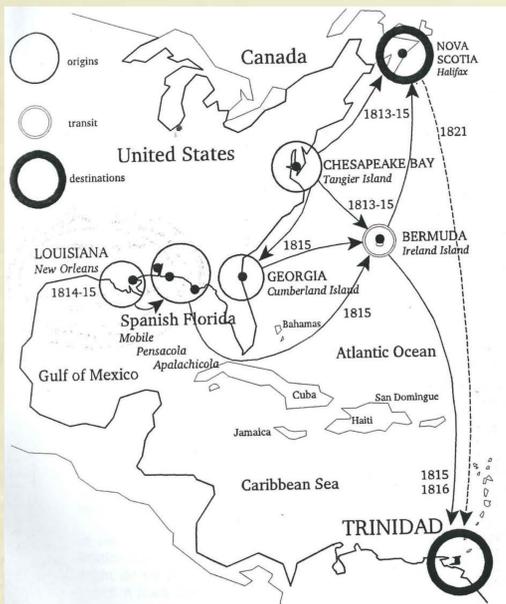
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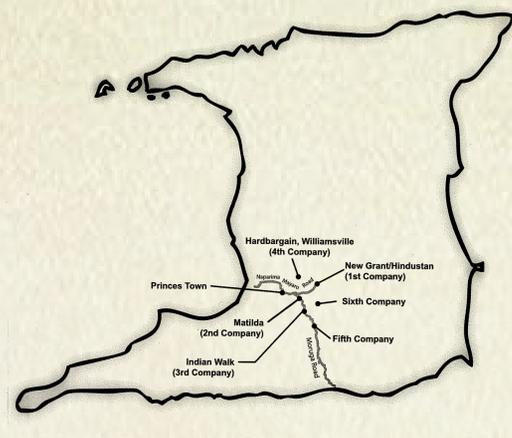
A sign at the entrance of East Dry River, Port of Spain, pays tribute to the Yoruba Village, which once covered areas of East Dry River, Belmont, Laventille and Morvant.

Merikins – the Freedom Fighters



From 1815 to the 1820s, Trinidad became the home to over 700 formerly enslaved African-Americans who earned their freedom as runaways to the British Royal Navy to fight in the War of 1812 against America.

To encourage recruitment in the War of 1812, Sir Alexander Cochrane issued the Proclamation of 1814 which allowed for enslaved African-Americans to either join the British forces or be settled in the British colonies. Many opted to join the British forces and they formed a section of the British Royal Navy called the Corps of Colonial Marines which was formed on May 18, 1814. The Corps of Colonial Marines was involved in various battles, including the Battle of Bladensburg, where Washington D.C was burnt to the ground.



At the end of the War of 1812, the soldiers were temporarily settled in the garrison at Bermuda where they were offered a choice of either serving in the West India Regiment or being settled as free men in a British colony. Vehemently refusing the former, the Corps of Colonial Marines was disbanded between 1815 and 1816 in two British colonies - Trinidad and Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.



In Trinidad however, they were granted sixteen (16) acres of land in six (6) areas, later called the Company Villages, in South Trinidad, away from the enslaved population that had already inhabited

the island. The village names were based on the naval companies in which they served as Colonial Marines.

Source:

Laurence, K.O. "The Settlement of free negroes in Trinidad before emancipation" Caribbean Quarterly. Vols. 1 and 2, 1963

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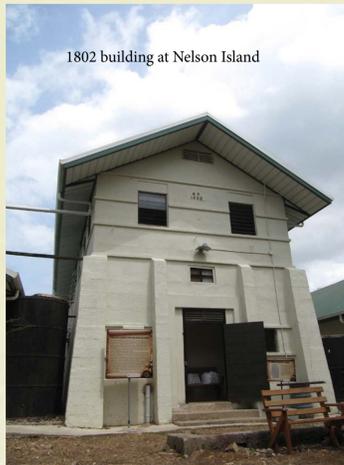


Our African Heritage

Like other groups who came to Trinidad and Tobago, the people of African descent have left a legacy that has shaped our unique Trinbagonian identity. Some aspects of that legacy have survived as authentic forms, while other aspects have merged with other cultures over time to form syncretic and indigenous cultural forms.

Built Heritage

Today there exists buildings and other relics of our colonial past which were built by enslaved and indentured Africans. The sugar mills and St. Patrick's Anglican Church in Tobago, and Fort George and the 1802 building on Nelson Island in Trinidad, are just a few examples of work completed by the enslaved or indentured Africans. They were generally involved in the clearing of land, the breaking of rocks, and the construction of roads, bridges, forts, and sugar works. They can be regarded as our early nation builders.



Religion

There are two main African-derived and syncretic faiths which have survived through generations. They are the Spiritual or Shouter Baptists and the Orisha faith (formerly called Shango). The Orisha faith has Yoruba roots and gained national recognition in the 1990s. Ancestral veneration is an integral part of the faith. Orisha festivals, such as the Rain Festival, are held throughout the year.



The Spiritual Baptist faith was prohibited by law in 1917 but the ban was eventually lifted in 1951. The 1996 holiday granted in observance of the Spiritual Baptists gave further legitimacy to the religion. The Baptist faith was first brought by the Merikins, former enslaved African-Americans who had served in the British navy and were settled in south Trinidad. There are now various manifestations of that faith, inclusive of the Spiritual Baptists.

Food

Food either commonly used in Africa or that which was commonly prepared by Africans before and after Emancipation, represent part of our culinary heritage. Ground provisions such as yam, dasheen, eddoes, bananas, plantains were popular as many Africans had cultivated their own food on or near the plantations. Dishes such as ackra (fried salt fish and flour) and cornmeal-derived dishes of payme and coo-coo are among African-inspired dishes.



Language

Many words in our vocabulary has its roots in African language. For example, "susu" is a word based on the Yoruba word "esusu," which refers to an informal savings practice common in West Africa.

The reference to "allyuh" or "you all" is based on the African language distinction between the plural "you" and the singular "you". The use of the subject-adjective without the verb, such as "he sick" is African influenced as is emphasizing through repetition eg. "I now now come back." Anansi the popular folk tale character is derived from tales from the Gold Coast while "jumbi" is a word from Angola meaning a ghost.

Folklore

Anansi stories remain the most popular of the local folktales that have African roots. Other characters, rooted in African culture are the tortoise, hare, dwen-douyen and socouyant.

Cultural practices and influences in Carnival

There are many cultural practices which can be traced back to Africa, some of which have evolved into indigenous forms such as Carnival, calypso and steelpan. The drum is the iconic African-derived musical instrument. The shapes and constructions of drums, the way they are made, are West African in nature. Tambu-bamboo is derived from "tambu," a Congolese word for drum. The bottle and spoon and



steel percussion from cowbells, iron wheels and steelpan produce tones that are West African. Stickfighting or bois is a dance-like marital art with roots in the Congo and Angola. It is still practised in places such as Moruga. "Kambule" is a Congo word meaning a parade/procession usually accompanied by call and response, singing and percussion. The idea of spirits being hidden behind masquerades, as well as having the body daubed with paint or mud is also African.

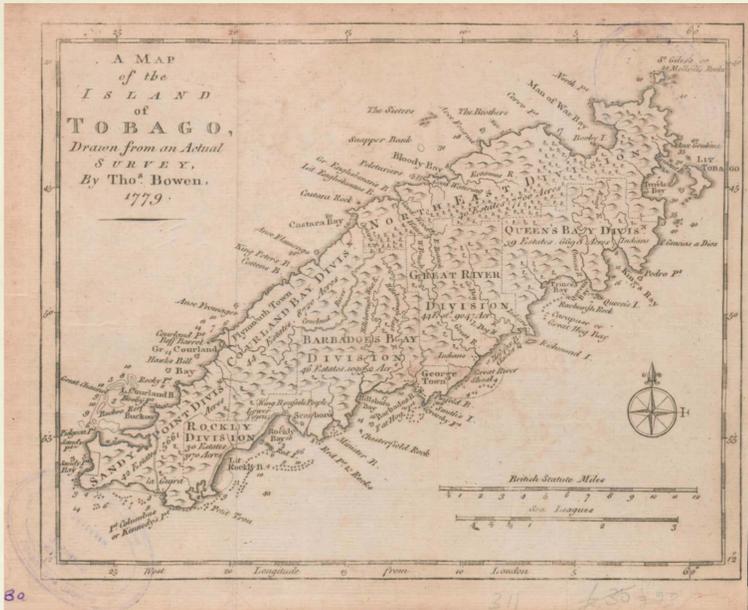


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Enslaved Africans in Tobago



Like other British West Indian colonies, Tobago flourished on a sugar plantation economy, bolstered by the labour of enslaved Africans, the majority of whom came after 1793 under British rule.

The Slave Act of 1775 was among the laws re-enacted in 1794 when the Assembly began to function. The enslaved people had no intrinsic rights and were considered a piece of property, a chattel, living in the shadow of the whip. However, this was not without reprisals as many revolted. The first revolts were in 1770 and were followed by more revolts in 1771, 1773, 1774, and 1801. Work stoppages, cane fires and other forms of sabotage, poisoning, suicide, and cultural resistance, were also subtle forms of retaliation and asserting their identity.



The Market Square viewed from the Court House, 1877.
Photo from *The Changing Society of Tobago, 1838-1938* by Susan Craig-James.

In 1819, the first year of slave registration in Tobago, the total enslaved population was 15,457. The largest enslaved populations were located in the leeward parishes. They comprised a heterogeneous group differentiated by place of residence (town or plantation), skill and occupation, gender, colour, religion, language and place of birth (African or creole). They were often distinguished as being either “attached” to plantations or “unattached” (as their owners were not owners of estates). The latter group worked mainly as domestics, carpenters, coopers, tailors and other artisans and were even hired out to estates.



St. Patrick's Anglican Church, Mt. Pleasant, Tobago, built by enslaved Africans.

One distinguishing feature of the enslaved people was their enterprise in the cultivation and sale of produce in the Sunday market. This eventually gave them socio-economic leverage and laid the foundation for the emergence of the peasant class after 1838.

Emancipation of the enslaved came in 1838 when Tobago was administered with Grenada, St. Vincent and Barbados as part of the Windward Islands. Tobago became a Ward of Trinidad in 1889.

Bacolet 397

Names of		Colour	Age	Country	Usual Employment	Remarks
Males	Females					
Nelson		Black	35	African	Field	
Red		Black	50	Creole	Field	
Red Rumbro		Black	55	African	Matchman	Bad looking
Cofford		Black	35	African	Carton	
Pfano		Black	33	Creole	Cooper	
Pierre		Black	35	Creole	Carpenter	
Parrot		Black	40	Creole	Miller	Abos
Providence		Black	50	African	Matchman	Wealthy
Piper		Black	15	Creole	Carpenter	
Phillips		Black	9	Creole		

Extract from the Tobago Slave Register 1819 -1824

Source:

Archibald, Douglas. *Tobago Melancholy Isle*, Vol. III 1807-1898. Trinidad and Tobago 2003.

Craig-James, Susan. *The Changing Society of Tobago, 1838-1838 - A Fractured Whole*, Vol 1 1838-1900. Trinidad and Tobago, 2008.

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Enslaved Africans in Trinidad

In 1606, four hundred and seventy (470) enslaved Africans were brought to Trinidad by Dutch slaver Isaac Duverne. This was the first recorded instance of enslaved Africans being brought to the island. At that time, Trinidad, which was governed by the Spanish Crown was underdeveloped and participation in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade was minimal at best. It was not until the eighteenth century that there was a substantial increase in the number of enslaved Africans in Trinidad. This was as a result of the Cedula of Population of 1783 as the Roman Catholic planters who migrated did so with their enslaved Africans.

After the island was ceded to the British in 1797 there was rampant growth in the slave population of Trinidad as the British sought to make the island into a model plantation colony. To ensure this, large numbers of enslaved Africans were imported to the island until 1807 when the British Parliament passed the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act. Between 1797 and 1807 the number of enslaved Africans grew from 10,009 to 21,895. As a result of the passage of the Abolition Act, there was the development of an Inter-Colonial Slave Trade from which Trinidad acquired approximately 6,000 enslaved Africans between 1808 and 1825.

To combat the illegal trade in enslaved Africans from both the Trans -Atlantic and Inter-Colonial Trade, the British Parliament passed the Order in Council of 1812 which made it mandatory for all enslaved Africans of Trinidad to be registered. The first registration of enslaved Africans took place in Trinidad in 1813.

The results of this registration showed that the total enslaved population was 25, 696, of which African born slaves comprised 13, 984 whilst Creole born slaves were 11,633.

The 1813 Census of Trinidad identified the ethnicity of the enslaved Africans on the island which include:

- Senegambia - Malinke, Woloff, Bambara
- Upper Guinea - Fulbe, Susu, Temne, Kissi,
- Windward Coast - Kwaka, Akwa
- Gold Coast - Kormantyn, Fanti, Akan
- Bight of Benin - Hausa, Allada, Yoruba, Whydah
- Bight of Biafra - Igbo
- West Central Africa - BaKongo

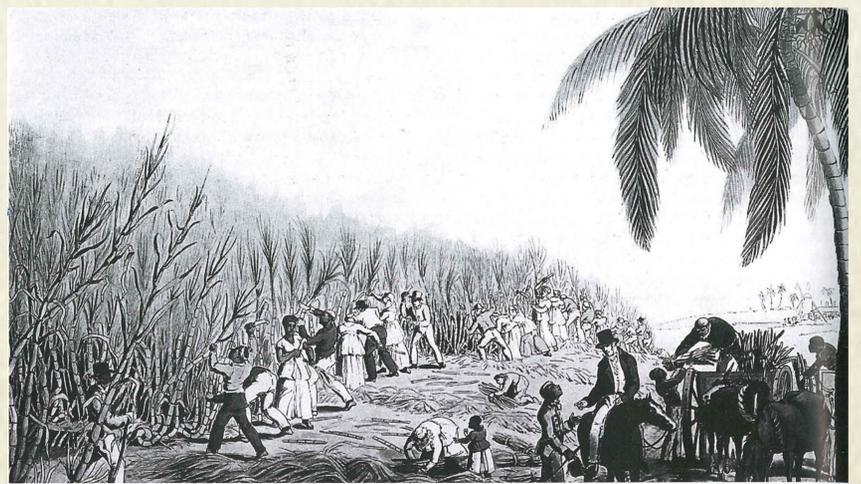
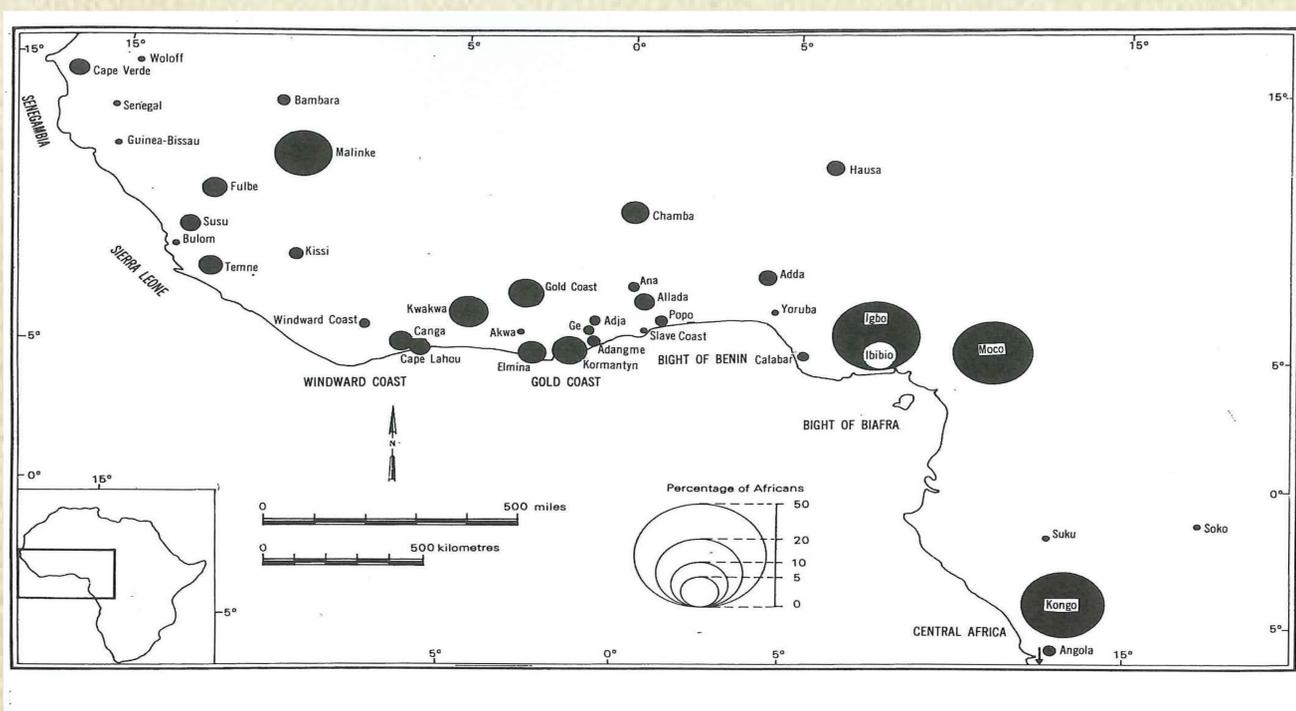


Fig 8.3 Sugar crop - cutting cane



Origin of African-born slaves: Trinidad, 1813.

Map taken from "Slave Populations of the British Caribbean: 1807-1834" by B.W. Higman.

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- Higman, B. W. Slave Populations of the British Caribbean: 1807-1834. Baltimore U.a.: Johns Hopkins U Pr., 1984. Print.
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West India Regiments

The West India Regiments were infantry units within the British Army. There was a need for a colonial army in the island colonies and West Africa and as such enslaved African men were drafted into these regiments as it was believed they were better suited to fight in tropical conditions and were not as susceptible to disease as the Europeans. Although they were members of the British Army, enslaved African soldiers were still vulnerable to the harsh British Slave Laws. However, in 1807, the amended Mutiny Act made all African soldiers who were recruited as slaves free men.

Recruits for these regiments were acquired through three different phases and methods which were:

Phase I (1795 to 1807) – Recruits bought directly from suppliers in Africa

Phase II (1808 to 1815) – Recruits were Prisoners of War and Recaptives

Phase III (1812 to 1815) – Voluntary Recruits from Sierra Leone



The 1st West India Regiment

There were a total of twelve West India Regiments established between 1795 and 1812. The 1st West India Regiment was established on 2nd May 1795. According to A. B Ellis, "The Negro West India troops won the highest commendations from every British commander under whom they served." However, with the end of the War of 1812, the number of regiments decreased and the War Office was faced with relocating them.

The 3rd and 6th West India Regiments

In 1817 the 6th West India Regiment which was stationed in Tobago was demobilized. It was suggested that they take up residence in the remote East Coast of Trinidad where they would be far removed from the already established enslaved population and they would be able to open up a road network to Manzanilla. In January 1818, 180 disbanded soldiers settled in Quare (Valencia), where they were granted eight (8) acres of Crown Land if they were single or sixteen (16) acres of Crown Land if they had a family. In 1819, the 3rd West India Regiment, which was stationed in Trinidad, was partially demobilized as five companies of this regiment still bore arms. The first group of demobilized soldiers were settled on the East Coast in Quare (Valencia), Turure and La Sieva in June/July 1819. In February 1825, the remaining five companies

were demobilized and settled in Upper, Lower and North Manzanilla. Among the former soldiers were a few Mandingo Muslim ex-sargeants who converted many of the settlers to Islam.

In the following years, many of the former soldiers and their families settled elsewhere and the settlement began to lose its identity.

Sources:

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Ellis, A. B. *History of the First West India Regiment*. London: Chapman, 1885. Print.

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