

THE VIRGIN ISLANDS UNDER THE UNITED STATES NAVAL ADMINISTRATION,
1917-1931

by

Gregory R. La Motta

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
the University of Maryland in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

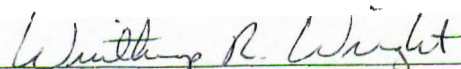
1982

APPROVAL SHEET

Title of Thesis: The Virgin Islands under the United States
Navel Administration, 1917-1931

Name of Candidate: Gregory Raymond La Motta
Master of Arts, 1982

Thesis and Abstract Approved:


Winthrop R. Wright
Associate Professor
Department of History

Date Approved: April 21, 1982

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: The Virgin Islands under the United States
Naval Administration, 1917-1931

Gregory Raymond La Motta, Master of Arts, 1982

Thesis directed by: Winthrop R. Wright, Professor, Department
of History

This thesis examines the United States naval administration of the Virgin Islands to determine how the transfer from Danish to American sovereignty affected the island society. This examination provides some insights into the establishment of an American government as part of the history of the Virgin Islands. The paper tries to determine whether the United States naval administration represented more the beginning of a break with the colonial system developed under the Danes, or the continuation of that process of colonialism.

This study, largely utilizes the documents contained in several Record Groups of the National Archives. By the information obtained from these documents, the paper analyzes the relationship of social classes to the political and economic systems of the islands.

This analysis reveals that the political and economic systems continued to operate for the benefit of the colonial power and a small local elite. Largely due to their racist perceptions of Virgin Islanders, the navy sought to maintain the systems that ensured white domination of the society. This adherence to the existing order disappointed many Virgin Islanders, who hoped that American rule would bring political and social reforms to the colony. Despite the institution of some American cultural practices, the system of colonialism changed little during the fourteen years of United States Navy rule.

Table of Contents

	Page Number
Introduction	1
One: The Government and the Economy	11
Two: Labor	32
Three: Americanization	53
Four: The Radicals v. The Navy	72
Five: The End of Navy Rule	100
Conclusion	123
Appendix	128
Bibliography	129

. . . When you speak of "irresponsible and self seeking agitators" certainly you could not have had in mind the groups of members of the Colonial Councils of the Virgin Islands who are at present in the United States endeavoring to arouse Congressional and Presidential interest in the unsatisfactory state of affairs in the Virgin Islands May your stay in my native home be a pleasant one, and may I express the wish of conferring with you personally upon my return? . . . *

. . . they won't cultivate the Island they ain't care to cent about the laboring class of people weather we dead are not we who putting money in they pocket and if they don't give work that sinking the Island this can't pay to have one or two man suffering a Island of people in this way they taking advantage of we poor people in this Island.**

*Excerpt of letter from Jean B. Hestres, a member of the colonial council delegation in New York City, to the navy governor of the Virgin Islands, 16 October 1925, File 95, Record Group 55 Entry 2, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

**Excerpt of letter from anonymous laborer of St. Croix to naval governor. The sugar factories of the island have just gone bankrupt due to the Great Depression, Undated (1930), File 58, RG 55/3, NA.



50W

20N

Atlantic Ocean

101

BAHAMA ISLANDS
ANDROS
NASSAU

CAICOS IS
TURKS IS

HAITI
Port au Prince
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
Santo Domingo

JAMAICA
Kingston

GRAND CAYMAN

PUERTO RICO
San Juan
VIRGIN IS
ST MARTIN
ANGUILLA
BARBUDA
ANTIGUA
ST KITTS
NEVIS
ST CROIX
GUADELOUPE
MARIE GALANTE
DOMINICA

MARTINIQUE
ST LUCIA
ST VINCENT
GRENADA

TOBAGO
Port of Spain
TRINIDAD

ARUBA
BOINAIRE
CURAÇAO

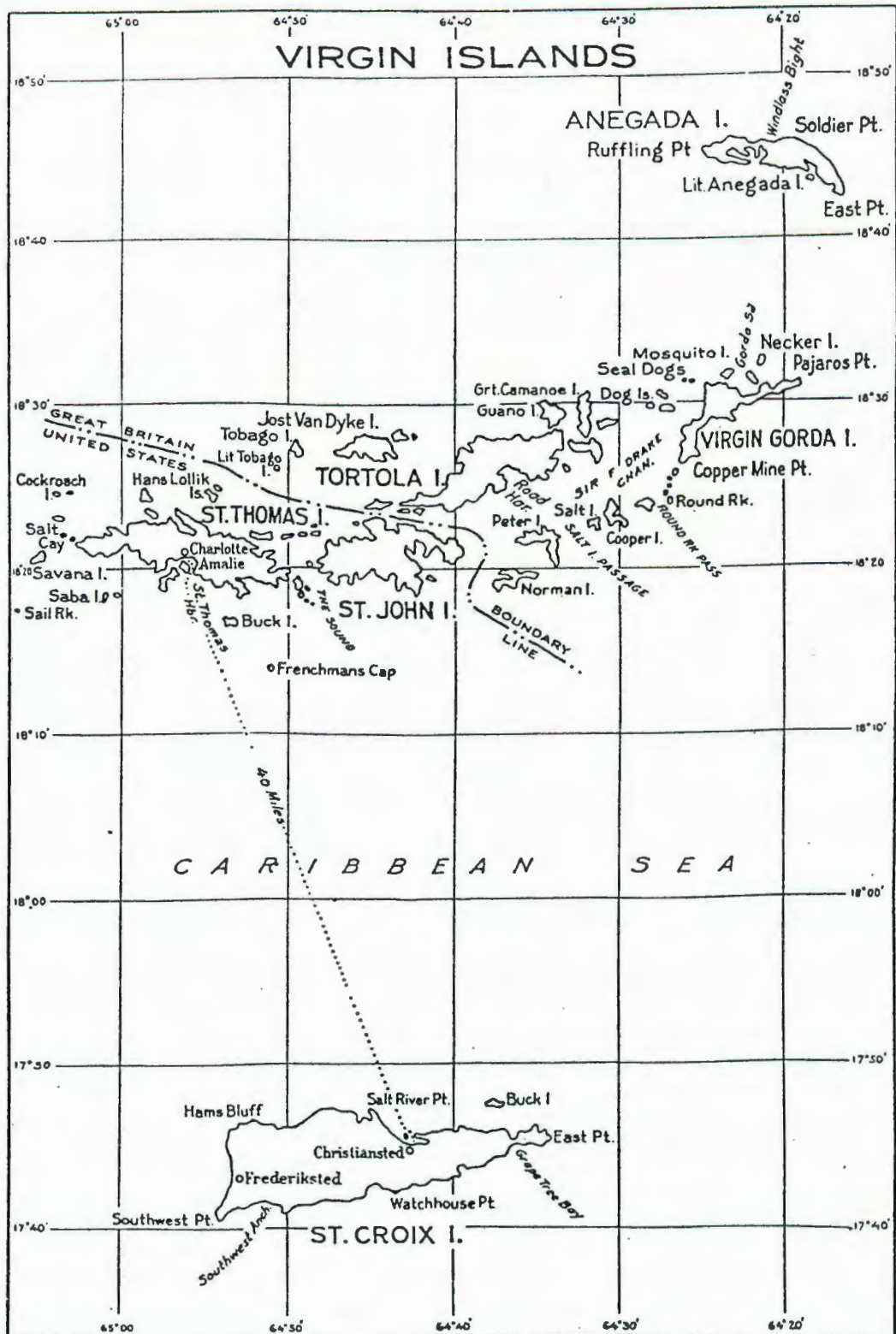
Cartagena
Lake Maracaibo

Paramaribo
Georgetown
GUYANA
SURINAM
CAYE

VENEZUELA

Caribbean Sea

CANAL



Introduction

In 1917 the United States purchased the Virgin Islands¹ from Denmark. Many Virgin Islanders expected that they would receive from the United States the political and economic benefits that had been denied them under Danish rule. They found instead that the new United States navy administration continued the practices instituted by the departed Danes. Simply put, American² colonialism replaced Danish colonialism. Ownership of the colony had passed from one country to another without changing the political, economic or social systems designed to benefit the colonizing nation and a local elite.

Denmark ruled these three small islands, St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix, for over two hundred years before selling them to the United States. In 1671 the Danes took possession of St. Thomas, in 1717 they annexed its tiny neighbor St. John, and in 1733 they bought St. Croix from France. Situated at the midpoint of the Caribbean archipelago, St. Thomas became an important commercial crossroads. The Danes operated the islands as a free port to entice ships of all nations to stop there on the way to and from Europe, Africa, North and South America. The Danes also

attempted to grow sugar cane, the major agricultural activity of the Caribbean. Unfortunately, St. Thomas proved too small and hilly for successful sugar production. This prompted the Danes to seek more suitable locations to reap the profits of sugar. They tried raising sugar cane on St. John, but failed there for the same reasons that caused problems on St. Thomas. Eventually the Danes all but abandoned St. John, and this small island ceased to be significant in the development of the Virgin Islands. The Danes finally hit the jackpot in St. Croix, where sugar made huge profits for the sugar companies and individual planters.

From 1671 to 1917, Denmark developed the Danish West Indies, as the islands were then called, along the same colonial principles that guided the expansion of other European nations over much of the world. Most importantly, colonialism called for the development of the islands for the benefit of Denmark. The major share of the profits from trade and sugar went to either the Danish government or to Danish businessmen. Denmark also retained tight political control of the islands, and the mother country made all the important decisions that affected the colony. On the islands, colonialism produced a small elite that enforced and benefitted from the system. These people were either Danes or other Europeans who were given the privileges of Danish citizenship in return for their loyalty to the colonial

system. Denmark denied citizenship to most of the other inhabitants of the islands, conferring on them only the status of "Danish subject." These people originally came unwillingly to the Danish West Indies from Africa as slaves. The Danes viewed these subjects of the crown as members of the Danish nation but refused to allow them to participate equally in society. Denmark brought Africans to the islands to produce for the colonial system, not to share in its benefits. Racism had found its integral place in the colonial system.

Colonialism proved quite adaptable to the changing fortunes of the centuries of Danish rule. During good times, the Danish government, planters and merchants happily consumed the profits of their colonial venture. In the eighteenth century when St. Croix produced enough rum, molasses and muscavado to enrich many a planter, and St. Thomas drew more than a thousand vessels each year to its harbor, Denmark rejoiced over its colonial jewels. When slavery ended in 1848, the colonial system, despite the lamentations of many planters, made a successful transition to wage labor. The dominant nature of sugar economy of St. Croix gave many workers there no choice but to work on a plantation. On St. Thomas, where the economy was not as labor-intensive, emancipation hardly mattered to the merchants. The major threat to St. Thomas came from the

introduction of steamships. The colonial economy of St. Thomas survived this threat by shifting from trade to coal bunkering. Unlike sailing vessels, the faster and larger steamships did not need to make as many stops for supplies and repairs, but they did gravitate to the harbors with the best bunkering facilities. While the island suffered from the reduction in stops, its ability to provide sufficient quantities of coal kept the economy competitive with other coaling stations in the Caribbean.

Even increasingly bad times failed to shake the colonial system. By the mid-nineteenth century, the worn-out soil of St. Croix and unfavorable market prices ended any hope for large profits in sugar. Soon high unemployment, low wages and chronic poverty afflicted the population of that island. St. Thomas fared somewhat better, but the loss of trade eventually took its toll. Still the system survived because whatever could be squeezed out of the failing economy had to be shared by only a few people. The planters and merchants complained, yet only the working class really suffered. To escape the hard times, people left the islands to look for jobs in the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Panama and the United States. People traveled to these places to work on projects such as the building of the Panama Canal. This emigration, along with a high death rate, reduced the Virgin Islands population from 39,600 in 1850 to 30,500 in 1900 and to 26,000 in 1917.³

These economic misfortunes soured Danish interest in colonialism. The islands, no longer producing much profit or taxes, had become a financial liability. The Danish leaders decided it best to get out of the business of colonialism, and they began to look for an interested buyer. The United States quickly emerged as the most serious candidate.

United States interest in the Danish West Indies dated from the time of the American Civil War, when Confederate vessels used St. Thomas as a safe haven from Union warships. American awareness of the strategic importance of the islands increased with the building of the Panama Canal. At the "gateway" to the canal, the islands, especially St. Thomas, would be useful as naval bases and coaling stations. Although the United States fulfilled this need with the occupation of Cuba and Puerto Rico, the possibility still existed that the Danish West Indies might pass into unfriendly hands. The outbreak of the Great War in 1914 caused further concern that Germany might purchase or capture them. This fear finally pushed the United States into consummating a deal with Denmark.

Although Germany probably never made any offers for the colony, the United States moved quickly. As early as October 1915, Denmark and the United States came to a tentative agreement. Then in January 1916, the two countries settled on a purchase price of \$25 million. By January 1917, they

had both ratified the treaty of transfer, and on March 1, 1917, the United States took control of the islands. One week before the United States entered World War I, the Danish West Indies became the United States Virgin Islands.

The United States bought a society that had changed little in many generations. On St. Croix, some two dozen planters of Danish and British descent owned nearly 80 percent of the land. About 100 plantations, averaging nearly 500 acres, covered the island. Three sugar companies controlled most of these plantations and manufactured almost all of the island's sugar at their factories.⁴ This planter class wielded enormous political and economic power over the 15,000 people of St. Croix. Feeling that they were the natural leaders of the society, this aristocracy resisted any changes that might improve the social position of the working class. The core of the working class consisted of the 3,000 black men and women who labored on the plantations. Their daily labors for the colonial system produced nothing for themselves but a subsistence living. A small middle class of a thousand shopkeepers, professionals and artisans earned their living largely by providing services for the plantations. This class contained a wide range of occupations, from doctors and lawyers to clerks and peddlers, and the island's main racial groups, blacks, whites and various brown mixtures. While they lacked the planters

political and economic powers, they generally received enough benefits from the society to support the upper class. Enough of these people resented upper class dominance so that when discontent against the planters appeared, middle class members often played an important role. By the time the Americans arrived on the scene, the long economic decline had created enough discontent to become a serious problem.

The social structure of St. Thomas differed somewhat from her sister island. The commercial economy created a cosmopolitan ruling class that included other people than just Britishers and Danes. Jews, Hispanics and brown Virgin Islanders often achieved equal status with white Protestant merchants. The social position of the merchants rested on the labor of black dock workers. According to the number of ships in the harbor, up to 300 men a day could get jobs as stevedores, and up to 400 people, mostly women, could find work as coal carriers. The rest of the lower class supported the system by working as construction workers, government or shop clerks, and domestic servants.⁵ St. Thomas boasted a larger middle class than St. Croix. Like their Crucian counterparts, most members of the St. Thomian middle class supported the status quo but some sympathized with attempts to improve the social position of the lower class. Nevertheless, the existence of a larger middle class, the greater diversity of jobs and higher wages than St. Croix lessened class conflicts between St. Thomas' 10,000 people.

Most of the people of both islands looked forward to the transfer to the United States. Many felt that the sale to the United States would only align the political situation with economic reality. By the end of the nineteenth century, the islands carried on more trade with the United States than they did with Denmark.⁶ Along with the fact that few Danes resided in the islands, increasing trade with the United States caused Virgin Islanders to believe that closer political ties to the wealthy United States might arrest the economic decline. The promise of political and social reforms also gained support for the sale from lower class, and some middle class, Virgin Islanders. Under the Danes, property and income qualifications restricted the franchise to a few men and racism limited the opportunities for black, and to a lesser extent brown, people to achieve a high social status. Only white persons had access to the top social circles where the important local decisions were made. In contrast to this, the Americans always seemed to be proclaiming their desire for liberty and equality for all men. These cries inspired hopes among some Virgin Islanders that American rule would bring political and social justice.

Unfortunately for those Virgin Islanders seeking reforms, the United States harbored no thoughts of abandoning the colonial system. While the now poor Virgin Islands produced few economic benefits for their new rulers, the

Americans believed in the same concepts by which Denmark had run the islands. Most importantly, the Americans shared the belief that the black lower class should never be given full political and social rights. These people would be led to a higher, more civilized standard of living, but they should never challenge white leadership.

This leadership fell to the United States Navy. Because of the wartime nature of the sale, the United States, quite logically, placed the colony under the supervision of the Navy Department. However, once purchased the islands lost their strategic importance since they were only significant if held by an enemy. Yet the United States allowed the navy to rule until 1931, because navy officers proved to be able replacements for the Danish administrators of the colonial system. While they differed with the local elite on several specific issues, the navy government favored the continuation of the traditional colonial institutions. Faced with dire economic, political and social problems, the navy officials saw no other solution than to call for discipline and hard work by the lower class. Virgin Islanders quickly realized that nothing much had changed.

Endnotes

¹"Virgin Islands" refers to the former Danish West Indies, now the Virgin Islands of the United States, as distinct from the British Virgin Islands.

²The term "American" is used throughout this paper to designate the people of the United States. This is a matter of convenience and is not intended as a slight to other American nations.

³Isaac Dookhan, A History of the Virgin Islands of the United States (Epping, Essex, England: Caribbean Universities Press in association with Bowker Publishing Company, 1974), p. 237.

⁴Thomas H. Dickinson, "The Economic Crisis in the Virgin Islands," Current History 27 (December 1927): 379; Census of the Virgin Islands of the United States, 1917 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918), pp. 116-25; Annual Report of the Governor, 1929, RG 55, NA; and Acreage of St. Croix, December 1922, File 109, RG 55/2, NA.

⁵Census of the Virgin Islands of the United States, 1917, pp. 86-7; Census of the United States 1930, Outlying Territories and Possessions (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Commerce, 1932), pp. 275-76; Boshulte to Chief of Naval Operations, 20 January 1923 and West India Company to United States Legation, Buenos Aires, 20 December 1923, File 63, RG 55/2, NA.

⁶Dookhan, A History of the Virgin Islands, pp. 246-48.

ONE

The Government and the Economy

The United States Navy inherited from the Danes the political and economic systems that had stood the test of many years of colonialism. With this in mind, the new administrators decided to leave the systems essentially intact. These systems ensured the orderly administration of the colony and kept the local elite in positions of power. Most members of this elite, while not Americans, at least belonged to the same race as the navy officials. Both navy officials and local elite believed that the well-being of the society depended on white leadership. They feared any changes that would give more political or economic power to the lazy and irresponsible black lower class. If black people ever gained positions of responsibility, the result would be chaos and ruin.

Of course, the navy had to change certain political and economic practices to conform with American customs. For example, new laws barred foreigners from holding public offices. The transfer treaty allowed Danish citizens residing in the islands to become American citizens, and most Danes made the switch, but a few retained their ties to the

former mother country. These people, along with the British and other Europeans, now had to give up any public offices they held. But such a cosmetic change did not threaten the colonial system. Other members of the upper class, with United States citizenship, filled offices abandoned by foreigners. Moreover, foreigners who met the property qualifications retained their right to vote. Satisfied with how their inheritance worked, the navy administrators made only a few minor changes.

I

Under American Navy rule, the political system developed by the Danes continued as the basis for the government of the Virgin Islands. When the United States Congress established a government for the new possessions by the Act of March 3, 1917, it copied the existing Danish constitution. Congress labeled the Act "temporary" as if more attention would be paid to organizing a government once the crises of war had passed, but no changes were made when the war ended. The Danish Colonial Law of 1863, as amended in 1906, remained in force. Ultimate political power simply passed from the Danish Crown and Rigsdag to the president and Congress of the United States.¹

The Colonial Law and the Act of March 3, 1917 concentrated political power in the office of the governor. The Act of March 3, 1917 stated:

all military, civil and judicial powers necessary to govern the West Indian Islands acquired from Denmark shall be vested in a governor and in such person or persons as the President may appoint, and shall be exercised in such manner as the President shall direct until Congress² shall provide for the government of said islands.

Since the president and Congress were far away and busy with other matters, the governors of the islands enjoyed much freedom to exercise their powers. In practice, the secretary of the navy selected the governors for the islands, and he placed the islands under the direction of naval officers. As military chiefs, the governors commanded the 400 marines and sailors stationed at the military bases in the islands.³ As civil leaders, the governors filled the top administrative positions with naval officers. The governors also had the power to appoint persons to several of the seats of the local legislature: the colonial councils. The governors could not enact major legislation, but they could sponsor bills and veto any laws passed by the colonial councils. If the councils refused to be cooperative, the governors could dissolve them and hold new elections. The "judicial powers" of the governors also allowed them to appoint and dismiss members of the judiciary. With all these powers, the governors could usually control every area of government.

Between 1917 and 1931, three admirals and four captains of the United States Navy served as governors of the Virgin Islands. Only the last of these, Captain Waldo Evans, stayed

in office for more than two years. Seen as tours of duty, these short terms prevented the governors from becoming knowledgeable about the society and developing comprehensive policies to solve local problems. Combined with their sympathy for the local elite, the difficulty of formulating long range plans favored the tendency of the governors to support the status quo.

Like the governorship, the transfer hardly affected the colonial councils. Two separate councils operated in the islands. The St. Thomas-St. John colonial council continued to serve largely as a forum for the merchant interests and the St. Croix colonial council usually voiced the wishes of the planters. Numerous franchise restrictions ensured planter and merchant domination of the legislatures. Voters had to be male, at least twenty-five years old, of "unblemished character," and a citizen of the Virgin Islands or the United States, or a resident for five years. Most importantly, a voter had to receive an income of \$300 a year, or own property for which he could obtain an annual rent of \$140 on St. Thomas and \$60 on St. John and St. Croix.⁴ These restrictions limited the franchise to about 6 percent of the population.⁵ This small electorate chose thirteen of the eighteen members of the Crucian council and eleven of the fifteen members of the St. Thomian council. The governor appointed the remaining members from among the leading

citizens of the society. Colonial council members served four year terms without pay, which effectively favored upper class membership.

The colonial councils had only a limited ability to check the extensive powers of the governor. While the councils could not pass legislation without the governor's approval, they could block bills sponsored by the executive. This meant that only bills that received the approval of the governor and councils became law. Most of the time this system worked smoothly because both sides shared similar interests. When there was disagreement, the power of the governor to dissolve the councils usually destroyed legislative opposition.

One major shift in the balance of power between the governor and the colonial councils occurred during the years of navy rule. Under the Danes, the governor shared some administrative functions with commissions made up of members from the colonial councils. These commissions helped supervise the hospitals, schools, road maintenance, poor relief and virtually every other administrative area of government. In June 1918 the first American governor, Admiral James H. Oliver, persuaded both councils that wartime circumstances demanded the expansion of executive power, and he absorbed the functions of the numerous commissions. In 1923 another governor, Captain Henry H. Hough, succeeded in

completely abolishing the commissions of the St. Thomas-St. John Council. In 1926 that council, regretting its decision to turn the commissions over to the executive, urged another governor, Captain Martin E. Trench, to restore the commissions. Trench refused and the colonial council could do nothing to reestablish the commissions.⁶ The loss of these commissions further weakened the position of the colonial councils in relationship to the governor.

The Act of March 3, 1917 also preserved the governor's control of the judicial system. The nature of the relationship between executive and judiciary stayed the same despite some changes in the structure of the court system. At the time of the transfer, separate district judges made court decisions for St. Thomas and St. Croix. Finding this too cumbersome, the navy governors worked with the colonial councils to streamline the system. In 1921 a single district judgeship replaced the separate island offices. This district judge presided over three police judges: one for St. Thomas-St. John and one each for the major towns of St. Croix, Christiansted and Fredericksted. The governors reinforced their control of the courts by appointing Americans to these posts. Any illusion that these courts made decisions independent of the executive disappeared with the practice of appointing the government attorney on St. Thomas as police judge of that island and the government

attorney on St. Croix as police judge for both Fredericksted and Christiansted. The designation of the Third Circuit Court in Philadelphia as the appeals court even further strengthened the governor's judicial authority. Few Virgin Islanders could afford the expense of travelling to the Philadelphia court to overturn a decision of the Virgin Islands District Court.⁷

The extensive control of the governors over the judiciary inspired some attempts to reform the system. Despite some successes, the governors fended off the major attempts to reduce their judicial powers. The most serious challenge to the governors came from one of the district judges. In September 1920 when two separate judgeships still existed, Governor Joseph Oman appointed an American, Lucius Malmin, as district judge of St. Croix. Once in the islands, Malmin refused to submit to executive control and quickly returned to the United States to seek an independent appointment as judge. The governor then revoked Malmin's appointment for leaving the islands without permission. Next, in 1921, Malmin secured an order from the Third Circuit Court and President Harding directing his appointment as district judge. A new governor, Captain Sumner Kittelle, refused to honor the order on the grounds that the passage of a new law had abolished the district judgeship of St. Croix. Pressure from the secretary of the navy then induced the

president to revoke Malmin's appointment.⁸ Malmin's effort failed to shake the powers of the governors. Nevertheless, constant criticism of the partiality of the judicial system forced the governors to make some changes. The governors had rationalized the practice of having the government attorneys serve as police judges by pointing to the fact that it saved money. Eventually though, the governors conceded to the demands of Virgin Islanders that separate persons should hold these positions. In May 1930 Governor Evans appointed one person as government attorney for the whole colony. He then earned the praise of Virgin Islanders by appointing natives as police judges.⁹ While praiseworthy, these appointments hardly dented executive control of the judicial system.

The Danish colonial political system, where a strong executive shared some power with the local elite, suited the desires of the United States. The governor's control of the system protected the interests of the mother country. The absence of local influence in selecting the executive reduced the possibility that the governor would favor the interests of the Virgin Islands over those of the United States. On the other hand, the colonial councils allowed the local elite to express their opinions. The successful administration of the colony depended on the cooperation of this most powerful element of the local community. Agreement on the basic values by which the society should be organized ensured the

continuation of the colonial political system under American rule.

II

As with politics, neither the Americans nor the local elite wanted to make any significant changes in the economy. While the tiny Virgin Islands offered few economic benefits for the United States, the navy administrators reasoned that the economic well-being of the upper class was essential to social stability. A prosperous planter/merchant class would generate more taxes, create jobs and keep white men in leadership positions. With no other interests in the islands besides their strategic position, the Americans saw no reason to upset the traditional economic system.

Under the terms of the transfer, the United States agreed to respect existing Danish businesses in the territory.¹⁰ More than anything else, this stipulation emphasized the continuity of colonialism through Danish and American sovereignty. Despite the change of flags, the economic cornerstones remained in Danish hands. The National Banks of the Danish West Indies held a monopoly over the issuance of money, so until 1934 when its charter expired, Danish West Indian dollars stayed in circulation as the official currency.¹¹ Likewise, stockholders in Denmark retained ownership of the largest businesses on St. Thomas and St. Croix. On St. Thomas, the Danish West India Company,

which supplied fuel to ships, grossed about five times as much money as the island's second largest business.¹² On St. Croix, the Danish controlled West Indian Sugar Company (popularly known as Bethlehem) owned half of the sugar cane acreage and produced two-thirds of the island's sugar.¹³ These two companies shared control of the economy with a few locally owned merchant houses, ship yards, sugar plantations and cattle ranches. Business profits either went abroad to Denmark or to the local elite, who themselves were usually of European origin.

Not even the long economic decline of the islands could shake the position of the planters and merchants at the top of the social structure. While their earnings from trade and sugar had been falling since the mid-nineteenth century, the upper class maintained fairly comfortable lifestyles. They still lived in spacious homes on wind-cooled hillsides, travelled by horse-back or automobile, wore clothes fashioned after the styles in Europe or the United States, attended plays, and ate the best foods that could be imported into the islands. The worst effects of the economic decline were passed on to the lower class through lower wages and higher unemployment. These were the people who lived in the wooden shacks in the hot valleys and plains, travelled by foot, often wore rags, and faced hunger and disease on a daily basis. But since the working class had little economic

political power, they could not force the upper class to risk the security of their position by exploring alternatives to the present economic system.

Yet, on St. Croix, where sugar determined the well-being of the economy, the slow decline in production worried the planters. Average yearly production of sugar, which generated the bulk of income, property taxes and export earnings,¹⁴ dropped from 7,500 tons in the 1850s to 6,500 tons at the beginning of the next century.¹⁵ A combination of worn-out soil, drought and low prices made sugar production difficult. Still such events as the great rise in sugar prices at the end of the Great War buoyed the hopes of the planters. In 1920 they exported 12,000 tons of sugar and made enough of a profit to get them through the succeeding lean years. In 1923 drought limited production to under 2,000 tons. A hurricane in 1924 broke the long drought and contributed to a 1925 crop of 10,653 tons, but production again slipped below 7,000 tons in the following years.¹⁶

The West Indian Sugar Company dominated the sugar economy of St. Croix. This company owned nearly two dozen separate plantations and ground the cane into sugar from these and many other plantations at its factory on Estate Bethlehem.¹⁷ The next two smaller companies, the St. Croix Sugar Company and the La Grange Sugar Company, operated on a much smaller scale. Whereas Bethlehem cultivated over 5,000

acres, St. Croix and La Grange planted about 450 and 750 acres in sugar cane.¹⁸ Combined their sugar factories produced about 20 percent of the island's sugar, an amount dwarfed by Bethlehem's production of 70 percent.¹⁹ Furthermore, Bethlehem increased its dominance of the sugar economy as hard times forced smaller factories and plantations out of business. Then in 1928, Bethlehem achieved a near complete monopoly of sugar production when the St. Croix Sugar Company sold out to the Danish-owned giant.²⁰ La Grange continued to struggle on under the control of local planters.

To advance their interests, the planters formed a planters association headed by Folmer Andersen, the manager of Bethlehem and a member of the colonial council. Most importantly, this association fought against any attempts to loosen the planters' hold on the land. The planters used their influence in the colonial council to keep property taxes low. Landowners paid seventy cents an acre on cultivated land, thirteen cents an acre on pasture land, and only one cent an acre on unused land. Though sugar cane actually utilized only 20 percent of all land, these rates enabled planters to maintain their large plantations.²¹ Rather than sell land to small farmers, they preferred to hold it with the hopes that the land would be bought by rich American investors. Large-scale American investment never

materialized, but the colonial council managed to resist all calls for tax reforms. These calls came from several governors who thought higher taxes on land would make the islands less dependent of Federal expenditures and from middle class reformist politicians who hoped to weaken planter domination. Not only did the planters successfully resist the governors and reformist politicians, but, in 1927, they persuaded the United States Congress to lower the export tax on sugar from \$8 to \$6 a ton. Congress believed the planters' cries that the survival of the sugar industry, and the whole economy, depended on the reduction.²²

Other efforts by the planters to protect their economic interests met with less success. In 1921 and 1925 Congress extended first the National Prohibition Act and then the Federal Immigration Act of 1924 to the Virgin Islands. Although rum production played a minor role in the island's economy, prohibition of its manufacture certainly worsened the already serious economic conditions. Similarly, the 1924 immigration quotas severely hampered the planters' ability to obtain cheap labor from other West Indian islands. Several planter petitions to the president, Congress and governor to exempt the Virgin Islands from these laws failed.²³ These failures hurt the planters, but the laws did not seriously threaten the sugar economy.

Across the sea, the commercial economy of St. Thomas faced different problems. Already suffering from the long economic decline, World War I further disrupted shipping to and from the island. Before the war, nine steamship lines regularly visited St. Thomas to take on coal, oil and water, and to transport goods and passengers. The war forced many of these lines to curtail their trips. The island's most important customer, the Hamburg-American line, was a German firm that completely abandoned St. Thomas once the Americans purchased the islands. After the war, many of the steamship lines shifted their regular stops to other ports, and St. Thomas never attracted more than two lines at a time to make its harbor a regular stop.²⁴

Like their Crucian counterparts, the St. Thomian elite had a secure hold on their position in society. Too small and hilly to support extensive agriculture, St. Thomas depended on its commodious harbor for its economic survival. Everything that the islanders needed: food, clothing and building materials for shelter, came by ship, and in return the island offered a harbor safe from storms, a convenient location to take on supplies and entertainment for sailors. This meant that the whole community backed the efforts of the merchants to revive the sagging harbor trade.

After the transfer, the merchants found that the United States placed some new obstacles in the way of improving

trade. While trade with the United States, especially Virgin Island food imports and sugar exports, increased greatly after 1917, prohibition threatened to ruin a substantial part of the island's business.²⁵ Fortunately for St. Thomas, the merchant class persuaded the federal government to ease the most onerous restrictions of prohibition. In 1922 after the businessmen of St. Thomas sponsored a protest march that pulled hundreds of people into the streets and sent a delegation of three men bearing petitions to see the president, the United States began allowing the transshipment of liquor at St. Thomas, if the liquor was not unloaded.²⁶ Working with the governors, St. Thomians also managed to stave off the application of United States coastwise laws to the Virgin Islands. These laws prohibited foreign ships from carrying goods between two American ports. Their extension to the Virgin Islands would have wrecked the economy of St. Thomas. In 1922 Congress brought the territory under authority of the laws but allowed the president to suspend the laws if a port lacked adequate American shipping services. This provision saved the Virgin Islands. Year after year, local leaders convinced the president to defer the laws.²⁷

Local attempts to improve the economy centered on improving the bunkering capabilities of the harbor. In 1925 the West India Company completed the construction of its new

ship-tending facilities. It built new wharves, deepened the harbor and expanded its accommodations for coal, fuel, oil and water. A jump in the number of visiting ships, from 428 in 1925 to 601 in 1928, rewarded the company's efforts.²⁸ On the other hand, the loss of the floating dry dock hurt the port. In 1924 this privately owned dock, which could service steamships, sank and, all efforts to raise or replace it failed.²⁹

Regardless of their secure position, the economic decline forced some members of the elite to explore alternatives to the traditional business activities. On St. Thomas, the Paiewonskys, a Jewish family of Polish descent, and the Bornns, a native brown family, pioneered efforts to develop a bay rum industry. Bay rum, a rubbing alcohol and shaving lotion, found a steady market in the British West Indies, and production soared from less than 30,000 gallons in 1918 to over 100,000 gallons in 1930. Cattle ranching also found favor among Virgin Island landowners. This allowed Crucian planters to lower production and labor costs while maintaining their huge holdings. For St. Thomian merchants, who controlled much of that island's land, cattle ranching supplemented harbor revenues. Shipped mostly to Puerto Rico, cattle exports increased from 517 in 1921 to 1225 in 1930.³⁰

The navy administrators also joined the effort for economic diversification. The navy expanded the Agricultural Experimental Station that had been created by the Danes in 1910. The station aided farmers in growing vegetables, and by 1930, local growers supplied a major share of the islands' vegetables.³¹ The local government also established the Department of Agriculture, Commerce and Labor, but the department never did more than complete a detailed study of economic conditions.³² Neither the Agricultural Experimental Station nor the Department of Agriculture, Commerce and Labor sought answers to the major economic problems of the colony. The navy governors believed that government should stay out of business and no governor ever produced a comprehensive scheme for economic development. Instead the governors preferred to concentrate on their pet project: tourism. The great beauty of the three islands conjured visions of an American winter playground. Indeed the transfer of sovereignty did gain the interest of some Americans, and several cruise ships brought their passengers for short visits during the winter months. However, no more than nine cruise ships a year ever visited the islands, and tourism had a marginal effect on the economy. Yet the governors could boast of the renovation of St. Thomas' two hotels, the construction of a golf course on that island and a visit there by Charles Lindbergh in his "Spirit of St. Louis."³³

None of the efforts by the government, merchants or the planters to diversify the economy altered the colonial economic system. Not only did Crucian sugar and St. Thomian commerce remain the economic mainstays, but the alternative enterprises, bay rum, cattle raising and tourism, clung to the same system. No matter what the activity, the colonial system produced more economic benefits for the elite than it did for the working class. Oriented toward foreign companies and the local elite, the economy offered few choices to the majority of the people. Most Virgin Islanders continued to work either on the docks of St. Thomas, the plantations of St. Croix, or in some other service for the upper class. So it was during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and so it remained in the beginning of the twentieth.

Endnotes

¹Isaac Dookhan, A History of the Virgin Islands overviews the Danish colonial government and Luther H. Evans, The Virgin Islands From Naval Base to New Deal, Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ann Arbor Press, 1945 details the United States System.

²J. Antonio Jarvis, Brief History of the Virgin Islands, (St. Thomas, Virgin Islands: The Art Shop, 1938) p. 119.

³Census of the Virgin Islands of the United States 1917, p. 86 and Fifteenth Census of the United States 1930 Outlying Territories and Possessions, pp. 275-76.

⁴Figures are in Danish West Indian dollars. One United States dollar equaled approximately 1.25 Danish West Indian dollars.

⁵The number of voters differ from source to source. The best is Isaac Dookhan, "Search for Identity," in The Journal of Caribbean History 12 (May 1979): p. 3.

⁶Evans, pp. 105-106 and 116; Annual Report of the Governor, 1926, RG 55, NA; Governor to Chairman of the Colonial Council of St. Thomas-St. John, 1 May 1920, and Governor to Chairman of the Colonial Council of St. Croix, 1 May 1920, File 58, RG 55/2, NA.

⁷Evans, pp. 115-16; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 6; Governor to Secretary of the Navy, 6 October 1919, and District Judge to Governor, 11 June 1923, File 66, RG 55/2, NA; and Secretary of the Navy to President, 12 July 1921, File 28759-542:22, RG 80, NA.

⁸File 28759-542:1-45, RG 80, NA, covers the Malmin episode.

⁹Annual Report of the Governor, 1930, RG 55, NA, and Governor to Senator F. Hale, 4 April 1930, File 42, RG 55/3, NA.

¹⁰Gordon Lewis, The Virgin Islands, A Caribbean Lilliput, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1972, p. 42, and Evans, pp. 45-6.

¹¹Evans, pp. 302-302.

¹²Collector of Customs to Governor, 22 March 1927, File 74, NA, and Collector of Customs to Governor, 20 July 1921, File 76, RG 55/2, NA.

¹³St. Croix Chamber of Commerce to President, 10 December 1924, File 84, RG 55/2, NA, and File on Sugar Factories, 26 November 1927, File 58, RG 55/3, NA.

¹⁴Evans, p. 196; Clerk to Asst. Government Secretary, 13 September 1926, File 74, RG 55/2, NA; Collector of Customs to Governor, 24 January 1926, File 76, NA; and St. Croix Chamber of Commerce to President, 10 December 1924, File 84, NA.

¹⁵Dookhan, A History of the Virgin Islands, p. 222.

¹⁶Annual Reports of the Governor, 1921-1930, RG 55, NA; St. Croix Chamber of Commerce to President, 10 December 1924, File 84, RG 55/2, NA; and Report of the Governor, 1 May 1928, File 48, RG 55/3, NA.

¹⁷Dookhan, A History of the Virgin Islands, p. 235.

¹⁸File on Sugar Factories, 26 November 1927, RG 55/3 File 58, NA.

¹⁹Dookhan, A History of the Virgin Islands, p. 234.

²⁰Annual Report of the Governor, 1928, RG 55, NA.

²¹Tax Assessor to Governor, 7 April 1927, File 74, RG 55/2, NA; Acreage of St. Croix, 1922, File 109, NA; and Report of the Governor, 1 May 1928, File 48, RG 55/3, NA.

²²Annual Report of the Governor, 1927, RG 55, NA.

²³Evans, pp. 5, 55, 66 and 274-75.

²⁴Jarvis, pp. 97-8; Dookhan, A History of the Virgin Islands, pp. 220-21; Governor to Director of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, 20 December 1921, File 76, RG 55/2, NA; and Government Secretary to Atlantic Navigation Corp., 28 October 1927, File 36, RG 55/3, NA.

²⁵Dookhan, A History of the Virgin Islands, pp. 246-48, and Commerce Report, 1923, File 76, RG 55/2, NA.

²⁶Governor to Secretary of the Navy, 19 May 1923, File 28759-606, RG 80, NA; Letter of the Delegation to the President, 19 July 1922, and President to the Governor, 30 October 1922, File 93, RG 55/2, NA.

²⁷Evans, p. 65.

²⁸Annual Report of the Governor, 1928, RG 55, NA; and West India Company, brochure, 1925, and Annual Report of the St. Thomas Harbor Department, 1926, File 63, RG 55/2, NA.

²⁹Annual Reports of the Governor, 1924-1930, RG 55, NA.

³⁰Annual Reports of the Governor, 1929-1930, RG 55, NA; Government Secretary to American Consul, Guadeloupe, 18 November 1927, File 22, RG 55/3, NA; Governor to Paiewonsky, 27 September 1928, File 39, NA; and Report by the Governor, 1 May 1928, File 48, NA.

³¹Headbookkeeper to Dispatching Secretary, 13 November 1920, File 55, RG 55/2, NA, and Government Secretary to Dispatching Secretary, 7 January 1929, File 22, RG 55/3, NA.

³²Dookhan, A History of the Virgin Islands, p. 269, Annual Report of the Governor, 1926, RG 55, NA, and Director of Agriculture, Commerce and Labor to Governor, 12 April 1927, File 110, RG 55/2, NA.

³³Annual Reports of the Governor, 1926-1928, RG 55, NA; Secretary of the Navy to Governor and enclosures, 7 December 1925, File 63, RG 55/2, NA; and Report by the Governor, 1 May 1928, File 48, RG 55/3, NA.

TWO

LABOR

The working people of the Virgin Islands resisted this system that forced them to labor for the benefit of the planters and merchants. Upper class control of politics and the economy secured only the unwilling cooperation of the lower class. This black lower class worked for the colonialist system because the necessities of life usually afforded them no other choice. Nevertheless, they knew that they had little chance to improve their social position or standard of living, and they fought against the restrictions of the system. They resisted in every possible way. As previously mentioned, some hoped to escape by emigrating to other lands. Others managed to set themselves up as somewhat independent small farmers, artisans and shopkeepers. Many others resisted by working only when necessary. The lower class sometimes moved beyond these individual acts of resistance by joining together to protest working and living conditions. Work slowdowns, riots and other forms of collective action gave the laboring class a sense of its potential strength. Collective action implied a threat of violence which was reflected in the upper class concern with

law and order. The elite realized they had to keep strict control of the society to prevent workers from realizing that they could really threaten the colonial system.

The history of the Virgin Islands provided examples where collective violence had some effect on changing the system. In 1733 the slaves of St. John took over that island for six months before being suppressed. Even after peace had been restored, the sugar economy of St. John never fully recovered. Then in 1848, the slaves of St. Croix, after hearing rumors of emancipation, revolted and demanded their freedom. This revolt forced the Danish government, which was contemplating a plan for the abolition of slavery, to make an immediate decision. Faced with widespread discontent and violence, the Danish governor quickly proclaimed the end of slavery. When the planters ameliorated the effects of emancipation by binding the cane workers to the estates on yearly contracts, the workers acted again. In 1878, after tolerating the contract system for thirty years, the workers rebelled and forced the planters to modify the system. The planter reduced the length of the contracts and even allowed workers, if they wished, to work on a day to day basis. By the end of the century, most workers opted for work on a daily basis. Over on St. Thomas, an 1890 labor riot provided another example of collective action. In that year, the government attempted to cut currency inflation by voiding the

use of brass tokens as money. These tokens had been used by merchants to pay their workers. Now, without warning, workers found the tokens useless. Led by female coal carriers, the workers began a riot that, while quickly quelled by soldiers, scared the business community and hinted at further possibilities for united labor class actions.¹

While the possibility of violence always lurked in the background, resistance usually took less drastic forms. Most often, workers sought only the independence to choose when, where and at what they would work. The fairly diverse economy of St. Thomas allowed some freedom in picking jobs and usually ensured peaceful labor relations on that island. On St. Croix, however, land monopoly, monoculture and low wages strained relations between employers and employees. Chronic discontent at times forced the government to develop plans to placate the workers. One such plan was the "parcelling-out" scheme initiated by the Danish government in the 1880s. Under this plan, the government and participating landowners divided up failing estates and sold them to laborers eager to establish small farms. The hopes of the laborers that "parcelling-out" would give them independence from the sugar estates proved illusory. Not enough land was parcelled-out to upset the plantation economy, and most people who did receive land were forced to grow sugar cane to survive economically. By the beginning of the twentieth

century these parcelists produced 25 percent of St. Croix's sugar cane. Unfortunately, the parcelists received little of the benefits of sugar production since they had to sell their cane to the sugar factories at prices set by the large plantations.²

The harshness of life on the plantations and small farms prompted many Crucians to abandon agricultural life by moving into Christiansted and Fredericksted. Here they pursued different trades, took available odd jobs or entered into domestic service. The attractions of town life increased the percentage of urban dwellers on St. Croix from 39 percent in 1870 to 50 percent in 1917. Even so, the move to town guaranteed no escape from the plantations. The scarcity of urban jobs forced many persons out to the estates to do part time work.³

When the Americans came to the Virgin Islands they encountered labor conditions that had changed little since the days of slavery. The working class lived in a world apart from the interests of the upper and middle classes. Concerned with day to day survival, the national security problems of the United States and the economic difficulties of Denmark must have seemed insignificant to poor laborers. The ceremony and rhetoric of the transfer did excite poor Virgin Islanders, but this faded once it became apparent that labor conditions would not change.

As in the days of slavery, plantation work still employed more laborers than any other single occupation. Three thousand men, women and children toiled in the cane fields or cattle pastures of St. Croix.⁴ In compensation for a nine-hour work day, laborers received low wages and a plot of land, called "nigger ground," to grow provisions. Some laborers lived on the plantations and others travelled there to work from the towns or their small farms. Regardless of whether they lived on the plantation or not, workers generally had access to a provision plot. Those who lived on the plantation also received the use of a small house. Depending on the wages paid by the estate owner, the laborers either rented their houses and provision plots or used them free of charge.⁵

In the fields, workers and owners (or their managers) struggled over who would control the pace of the work. The owners sought to get the workers to produce more in less time for less money, and the laborers attempted to work less for more money. On most estates this struggle took place within a system where a foreman pushed a gang of some twenty people through the day's work. At the end of the day, or some other period, the laborers received a set payment regardless of the amount of work done.⁶ This system allowed the workers some control over the pace of work. However, on some plantations a new system threatened even this small amount of control.

Called task, or piece, work, this new system paid only according to the amount of work done, not the time spent working. Although one task supposedly equalled a day's work, the workers resented what they saw as an attempt by the planters to control the pace of work. Fortunately for the workers, disagreements between workers and employers over the fairness of tasks and the amount of work done prevented wide spread implementation of the system.⁷ Rather than deal with the complexities of task work, most estate managers stuck to the simpler daily wage.

The tendency of many laborers, whether they worked on a plantation or in other activities, to work as little as possible appalled the American newcomers. The Americans agreed with the local elite that workers were lazy and wanted high wages for little work. One American governor grumbled: "It does not seem to strike the average laborer that if by working three days a week a living can be made, then by working six days a week, money could be saved towards bettering one's own surroundings or living conditions."⁸ To explain this apparent laziness, American government officials and local employers blamed race and climate. Although few white or brown persons could have been persuaded to work all day in the burning sun, they felt that black people lacked initiative due to a "... tropical unconcern about the future ..."⁹ More likely, the workers realized the hopelessness of

working hard for so little extra money. By only working to make enough money to survive, they hoped to retain some control over their lives. In a world which offered no hope of social advancement, poor persons resisted the demands of the system by living day to day.

Laborers found it not only almost impossible to improve their living conditions, as the American governor claimed they could, but they constantly struggled to avoid even more desperate straits. The poor economic situation of the Virgin Islands took its heaviest toll on the lower class. During the last years of Danish rule and the first years of American rule, official unemployment bordered on 10 percent, and this only covered those currently in the labor force. Other people, due to old age, infirmities and despair, had permanently dropped out of the labor force. Whether temporarily or permanently unemployed, the poor depended on government aid for survival. The government, Danish and American, allocated money to the poor directly from a poor fund, or it distributed pensions derived from the interest earned on charitable funds established by prominent Danes. In any given year, 1,500 persons received some money from the government. Hundreds more were usually turned away. Furthermore, the colony maintained more than a hundred paupers at the King's Hill Poor Farm in St. Croix. This institution, seen as a last resort by the poor, catered to

both Crucians and St. Thomians after the St. Thomas Poor Yard closed in 1922.¹⁰

Widespread disease further complicated the problem of poverty. Inadequate diets and the lack of proper sewage disposal and water supply systems caused many cases of pellagra, malaria and tuberculosis. Poor medical services also resulted in high infant mortality. Disease and infant mortality constantly kept the death rate above the birth rate.¹¹

When the United States took over the islands, it found the working class turning to a new method of resisting the colonial system. In 1915 a black Crucian teacher, D. Hamilton Jackson, organized the St. Croix Labor Union. In 1848 and 1878 workers had organized informally in violent protest, but now for the first time, they began to organize a formal institution to seek peaceful change. Aimed primarily at the cane workers, Jackson's union concentrated on economic goals. Of first importance, the union attempted to get higher wages for workers through collective bargaining with employers. As a more long range goal, the union hoped to raise enough money to buy land to distribute to workers for small farms.

The St. Croix Labor Union had some success in achieving the first goal. In 1916 a profitable sugar crop prompted

Jackson to demand a wage increase from thirty cents to thirty-five cents a day for first class laborers, and corresponding increases for other workers. When the Planters Association refused this increase, the workers went on strike. The owners retaliated by ejecting the laborers from their estate homes, but after the union held out for six weeks, the planters agreed to raise wages.¹² Another demand for higher wages greeted the American administration. This time, a strike was averted when the navy government offered its services as mediator. Hoping that United States sovereignty would bring better times, both sides agreed to a wage hike to fifty cents a day.¹³

While the success in increasing wages persuaded most cane workers, and many other workers, to join the union, the poverty of the laborers made it difficult to achieve the long range goal of establishing small farms. By 1920, the union claimed 4,000 members, but it had purchased only 1,400 acres and 300 cattle.¹⁴ The union did not have the financial resources to obtain more land, and it only got a few persons started as small farmers.

The organization of the St. Croix Labor Union inspired a similar attempt on St. Thomas. In 1916 coal carriers and stevedores there established the St. Thomas Labor Union. Like the Crucian union, the St. Thomas union largely avoided political issues and concentrated on obtaining wage increases

for its members. Headed by George Moorehead, a brown native who was employed as a loading dock foreman, the union first pushed for higher wages for coal carriers. At that time carriers earned one cent for every 90 pound basket of coal they loaded onto a ship. These rates prohibited any but the strongest person from making a living wage. The coal carriers of the Danish West India Company struck for higher wages, and that company quickly agreed to raise the wage to two cents a basket.¹⁵ This success brought 2,700 workers into the ranks of the union and forced other trading companies to follow the lead of the Danish West India Company. Between 1917 and 1924 average wages for all dock workers rose from below a dollar a day to one dollar sixty cents a day.¹⁶

The economic gains of the St. Thomas Labor Union failed to satisfy all St. Thomian laborers. In 1919 Rothschild Francis, a black shoemaker, founded the American Virgin Islands Federation of Labor. This union, which eventually became an affiliate of the national American Federation of Labor, preferred to seek political rights for workers rather than just economic benefits. The American Virgin Islands Federation believed that the political system largely determined the way workers lived. To gain support for his beliefs, Francis circulated a handbill on St. Thomas which stated:

Conservatism has hypnotized the worker and forces him to believe it is the will of the gods that he should go shabby, half-fed and penniless. Radicalism refutes this statement and maintains that since the worker is forced to surrender a portion of liberty for society it follows that society should enact laws to give him a decent livelihood.¹⁷

In other statements, Francis clarified the position asserted in his handbill "... that society should enact laws to give him (the worker) a decent livelihood." Such laws would only be realized once workers had the political power to enact them. To increase the political power of the working class, Francis vehemently demanded universal suffrage and a civilian government for the Virgin Islands. This political agitation attracted nearly one thousand workers to the federation.¹⁸

The American Virgin Islands Federation of Labor did not limit its activities to St. Thomas. Realizing that a broader base was necessary to develop a viable movement for political change, Francis attempted to bring Crucian workers into the federation. In 1920 he persuaded Morris Davis, a black native who had been active in organizing Crucian dock workers, to establish a branch of the federation in St. Croix. While it did not challenge the dominance of the St. Croix Labor Union, the Crucian branch of the federation soon boasted a membership of several hundred persons.¹⁹

The organization of these labor unions eventually led to a major clash between workers and the colonial elite. While the elite could afford to concede minimal wage increases to

their workers, they could not let the working class develop an exaggerated sense of its power. The political demands of people like Rothschild Francis made the elite even more determined to bring the unions under control. The workers must not forget who ruled the society.

In 1921 a major confrontation finally occurred in St. Croix. Rising sugar prices between 1918 and 1920 had allowed Crucian planters to grant more demands for higher wages. By 1920, when the planters did the "dance of the millions,"²⁰ wages had risen to a dollar a day. Then in 1921, sugar prices suddenly plunged downward due to a drop in world demand, and the planters decided to cut wages in half. This uprising announcement caught the St. Croix Labor Union in a disorganized state. The higher wages had destroyed worker concern for collective action and had weakened their commitment to the union. In 1921 membership dwindled to 2,000. To make matters worse, D. Hamilton Jackson had resigned the presidency and moved to the United States to study law at Hampton Institute in Virginia. His successor, Ralph de Chabert, lacked the energy and ability to rally the workers.²¹ Nevertheless, the wage cut jolted the union into action, and Chabert called the workers out on strike on August 22, 1921. This time the owners refused to acquiesce, and they ejected workers from estate houses. The disorganized union soon ran out of money and many workers starved.²²

At this point, the strike might have collapsed except for the efforts of the American Virgin Islands Federation of Labor. Morris Davis, filling the leadership role left vacant by Jackson, toured the island to encourage the workers. Invoking the name of D. Hamilton Jackson, he drew large crowds to his speeches, in which he suggested that workers be paid two dollars a day. Partly due to his efforts, 80 percent of the cane workers participated in the strike, which dragged on for months.²³ The strike interfered with the plowing of the fields, which was done in July and August, the planting of the cane, done from September to December, and threatened the harvest months of February and March.²⁴ On their side the planters knew a long strike meant starvation for many workers.

Finally in November, worker resistance crumbled. Hearing about the strike, D. Hamilton Jackson hurried back to St. Croix. The deplorable condition of the laborers quickly persuaded Jackson to conclude a settlement with the Planters Association. He and Folmer Andersen agreed that work would resume at sixty cents a day. The agreement, signed November 26, also provided for the implementation of a task system, based on seventy cents a day, by February 1922.²⁵ The agreement ended the workers' hope for improved living conditions. In the coming years, wages never rose beyond an average of seventy cents a day. The determination of the

planters not to pay higher wages forced the workers to submit or starve.

While the power of the elite was the most serious obstacle to the development of strong labor unions, internal divisions also caused major problems for the labor movement. On many issues, the working class divided into two groups: those born in the Virgin Islands and those born in one of the many British and French islands to the east of the Virgins. Just as Virgin Islanders emigrated to Panama, the Dominican Republic, Cuba or the United States to seek better jobs, people came to the Virgin Islands to escape even worse economic conditions in the eastern Caribbean. For example, 1921 wages in Barbados averaged forty cents a day.²⁶ For their part, native workers resented the immigration of the British and French West Indians, who competed for already scarce jobs and kept wages low. The antagonism between the two groups not only made labor organizing difficult, but it strengthened the position of the elite.

On St. Croix, the planters depended on the importation of workers from the eastern Caribbean to satisfy labor needs. Since Crucian planters paid higher wages than planters in the British and French islands, they had no trouble inducing laborers to come to St. Croix. Furthermore, in the 1850s, the planter dominated colonial council had created an immigration fund to aid planters in paying transportation

costs for these laborers. This system worked well until 1925 when the extension of the 1924 Federal Immigration Act to the islands sharply curtailed the importation of foreign labor.

The planters protested the extension of the Act, and the St. Croix Labor Union demonstrated its weakness by siding with them. The union split between protecting the interests of resident workers, who benefitted from the act, or placating those with overseas loyalties. The decision to support the planters signified that the union was no longer willing, or able, to challenge the power of the planters. The current president of the union, Alfred Francis, possibly with the hopes of recruiting alien laborers, signed a planter petition to Governor Martin Trench, urging that he use his influence to get Congress to repeal the act. Strangely enough, Trench came to the defense of native laborers. Although sympathetic to the planters' need for sufficient labor, the governor recognized the effect that importation would have on the already high unemployment rate in the islands. Announcing that he did not have the authority to tamper with federal laws, Captain Trench did nothing to help the planters.²⁷ The 1924 Immigration Act remained in effect.

The planters tried to solve their problem by importing laborers from Puerto Rico. Since Puerto Rico was also a United States possession, immigration laws did not apply to the movement of people between Puerto Rico and St. Croix.

However, wages in Puerto Rico compared favorably with St. Croix and the planters persuaded few Puerto Ricans to settle in St. Croix. By 1928 the Puerto Rican population in St. Croix numbered only 700, which did not even offset emigration by Virgin Islanders.²⁸

On St. Thomas, the alien problem centered on divisions between American and British Virgin Islanders. Close economic and familial ties bound St. Thomas with the British Virgin Islands, and people travelled often between the two areas. Even after the implementation of the Immigration Act, the flow continued as it was impossible to monitor all the people moving over the short distances between the islands. Labor unity rested on a decision of whether to distinguish between American and British Virgin Islanders.

With the leadership of the labor movement at stake, the St. Thomas Labor Union and the American Virgin Islands Federation of Labor differed sharply on the issue. Bending to familial considerations, Moorehead's union actively enlisted British Virgin Islanders. Moorehead also recognized that foreign labor boosted union membership and secured more contracts from employers by ensuring an adequate supply of labor. On the other hand, Rothschild Francis denounced alien labor for taking jobs away from native St. Thomians. The federation hoped to gain worker support by claiming to represent the true interests of natives.²⁹ Reflecting the

complexity of the issue, hatred between the two unions reached the point where Moorehead accused the federation of fomenting discontent among labor union members employed at the dock of the United States Shipping Board. In turn, Francis charged that Moorehead prevented federation workers from getting jobs with businesses employing the labor union.³⁰ This squabbling wrecked any chances for the development of a strong labor organization on St. Thomas.

The inability of the labor unions to secure meaningful economic gains for workers eventually forced leaders of the unions to take political action. While only Francis tied his union directly to political action, Jackson and Moorehead got involved in politics independently from union organizing. Actually, Jackson pioneered the drive to press worker viewpoints through political channels. In 1915 he founded the Herald, a newspaper dedicated to safeguarding lower class interests. In 1921 Rothschild Francis followed Jackson's example by starting a similar paper, The Emancipator.³¹ Francis took the lead, however, in undertaking even more direct political action. In 1919 he marshalled the support of enough sympathetic members of the middle class to gain a seat in the Colonial Council of St. Thomas-St. John. In 1921 his arch-rival, George Moorehead, joined Francis in the colonial council. In 1923 Jackson also got elected to the Colonial Council of St. Croix.³² In the colonial councils,

all three pushed for the elimination of sex and property qualifications in the franchise law. In contrast to the conservative Moorehead, Francis and Jackson also became the leading spokesmen for tax reform and the retention of the 1924 Immigration Act. Despite their efforts, none of the class for franchise or tax reform overcame the opposition of the upper class members of the councils.

While the participation of their leaders in the colonial councils and the organization of labor unions offered the working class new means to resist the demands of the colonial system, neither strategy shook the entrenched position of the local elite. The relationship between workers and rulers remained unchanged into the years of United States Navy administration. Of course individual workers never gave up their day to day resistance to upper class control of their lives. Denied political rights and economic opportunities, such resistance at least allowed workers to maintain their human dignity.

Endnotes

¹Dookhan, A History of the Virgin Islands, pp. 165-79 and pp. 224-31, and Jarvis, pp. 85-89.

²Dookhan, A History of the Virgin Islands, p. 234, and Reclamation Engineer of the United States to Governor, 15 July 1930, File 22, RG 55/3, NA.

³Dookhan, A History of the Virgin Islands, p. 232, and Census of the Virgin Islands 1917, p. 41.

⁴See Introduction, p.

⁵Theodoor DeBooy and John T. Faris, The Virgin Islands Our New Possessions and the British Virgins (Westport, Connecticut: Negro Universities Press, 1970) p. 198; Jarvis, p. 104; and "Agreement to Govern Relations between Employers and Laborers," 15 August 1917, File 59, RG 55/2, NA.

⁶Governor to Director of National Bank of Danish West Indies, 31 October 1930, File 22, RG 55/3, NA.

⁷Dispatching Secretary to Governor, 3 July 1918, File 59, RG 55/2, NA.

⁸Annual Report of the Governor, 1923, RG 55, NA.

⁹Chief Municipal Physician to Governor's Aide, 12 November 1918, File 59, RG 55/2, NA.

¹⁰Census of the United States 1930 Outlying Territories and Possessions, p. 276; Chief Municipal Physician to Governor's Aide, 12 November 1918, File 59, RG 55/2, NA; Aide for Public Welfare to Chief Municipal Physician, 19 May 1922, File 70, RG 55/2, NA; and File 45, RG 55/3, NA, details the public welfare situation.

¹¹Evans, pp. 267-77; Census of the Virgin Islands 1917, pp. 37-39; and Report of the Governor, 1 May 1928, File 48, RG 55/3, NA.

¹²Dookhan, A History of the Virgin Islands, p. 240, and DeBooy and Faris, p. 198.

¹³Assistant Commissioner of the Interior of Puerto Rico to Governor, 16 August 1917, File 55, RG 55/2, NA, and Dispatching Secretary to Governor, 1 July 1918, File 59, RG 55/2, NA.

- ¹⁴Hearings before the Congressional Committee, 9 February 1920, File 58, RG 55/2, NA, and Governor to Secretary of the Navy, 23 February 1923, File 28759-518:17, RG 80, NA.
- ¹⁵DeBooy and Faris, pp. 72-73, and Francis to Government Secretary, 19 January 1923, File 59, RG 55/2, NA.
- ¹⁶Dookhan, A History of the Virgin Islands, pp. 237-40, and Government Secretary to Marine Superintendent, Panama Canal, 7 January 1924, File 63, RG 55/2, NA.
- ¹⁷Working People's Committee handbill, undated, 1921, File 64, RG 55/2, NA.
- ¹⁸Resolution of Mass Meeting in St. Thomas, 4 November 1925, File 108, RG 55/2, NA.
- ¹⁹Agreement between Merwin and Porter's Union, 5 August 1919, File 59, RG 55/2, NA; Petition to Congress by American Virgin Islands Federation of Labor, undated, 1921, File 59, RG 55/2, NA; and Working People's Committee to Governor, 3 December 1919, File 28759-464, RG 80, NA.
- ²⁰This phrase is usually used to describe the Cuban sugar boom of 1919-21.
- ²¹Hearings before the Congressional Committee, 9 February 1920, File 58, RG 55/2, NA, and Dispatching Secretary to Governor, 10 February 1923, File 28759-518:17, RG 80, NA.
- ²²Government Secretary to Governor, 19 November 1921, File 59, RG 55/2, NA.
- ²³Speeches by Davis, August-November 1921 and Daily Reports of the Police Department, 22 August - 2 December 1921, File 59, RG 55/2, NA.
- ²⁴Governor to Director of National Bank of Danish West Indies, 31 October 1930, File 22, RG 55/2, NA.
- ²⁵Agreement to Settle Labor Strike, 26 November 1921, File 59, RG 55/2, NA.
- ²⁶American Consul in Barbados to Government Secretary, 5 July 1921, File 59, RG 55/2, NA.
- ²⁷Annual Report of the Governor, 1927, RG 55, NA, and Planters of St. Croix to Governor, 26 November 1926, File 65, RG 55/2, NA.

²⁸Annual Report of the Governor, 1928, RG 55, NA, and Third Ordinary Meeting of the St. Croix Colonial Council, 12 November 1927, File 41, RG 55/3, NA.

²⁹The New Day, 12 March 1921, File 59, RG 55/2, NA, and Working People's Committee to Governor, 3 October 1919, File 64, RG 55/2, NA.

³⁰Francis to Government Secretary, 19 January 1923, File 59, RG 55/2, NA, and Construction Engineer to Commandant, 30 October 1920, File 63, RG 55/2, NA.

³¹Dookhan, A History of the Virgin Islands, p. 241, and Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 11-12.

³²Election Results of the Colonial Councils, 1919, 1921, 1922, 1923 and 1925, File 65, RG 55/2, NA.

THREE

AMERICANIZATION

While keeping intact the essentials of the Danish colonial system, the United States introduced new concepts of development to the society of the Virgin Islands. These concepts had evolved to rationalize the expanding involvement of the United States in colonialism. As the United States took control of Hawaii, Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Phillipines and the Panama Canal, it developed a colonial policy aimed at bringing the advantages of "American civilization" to these backward, underdeveloped places. The whole effort to remake these colonies in the image of their new mother country became known as "Americanization." American officials based colonial policy on the ideology that there existed an "American way of life" that was superior to other "ways of living." In 1924 one governor of the Virgin Islands, Captain Philip Williams offered this concise explanation of the policy:

Americanization has been the main objective of successive (United States) administrations. It is my understanding that Americanization means teaching the way of living that conforms with the ideals current in America as distinguished from the manner and living practiced in other countries.¹

By teaching Americanization, the United States could claim that its acquisition of colonies served a good purpose. The

people that came under American rule now had an opportunity to become more civilized.

None of the efforts to Americanize the Virgin Islands challenged the principles of colonialism. That the colonial subjects had to be taught the American way of life indicated that the relationship between colonizer and colonized would not be altered. The United States claimed that Americanization was based on equality for all men, but the Americans did not embrace Virgin Islanders as equals. Even before the Danish West Indies became the American Virgin Islands, the Supreme Court of the United States had constructed the constitutional framework in which to place the new possessions. In 1901 the Supreme Court had ruled in "Downes v. Bidwell" that the acquisition of new territories did not entail any obligation to extend to their people United States citizenship. This decision allowed the United States to deny citizenship to Virgin Islanders. In 1904 another Supreme Court decision, "Dorr v. United States," placed authority over colonies with Congress and not the Constitution.² This ruling ensured the subordinate position of the colony by giving Congress the power to select which federal laws would be extended to the Virgin Islands.

The relegation of Virgin Islanders to a second class status conformed to the tenet of colonialism which held that a colony should be developed primarily for the benefit of the

colonial power. The United States purchased the islands to obtain the use of an important naval base, not to satisfy any desires of Virgin Islanders. Of course, once in power, the Americans felt they had a responsibility to care for the poor, ignorant and unsanitary Virgin Islanders. Americans saw Americanization as a favor done for Virgin Islanders. The United States acquired a naval station, and in return, the navy taught Virgin Islanders the importance of efficient administration, a good education, hard work and cleanliness.

The compatibility of Americanization and colonialism enabled the Americans to aim for the improvement of administrative efficiency and the standard of living without changing the social structure of the islands. Americanization posed no threat to the political and economic powers of the local elite. In Americanizing the political system, the American governors did little more than push the colonial councils to change the territory's legal statutes. In 1920 the St. Croix Council and in 1921 the St. Thomas Council enacted an American code of laws. These laws introduced trial by jury and barred people who were not Virgin Island or United States citizens from holding public office. Such minor changes hardly affected elite control of the political system. Similarly, Americanization brought few changes to the economic system. Along with prohibition and federal immigration laws, Congress sought to bring the

islands into the American economic system by extending to them the federal income tax. Although many planters and merchants denounced these laws, especially prohibition and the immigration quotas, the impact of the federal statutes proved no more than an annoyance to the elite.

The continuation of the colonial social structure suited the racist views of the American rulers. Indeed racism played an important role as another factor common to both colonialism and Americanization. Racism contributed to the paternalistic view that the United States held toward the Virgin Islands. Americans believed that black and brown Virgin Islanders lacked the ability to competently manage the affairs of their own society. This meant that white Americans had to assume the responsibility of governing the colony. Even the few white Virgin Islanders could not be given too much responsibility since only Americans could teach the natives the American way of life. Perhaps in time Virgin Islanders could be taught to manage their own affairs, but they could never expect equality with white Americans. Of course it behooved Americans to treat natives kindly so as not to alienate them from the process of Americanization. Luther Harris Evans, an American observer of the local scene, explained how the administration could earn the trust of the people while ensuring their subordinate status:

The opening of certain offices to the local people,
and the practice of filling them on a clear basis

of merit, has a beneficial effect. Furthermore, an identification of the governing class with the interests of the people by appropriate acts helps a great deal to allay hostility and distrust It is not necessary to profess or to practice complete social equality. But it is essential to have dignity and to treat others with dignity. Negroes expect a separate status, but they do not expect that status to be accompanied by galling discriminations. When discrimination cannot be avoided, wisdom dictates that colonial administrators keep them as few and inoffensive as possible. If possible, questions of race prestige must be kept from arising Persons who do suffer from race phobia should never be allowed to occupy official positions.³

This argument held that Americanization could proceed smoothly if an atmosphere was created in which Virgin Islanders did not question their social status.

The racism of the American administrators came directly from their experiences in the United States. Coming from a society which discriminated against its black citizens, the navy officials endorsed the racial hierarchy of the Virgin Islands. Since the United States denied equality to black Americans, black Virgin Islanders should expect no better treatment. The contradiction in American society that proclaimed all men equal while denying equality to black persons became an integral part of the ideology of Americanization. In this respect, Americanization coincided with practices in the United States.

Because of some differences in the American and West Indian perception of race, Americanization did affect race relations in the Virgin Islands. Under the Danes, the Virgin

Islands had developed the typical West Indian distinctions between black, brown and white. A complex array of attributes based on family background and economic standing as well as race determined a person's social standing. Money "whitened" some brown, and fewer black, persons enough to allow them to achieve near equality with white persons. The American navy officials drew a much stronger line between black and white. To American eyes, race outweighed any consideration of economic standing. They saw all non-white persons as equally inferior. While this view at times had the beneficial effect of pushing brown and black Virgin Islanders closer together, it more usually strained race relations by heightening the sense of the importance of color.⁴

The Americanization of race relations had the strongest impact on the brown members of the upper and middle classes. The sharper racial distinctions reduced the social status of the lighter skinned, more successful members of the community. While the Danish government officials had socialized with, and actively sought advice from, the brown leaders of the society, the American officials made them feel unwelcome in the upper social circles. While preaching hard work and prohibition to the general public, navy officers relaxed and drank with the white aristocracy at exclusive social clubs. The brown elite resented not only being left

out of these social gatherings, but also disliked the different standards created for white and non-whites. Furthermore, attempts by the Americans to place them on the same social plane as the black lower class outraged prominent brown members of the territory. For example, the Danish governors had catered to the social aspirations of the brown elite by holding an annual ball for all the important people of the islands regardless of color. The second American governor, Admiral Joseph Oman, attempted to continue this tradition by inviting the general public to a huge party. The attempt failed when the shocked brown elite disdained from mixing with lower class Virgin Islanders.⁵

Yet, despite the changes in attitudes, Americanization just perpetuated the racial hierarchy developed by colonialism. The brown middle and upper classes complained about the way they were treated by the navy officials, but their actual political and economic restrictions differed little from under the Danes. The Americanization of race relations meant even less to the members of the black middle and lower classes. American rule offered no less, or no more, opportunities for social advancement. Under both the Danes and the Americans, a few white men controlled the reins of political and economic power. All things considered, Americanization had little effect on the basic practices and relationships that governed this colonial society.

But because Americanization proved to be only another variation of colonialism, does not mean it had no impact on the lives of Virgin Islanders. In fact, Americanization overwhelmed Virgin Islanders. The navy governors devoted considerable energy and spent much money to remodel the society according to their notion of American ideals. Every year, the governors reported to the secretary of the navy and the president that the territory was making great strides in becoming Americanized.

The navy governors set as their major goal the improvement of the standard of living. Facing disease, poverty and illiteracy, they undertook a thorough program to improve hospitals, water supply, sewage disposal, public welfare and schools. Average annual expenditures of the department of health, education and public works totalled 70 percent of the budget of the St. Thomas-St. John government and 65 percent of the St. Croix government.⁶ The navy upgraded hospital facilities, and navy doctors and nurses provided extensive medical care to thousands of people. To further facilitate health care, the navy established a nursing school for native women. The administration improved the sewage disposal system and constructed huge reservoirs to control the water supply.⁷ All these efforts resulted in the gradual decline of the death rate from 28.4 per thousand in 1918 to 22.8 per thousand in 1927. A similar decrease

occurred in the infant mortality rate.⁸ In the area of education, the navy built new schools and attracted more natives into teaching by raising the average salary from sixteen dollars a month in 1918 to fifty dollars a month in 1930. The expansion of the school system guaranteed every child an American-style ninth grade education. Consequently school attendance rose from 3770 in 1917 to 4500 in 1930, and illiteracy dropped from 25 percent to 16 percent over the same period.⁹

To fuel these social programs, the navy relied on appropriations from the federal government. During the last seven years of its rule, Denmark directly supplied only 4 percent of the revenues of the colonial government. During the fourteen years of American navy rule, money from the United States government constituted 43 percent of the revenues available to the territory.¹⁰ Congress gave the funds reluctantly. Year after year the governors obtained federal appropriations only by promising that the islands would eventually become self-sufficient. The governors argued that they needed federal money to provide necessary social services and to prime the economic pump. Congress responded by trusting the navy's ability to improve conditions in the colony. From an initial appropriations of \$100,000 in 1917, Congressional grants rose to a high of \$425,000 in 1924 before being slashed by a money conscious

Congress to \$280,000 in 1927 and 1928 and then to \$260,000 in 1929.¹¹

Despite the promises of the governors to Congress, the Virgin Island government made little attempt to increase local revenues. Such a move would have entailed drastic tax reforms, and the local aristocracy, the people most capable of paying, resisted any increases in their taxes. The governors only managed to squeeze one small concession out of them. In 1922 the Colonial Council of St. Thomas-St. John raised taxes slightly by instituting a real and personal property tax. The members of the council claimed that this was all they could afford to contribute to the local treasury.¹²

By using their extensive political powers, the governors conceivably could have forced the colonial councils to increase taxes, but this would have endangered the alliance between the navy and the local aristocracy. The governors saw the planters and merchants as the natural leaders of the society and did not want to upset their economic position.¹³ Unwilling to challenge the elite, Governor Sumner Kittelle presented the 1922 real and personal property tax of the St. Thomas council to Congress as proof that the islands were moving towards financial independence.¹⁴ This belied the actual situation. The Virgin Islands depended on federal appropriations just as much in 1930 as they had in 1918.

Continued federal appropriations contributed to the development of a colonial mentality among Virgin Islanders that looked to the United States for aid and guidance. Of course the elite desired Congressional grants because they kept taxes low, but the federal money also kept other Virgin Islanders from exploring ways to solve their own problems. A government official observed this process when he noted: "Self-support is probably many years away. The people have not yet learned to think of the United States as anything but a glorified Santa Claus."¹⁵ With federal financial aid came a strong reliance on the United States to also supply ideas and leadership.

While the Americans lamented over the inability of the natives to solve their own problems, they hoped that Americanization would teach Virgin Islanders to be more responsible for local affairs. Once the basic problems of health and education had been solved, Virgin Islanders would develop the skills necessary to take care of themselves by learning more about the American way of life. This meant that the islanders had to become Americanized culturally. As a first step, the navy administration designed a flag for the territory. In 1921 Admiral Kittelle unveiled a flag which pictured an American bald eagle stationed on a white background. This showed Virgin Islanders that they were now part of the United States. Other steps in the process of

Americanization included changing the name of the colony's capital from Charlotte Amalie, the name of a Danish queen, to St. Thomas and naming schools after American presidents. Virgin Islanders more actively participated in Americanization when the administration recruited a United States navy band from local talent and, in 1924, sent it on a tour of the United States. Of course, the bandmaster, Alton A. Adams, could only attain the rank of chief petty officer, the highest rating given black sailors. Finally by 1929, when D. Victor Bornn, local businessman and journalist, noted that baseball had replaced cricket as the favorite Virgin Island sport, Virgin Islanders could claim that they were truly Americans. To celebrate, and further reinforce, their Americanness, the governors directed Virgin Islanders to observe such holidays as Thanksgiving Day.¹⁶

As the governors pursued their goals, they failed to recognize a contradiction between local control of Virgin Island society and Americanization. To become Americanized, the governors reasoned, Virgin Islanders had to be led by Americans. However, this had the effect of retarding Virgin Islanders' responsibility for solving problems. Probably the governors never came to grips with this contradiction because they assumed that Virgin Islanders could never govern themselves. Americanization might lead Virgin Islanders to share some responsibility, but ultimate authority would

always remain with the United States. As much as anything else, this reasoning demonstrated the relationship of Americanization to colonialism.

Not all Virgin Islanders accepted the navy's plan to Americanize the territory. These people did not reject Americanization outright, but they developed their own version of the policy. They wanted Americanization to include political and social equality for all Virgin Islanders. When the navy made no attempt to institute universal suffrage and a more representative legislature, these Virgin Islanders formed a movement in opposition to navy rule.

The navy administration branded this group with the term "radical." This term came out of the Red Scare mentality that pervaded the United States after World War I. Coming from this atmosphere, the navy perceived any attacks on their administration as un-American, and they called their attackers Bolsheviks, race-haters and, most commonly, radicals.¹⁷

The same men who organized the labor unions led the radicals. The radicals clustered around D. Hamilton Jackson in St. Croix and Rothschild Francis in St. Thomas. Their involvement in the labor movement had convinced these men that working class progress could only be achieved through

political reforms. This belief is what led them to seek, and obtain, election to the colonial councils. Although their appellation connoted drastic social change, the radicals primarily aimed to replace the navy administration with a more representative civilian government. Their rhetoric often hinted at the need for equal economic rights for workers but they never developed a program to overturn the colonial social structure. Instead they pinned their hopes on the belief that Americanization would eventually include political democracy. Rothschild Francis revealed the radicals' faith in Americanization when he claimed: "We in the Virgin Islands believe implicitly in America; we are Americans geographically, we are Americans in customs and everything."¹⁸ Like the navy, the radicals accepted the United States as a model for change, but they preferred different aspects of the same model.

The demands of the radicals for political and social equality unsettled the navy officials. The racist views of the Americans could not envision the extension of equal rights to the black majority. When the radicals called for Americanization that included full political equality, the governors responded with a warning about the dangers of allowing political control to fall into the hands of the black masses. Governor Sumner Kittelle best expressed these sentiments:

There are a few of the better educated and radical negroes who are secretly working to bring about a complete exclusion of all whites from public office and school. Their motive is the acquirement of full local political power I cannot too strongly urge, that there be no change made in the organic law until a full generation has elapsed and views broadened and clarified by time; and above all the white element must remain in the lead and supreme control.¹⁹

These remarks revealed that American officials had a fear of the black masses which twisted the demand for equality into a form of race hatred. From this viewpoint, the survival of a civilized society depended on the denial of equality to blacks.

While the radicals did point to white domination as a major problem, they usually refrained from making race the main issue in their cries for social reform. Instead they called for an Americanization that actually meant "all men are created equal." This would bring equal rights to all Virgin Islanders and eventually end racial inequality.²⁰

Although the radicals and the navy clashed most strongly on the issue of political reform, their differences extended to other areas as well. The radicals, like most Virgin Islanders, applauded the navy's accomplishments in improving health and education, but they complained that these social programs did not solve many basic problems. As long as Virgin Islanders were forced to labor in an economy dominated by the sugar and trading interests, they could not make significant changes in their standard of living. The radicals

wanted Americanization to include a plan for jobs. Of course the establishment of vegetable farms and the construction of hospitals, reservoirs, schools and other public works provided some jobs, but these efforts created only a small avenue of escape from the plantations and docks. Beset with high unemployment, the navy organized the Government Employment Service to help employers find laborers.²¹ This plan hardly satisfied the expectations of the radicals.

The radicals proposed massive tax reforms as a means to improve the economy. They urged the governors to push for the colonial councils for increased taxes on unused land. This would improve the economic situation by lessening the colony's dependence on federal appropriations and by forcing landowners to sell land to laborers for the establishment of small farms. By doubting the necessity for federal appropriations, the radicals ran counter to majority opinion. D. Hamilton Jackson, in particular, insisted that the islands could become self-supporting. In 1920, when increased appropriations were first being considered, Jackson suggested that a thorough study of St. Croix's financial resources would reveal the benefits of tax reform. The hopes for the establishment of small farms stemmed from the program of the St. Croix Labor Union. The radicals believed that higher taxes on unused land would induce the elite to sell this land to small farmers. Unfortunately for the radical plans, the

unwillingness of the governors to challenge the colonial councils precluded serious consideration of tax reform.

Despite its differences with the navy version, nothing in the radical concept of Americanization challenged the colonial system. While they debated what practices constituted Americanization, the racials looked to American society and ideals for the formation of their goals. Even when insisting on political equality, the radicals assumed that the federal government would retain ultimate authority over the colony. Similarly, their plan for tax reform, if implemented, might have loosened the oligarchy's grip on the land, but it certainly would not have greatly changed the social structure or economic system.

Nevertheless, the radicals did raise serious objections to the practices of the navy administration. While most Virgin Islanders appreciated many of the navy's effort, especially in the area of social services, the complaints of the radicals indicated that navy rule was not a complete success. Virgin Islanders complimented the navy's work by accepting many aspects of American culture, but an increasing number began to question the ability of the navy to solve basic problems.

Endnotes

- ¹Annual Report of the Governor, 1924, RG 55, NA.
- ²Lewis, p. 43.
- ³Evans, p. 322.
- ⁴Darwin Cregue, The United States and the Eastern Caribbean (Philadelphia: Whitmore Publishing Company, 1968) pp. 75-76.
- ⁵Jarvis, P. 133, and Director of Education to Governor, 22 February 1930, File 46, RG 55/3, NA.
- ⁶Evans, pp. 197-98.
- ⁷Evans, pp. 266-67; Cregue, pp. 78-79; Dookhan, A History of the Virgin Islands, p. 267; and Governor's Address to Graduating Class of Municipal Hospital, 21 February 1930, File 44, RG 55/3, NA.
- ⁸Report by the Governor, 1 May 1928, File 48, RG 55/3, NA, and Chart prepared by Director of Education, 3 October 1929, File 46, RG 55/3, NA.
- ⁹Evans, pp. 272-73; Cregue, p. 78; and Fifteenth Census of the United States 1930 Outlying Territories and Possessions, pp. 267-68. Money figures are in United States dollars.
- ¹⁰Evans, pp. 193-98.
- ¹¹Evans, pp. 153-62. Figures are in United States dollars.
- ¹²Evans, pp. 167-70.
- ¹³Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 5.
- ¹⁴Evans, p. 157.
- ¹⁵Director of Agriculture, Commerce and Labor to Governor, 12 April 1927, File 110, RG 55/2, NA.
- ¹⁶Jarvis, pp. 134-35; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 4-5; Cregue, pp. 78-79; The Broadcaster, 5 February 1929, File 70, RG 55/3, NA; and Proclamation by Governor, 6 November 1928, File 5, RG 55/3, NA.

¹⁷The New Day, 12 March 1921, File 59, RG 55/2, NA; Keyser to Secretary of the Navy, 13 November 1922, File 28759-685, RG 80, NA; and Annual Report of the Governor, 23 March 1922, File 28759-688, RG 80, NA.

¹⁸Hearings before the Committee on Territories and Insular Possessions, United States Senate, Sixty-eight Congress, First Session (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1924) 15 March 1924.

¹⁹Governor to Secretary of the Navy, 27 February 1922, File 89, RG 55/2, NA.

²⁰Mandate from Monster Mass Meeting, 20 July 1919, File 64, RG 55/2, NA; Extraordinary Meeting of the St. Croix Colonial Council, 31 May 1929, File 41, RG 55/3, NA; Jackson to Secretary to the President, 23 March 1921, File 28759-518:4, RG 80, NA; Dispatching Secretary to Governor, 10 February 1923, File 28759-518:17, RG 80, NA; and Governor to Secretary of the Navy and enclosures, 1 December 1922, File 28759-685, RG 80, NA.

²¹Cregue, p. 79, and Executive Order #3, 18 August 1918, File 59, RG 55/2, NA.

FOUR

The Radicals v. The Navy

Throughout the years of navy rule, the battles between the radicals and the administration dominated the political scene in the Virgin Islands. The two sides confronted each other over the issues of bestowing United States citizenship on Virgin Islanders, enacting universal suffrage and establishing a civilian administration. Most of the upper and middle classes backed the navy on these issues, while the rest of the middle classes and most of the lower class sided with the radicals.

When the United States purchased the Danish West Indies, Virgin Islanders expected to receive American citizenship. However, the terms of the treaty conferred United States citizenship only on Danish citizens living in the islands. These people could chose between retaining their Danish citizenship or becoming United States citizens. Since the Danish government had never extended citizenship beyond people of Danish birth or ancestry, less than 5 percent of the population gained the opportunity to become United States citizens.

From the outset, the radicals advocated United States citizenship for all islanders as part of the Americanization process. On the other side, the navy and the local elite opposed the extension of citizenship on the grounds it would imply equality between them and the ignorant, black populace.

The same reasoning divided the ruling class and the radicals on the issues of suffrage and the establishment of a civilian administration. The radicals demanded universal suffrage in order to guarantee a more representative legislature. They argued that the authoritarian mentality of the navy rulers blocked their ability to understand the democratic rights of the people. The radicals felt that an administration consisting of American civilians would be better equipped to develop democracy in the Virgin Islands. Conversely, the navy and its allies claimed that the masses lacked the capabilities to take on the responsibilities of democratic government. The upper class wanted to preserve the colonial councils as forums for whom they thought to be the natural leaders of the society. These leaders believed that only the strong, disciplined leadership of the navy could ensure efficiency and order in the society.

Denunciation of navy rule set the radicals apart from other Virgin Islanders who called for the extension of United States citizenship and the franchise. Some prominent Virgin Islanders believed that cooperation with the navy would

eventually prove that islanders deserved United States citizenship and universal suffrage. George Moorehead, the leader of the St. Thomas Labor Union and member of the colonial council, assumed the leadership of the cooperative reformers. He strongly favored American citizenship and universal suffrage, but he condemned those who agitated against the navy.¹

George Moorehead, and others of similar mind, posed no problems for the navy officials. Such people fitted the familiar "Booker T. Washington" image that the navy hoped Virgin Islanders would emulate. The administration heartily approved of a local leadership that rejected political activity by the masses in favor of encouraging thrift, hard work and respect for superiors. As islanders learned these values, the navy could slowly allow them more political responsibility. From this viewpoint, men like Rothschild Francis and D. Hamilton Jackson failed to appreciate what the navy planned to accomplish and only led the people astray from the proper way of life.

While both the navy and the radicals claimed to care for the working class, they aimed much of their rhetoric at the middle class. In a close election, the votes of the professionals, clerks, artisans and small shopkeepers could tip the political scales in favor of the workers or the elite. Most of the middle class sided with the elite, but

some members saw an opportunity to increase their political leverage by championing the rights of the poor. Those who favored the upper class cited the strength of tradition and the need for law and order. This reasoning emphasized the economic differences between middle and lower class persons. The other members of the middle class resented the domination of the planters and merchants. They emphasized the bonds between the native born brown middle class and the native born black lower class. These people did not think that more political power for the masses would lead to chaos. Instead they felt that a more democratic political system would be more responsive to the needs and rights of all Virgin Islanders.

While claiming leadership of the working class, most radicals belonged to the middle class. Like other members of their class, they stood to reap political rewards once the lower class was enfranchised. Because of this their opponents charged them with political opportunism, and certainly the prospect of personal political gain contributed to the motivations of the radicals.

But the opportunity for political reward neither covered the range of radical motivations nor the seriousness of their charges against the navy. By their actions and rhetoric, men like Jackson and Francis proved their sympathy for the plight of the poor. More than mere opportunists, they developed an

ideology based on equal rights for all Virgin Islanders. Ideology, not opportunism, was the primary force that moved middle class radicals to oppose navy rule.

The radical movement consisted of a loose coalition of men united in their opposition to the navy regime. Virgin Islanders joined the radicals for varying reasons. Like Jackson and Francis, the constant leaders of the radicals, some had connections to the labor movement. Morris Davis earned his radical label for his part in organizing labor in St. Croix. He angered the navy by suggesting that workers deserved more economic and political rights. Another advocate of labor rights, Ludvig Rogers, followed Francis in promoting radicalism on St. Thomas. Along with Francis and Davis, this black St. Thomian helped organize the American Virgin Islands Federation of Labor.² Some radicals developed their concern for civil rights outside the labor movement. Octavius C. Granady, the one other black lawyer in the territory besides Jackson, became sensitive to problems of the lower class from his work with poor, black clients. Born in St. Thomas, Granady had lived most of his life in the United States, where he earned a degree from Howard University Law School. After the transfer, he returned home to practice law. Dismayed by the discriminations against Virgin Islanders, Granady joined Francis in protesting navy rule.³ Other Virgin Islanders entered radical ranks to

expand the power of the middle class. On St. Thomas, Jean B. Heatres gained election to the colonial council by advocating a political alliance between the middle and lower classes. Along with Francis, he introduced resolutions calling for United States citizenship, universal suffrage and civilian government.⁴ On St. Croix, Halvor Berg supported the radicals in the colonial council. A native white manager in the island's telephone company, Berg resented the autocratic nature of navy rule. Not a strong supporter of universal suffrage, Berg hoped to obtain greater middle class participation in governing the islands. Nevertheless, his opposition to navy rule usually allied him with Jackson.⁵

While radicalism was largely a native Virgin Island movement, people from other islands played important roles. Two of these people, Reginald Barrow and Thomas Fitzhugh Morenga-Bonaparte, particularly earned the ire of the navy for their bitter denouncements of the government. Born in St. Vincent, Barrow, a black Anglican priest, came to St. Croix from Barbados in 1920. A few months after his arrival, the rector of his parish revoked Barrow's authority to preach because of his strong support for the sugar cane workers and his open animosity toward the naval government. Undaunted, the priest founded his own church, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and continued to agitate in favor of workers' rights. At the same time, Barrow became more

involved in organizing workers. He joined the St. Croix Labor Union, but personal disputes with union leaders convinced him to start his own organization, the St. Croix Benevolent Society. The society concerned itself primarily with purchasing land for the establishment of small farms. In 1921, when labor problems racked St. Croix, D. Hamilton Jackson praised Barrow for having developed a better land settlement program than the St. Croix Labor Union. Jackson hired Barrow as an editor for the Herald, which gave the preacher a far reaching pulpit to attack the colonial government.⁶

Thomas Fitzhugh Morenga-Bonaparte, a Grenadian, also achieved notoriety as an editor of a radical newspaper. In 1922 he found employment on Francis' paper, The Emancipator. Perhaps Morenga-Bonaparte's defiance of authority drew him to Francis. His past actions certainly revealed a rebellious nature. Years earlier Morenga-Bonaparte lost his job as a policeman in the Canal Zone because of insubordination. From there he moved from island to island giving boxing lessons, and in 1921 he arrived in St. Croix. Morenga-Bonaparte soon ran into trouble for not paying rent at his boarding house. He managed to come up with the money for the rent, but decided to seek better fortune in St. Thomas.⁷ From his experiences as a policeman, and from his troubles with the law, Morenga-Bonaparte developed a critical eye for

authority. This made him an ideal colleague for Rothschild Francis.

To defeat the radical threat, the navy and the local elite employed a powerful array of weapons. Upper class control of the political and economic institutions gave them a great advantage in the struggle with the radicals. Elite control of the economy prevented the radicals from applying economic pressures to gain reforms. The failure of the 1921 cane workers' strike proved the uselessness of such a course. Even D. Hamilton Jackson, who envisioned an economy based on small farms, admitted that the sugar estates were essential to the economic well being of St. Croix.⁸ On St. Thomas, the radicals did not even attempt to challenge the economic dominance of the West Indian Company, the Bay Rum manufacturers and the few other large commercial firms. This economic dominance translated into enormous political power. Combined with the powers of the executive, elite control of the colonial councils allowed the upper class to fend off the political initiatives of the few radicals who gained seats in the legislatures.

Navy control of the judicial system further blunted the radical attack. During much of this period, George Washington Williams, a person quite willing to use his powers against radicalism, headed the judiciary. In 1921 Williams came to

the colony to take up the posts of government attorney and police judge for St. Thomas-St. John. He made little attempt to hide his racist views, and soon many Virgin Islanders objected to his presence in the judicial system. However, the navy appreciated his efforts and, in 1924, promoted him to District Judge of the Virgin Islands.⁹ As district judge, Williams made liberal use of the charge of libel to protect upper class interests. Any radical who attacked the administration faced being fined or imprisoned for libel. The district judge also jealously guarded his power to decide the outcome of trials. While trial by jury was mandatory in cases punishable by a year or more in prison, the district judge could decide lesser cases by himself. To counter this power the radicals called for jury trials in all cases involving more than twenty dollars, but Williams responded by saying that such a move would not only waste time and money but could possibly result in the wrong verdict.¹⁰

Upper class interests also received protection from the police force. Before American rule, Danish gendarmes had preserved order in the colony. The Americans replaced the gendarmerie with a smaller native police force, but a mentality which viewed the police as an occupying body still survived among Virgin Islanders.¹¹ Because the position of director of police was filled by Americans, many Virgin Islanders continued to believe that the police worked for

foreign interests. In addition, the availability of United States marines and sailors stationed on the islands as a reserve police force confirmed the belief that nothing had changed with the end of Danish rule.¹²

Control of most of the press completed upper class dominance of the society. The major newspaper of St. Croix, the Avis, vigorously defended the views of the planters. The island's second largest paper, the West End News, also tended to side with the elite and the navy. On St. Thomas, the two largest newspapers, the St. Thomas Mail Notes and the Bulletin, usually expressed the opinions of the merchant class.¹³ While these newspapers agreed with the government on basic issues, their opinions diverged from the navy viewpoint often enough to push the administration to provide its own propaganda. In February 1927 the government began publishing the Virgin Islands Broadcaster, a short semi-annual newsmagazine, to inform the public about the navy's plans and accomplishments.¹⁴ Together, the long established newspapers of the elite and the new government publication gave the upper class the advantage in disseminating information and shaping public opinion.

Despite upper class control of the press, police, government and economy, the radicals conducted a strong political campaign against navy rule. While radical membership in the colonial councils certainly helped, much of

the political struggle took place outside these legislative bodies. The radicals skillfully used the labor unions, public speeches, petitions and their newspapers to malign the administration. One historian of this struggle has excellently described the strong points of the radical campaign:

. . . the radical Negro leaders . . . were more skilled in political method than the naval bureaucrats, were infinitely better orators, and were supported by a class solidarity that went back in its roots to the local class struggle that predated the period of American rule. Guerilla warfare in the legislative councils was increasingly replaced by guerilla warfare in field and factory by way of a lively polemical press conducted by skilled Negro editors . . .¹⁵

Their experiences in organizing the labor movement and conducting election campaigns made the radicals more adept at political tactics than the local elite, who took political power for granted, and the navy officials, who were never trained in politics.

The radicals made the best use of their direct contact with the masses. The early successes of the labor unions gained for Jackson, Francis, Davis, Rogers and Barrow the confidence of many people. Similarly, Jackson and Granady earned mass support from their work with poor clients. The radicals mobilized this support by calling mass meetings. In moments of political crisis, the radicals could draw hundreds of people to listen to speeches and to support petitions and resolutions. Although the elite and

administration tried to ignore the importance of these meetings of the unfranchised, such gatherings certainly represented potential political power. Just as a few radicals had gained election to the colonial councils so might a coalition be formed that would enfranchise, and harness the political strength, of the masses. At the very least, these demonstrations of mass discontent countered the navy's claims that it headed a successful administration which enjoyed popular support.

In addition to mass meetings, the radicals expressed their viewpoints through their newspapers. Although neither the Herald nor The Emancipator matched the circulation of the establishment press, they partly countered upper class domination of the media by offering alternative interpretations of issues. Their pointed attacks on the administration provided constant material for the political debates on the merits of navy rule.

Daily relations between the local inhabitants and United States military personnel also provided ample propaganda for the radical cause. American marines and sailors often expressed such blatant racial prejudices that popular sentiment turned against the navy. Counting those men stationed in the islands plus the men who arrived on visiting naval ships, military personnel in the islands at times numbered several hundred. These large groupings of single

young men not only contributed to problems of gambling, drinking and prostitution, but also caused numerous incidents of violence. Try as they might to improve civilian-military relations with picnics and baseball games, the navy administration could not end the antipathy between islanders and servicemen. Charges that the navy brought immorality, prejudice and violence to their homeland fueled the radical attack on the regime.

As the years of navy rule passed, the high hopes with which Virgin Islanders greeted their new rulers gave way to frustration and bitter feelings. Since the navy governed under the "Act To Provide A Temporary Government For The Virgin Islands," the radicals charged that the department had no right to continue administering the territory. The radicals blamed the navy for standing in the way of greater civil rights for all Virgin Islanders. For their part, the navy continued to resist political changes by claiming the radicals were ignorant of the principles of good government and did not appreciate the efforts to improve the standard of living.

Trouble between the radicals and the navy started early. By 1918 the initial atmosphere of good will and wartime cooperation had worn thin enough for the radicals to begin questioning the wisdom of navy rule. Octavius C. Granady

first ran into trouble with the authorities when they thought he might have evidence supporting questionable activities of the district court. Governor James Oliver and District Judge C. G. Thiele revoked Granady's license and placed him in jail for defrauding clients. Although Granady was freed for lack of evidence and soon regained his license, the experience turned him against the government.¹⁶ Before the end of the year, he and Francis joined together to organize the "American Historical Research Circle," a political club opposed to navy rule.¹⁷ Over on St. Croix, D. Hamilton Jackson, who had already earned the suspicions of the navy for agitating the plantation workers, attacked the administration in an October editorial in the Herald. Jackson particularly angered the navy administrators by quoting a speech by President Wilson in which he stated that no nation should be ruled by military force.¹⁸

At the end of the year, relations between the radicals and the navy deteriorated even further when fights broke out between natives and American servicemen in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas. Amid the drinking and dancing of Christmas Eve celebrations several marines got into a fight with some civilians. Before the military and local police could restore order, marines had discharged their rifles into the air, and marines, sailors and natives had thrown stones and bottles at each other. Three people were seriously hurt.

The next evening, ". . . much to the surprise of the officials . . ." similar rioting spoiled the Christmas Day festivities.¹⁹ The "American Historical Research Circle" blasted the navy for its inability to control its men and published letters in newspapers in New York City and Puerto Rico blaming the riots on ". . . race hatred pure and simple . . ."²⁰ Apparently these, and other similar, remarks greatly upset the administration. In early 1919 Governor Oliver reported to the secretary of the navy that Rothschild Francis, still a shoemaker, ". . . was fined in the police court for writing libelous remarks on a blackboard and exposing same outside of his shop."²¹

From his scribbling on a blackboard, Francis moved on to organizing wide opposition to the navy regime. In 1919 he joined Ludvig Rogers of St. Thomas and Morris Davis of St. Croix in forming the Working People's Committee, the predecessor of the American Virgin Islands Federation of Labor. The Working People's Committee paved the way for the Federation by publishing handbills and organizing public meetings to educate workers about their political and civil rights. In July the Working People's Committee of St. Thomas sponsored a "Monster Mass Meeting" which produced a petition to Congress asking for the clarification of the status of the Virgin Islands and Virgin Islanders. The petition demanded a Bill of Rights, universal manhood suffrage, workingman's

compensation laws, regulation of wages, the establishment of homesteads and preference for Virgin Islanders in government jobs. Finally, the petition called for the quick Americanization of St. Thomas, including the establishment of an Americanized school system, judiciary and postal service.²² Whereas the petition did not directly attack navy rule, it clearly implied that the administration was not fulfilling Virgin Islander expectations of Americanization.

After forming the American Virgin Islands Federation of Labor, its leaders continued to use the tactic of the mass meeting to involve the labor movement in politics. In November 1919 both colonial councils passed resolutions asking Congress to replace the Danish West India francs with United States dollars as the colony's currency because an unfavorable rate of exchange was hurting the economy. Since the transfer treaty guaranteed to the National Bank of the Danish West Indies a monopoly to issue bank notes, the Federation viewed a change in currency as a violation of treaty rights. The labor union demanded that the Virgin Islands be compensated for any change in the treaty. Rothschild Francis gathered together several hundred persons to demand compensation of two million dollars. On St. Croix, Morris Davis sponsored a similar meeting which demanded four million dollars in compensation for the violation of treaty rights if the currency was changed. All this money would be

spent by the local government to improve living conditions in the islands. Neither the local or the federal government gave any indication that they paid much attention to these demands, but the United States made no move to change the currency until 1934 when the bank's charter expired. Actually, the issue of currency change was only of minor importance in these meetings. More importantly, these meetings demonstrated the determination of the radicals to include the working class in the policy making process. The success of these protests can be gauged by the fact that George Moorehead's St. Thomas Labor Union found it necessary to call its own mass meeting in favor of the resolutions of the colonial councils.²³ Like the radicals, the more conservative Moorehead realized the political potential of these public gatherings.

The next couple of years saw more mass meetings. In July 1920 the Working People's Committee collected enough money at one of these meetings to purchase a printing press, which enabled Francis to establish The Emancipator.²⁴ In 1921 Morris Davis used mass meetings to encourage the cane workers in their strike against the sugar companies. Perhaps the spectre of the fiery oratory of Morris Davis inspiring the masses to some terrible action frightened the authorities. In any case, the police arrested Davis for disturbing the peace and the police court of Fredericksted fined him \$200.²⁵

The arrest of Davis marked the beginning of a series of actions by the government against the radicals. Political agitation of the masses and hostile newspaper editorials tarnished the navy's image as the savior of a backward people. To make matters worse, in March 1921, during celebrations to observe the fourth anniversary of the transfer, rioting again broke out between natives and servicemen.²⁶ Still, the administration believed that most Virgin Islanders appreciated navy leadership and only a few malcontents were causing trouble. However, these troublemakers, if allowed free rein, could cause problems by misleading the people. The navy intensified its efforts to silence the radical opposition.

In 1922 an opportunity appeared to punish D. Hamilton Jackson for his anti-government views. In March the police court of Fredericksted fined the St. Croix Labor Union fifteen dollars for not repairing the roads adjacent to one of its properties as required by law. Jackson, now the attorney for the union, wrote an editorial in the Herald criticizing the court because it failed to fine several plantations for not repairing their roads. For his editorial, the police court slapped a ten dollar fine on Jackson and sentenced him to six days in jail for contempt of court. Jackson appealed to both the Virgin Islands district court and the Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia.

However, George Washington Williams, as government attorney, convinced the judges that Jackson wrote the editorial to smear the navy administration and mislead the public. Jackson lost the appeal and went to jail.²⁷

A different fate befell Jackson's assistant editor, Reginald Barrow. In September 1922 Governor Kittelle ordered his deportation to St. Vincent for attempting to turn the laborers of St. Croix against the government. As assistant editor of the Herald and as minister of the A.M.E. church, Barrow constantly criticized the government and its officials. Two attempts to convict Barrow of slander ended in hung juries, so Kittelle decided to bypass the judicial system by deporting Barrow as an undesirable alien. Fearing that publicity might cause public disturbances, the police packed Barrow off to the British West Indies without the benefit of a hearing before the courts.²⁸

The government also used deportation to rid the islands of Thomas Morenga-Bonaparte. With his police training, Morenga-Bonaparte had proved an irritant to the government with his frequent and knowledgeable criticisms of the police. In January 1923 Governor Henry Hough ordered his deportation for writing an editorial in The Emancipator ridiculing the police for not following proper arrest procedures. To escape deportation to Grenada, Morenga-Bonaparte fled to the nearby island of Tortola.²⁹

The attacks on the radicals continued into 1924 and 1925. First in 1924, Governor Philip Williams, again revoked Granady's license for his constant criticism of the government. Then Halvor Berg lost his job at the telephone company for his anti-government views. Finally, in 1925 Morris Davis was jailed for sixty days, ostensibly for beating his wife, but the charges may have been politically motivated.³⁰

Despite government repression, the radical attacks grew stronger. In 1925 G. W. Williams, now district court judge, sentenced Rothschild Francis to thirty days in jail for writing an editorial libelously accusing a policeman of brutality. Francis responded with another editorial denouncing Williams for not allowing the editor a trial by jury. Williams promptly countered this by finding Francis guilty of contempt of court. Next, Francis appealed both sentences to the Third Circuit Court in Philadelphia on the hopes that the court would uphold the right to jury trials in the territory. On the libel charge, the Philadelphia judges reversed the district court on the grounds that Francis did not name anyone in his editorial. But more importantly, the appeals court ruled that, since libel was a misdemeanor, Williams had the right to decide the case without a jury.³¹

While Francis was losing his battle, the Crucian radicals and the administration moved toward a major

confrontation in the colonial council. D. C. Canegata, a brown native physician, and D. H. Jackson organized the People's Party, a loose caucus of native politicians. The dignified Canegata had previously refrained from blatant attacks on the navy, and therefore, had never been branded a radical. Apparently the slow pace of political change under the navy finally forced him to side with the radicals. The People's Party, a new innovation in a system where politicians had always run as individuals, aimed at obtaining more political power for native Crucians. In the elections of 1925, Canegata, Jackson, Halvor Berg, Ralph de Chabert and enough other members of the party grabbed enough seats to gain control of the council. D. C. Canegata, as head of the People's Party, became the council's first nonwhite chairman.³²

Within the colonial council, the party attempted to curtail the power of the governor to appoint legislators. Even before they controlled the majority of the seats in the council, the party nearly prevented the appointment of Kai Esmann, claiming that he was a Danish citizen. The administration refuted the charge by showing that Esmann had never refused the chance to assume United States citizenship and, by the terms of the transfer treaty, had received American citizenship. This must have stung the native politicians, who were not entitled to the same benefits from the treaty. At this time, the People's Party just barely

lacked the votes to control the council, and Esmann's appointment was accepted eight to seven.³³

After the election, the party again challenged an appointee of the governor. This time the party prevented the appointment of C. U. F. Daniel on the grounds he was a federal employee. In retaliation, Governor Philip Williams dissolved the colonial council and ordered new elections. This measure, used previously by Governor Kittelle to get the St. Thomas council to vote for an administration bill, only served to elect a stronger People's Party ticket. The impasse ended when the United States Treasury Department ruled against the eligibility of Daniel, a federal customs agent.³⁴

Encouraged by this development, the People's Party next challenged the appointments of A. E. Stakemann and Douglas Armstrong, two of the directors of the St. Croix Sugar Company.³⁵ The party claimed that these two men were aliens and could not hold public office. At the time of the transfer, Stakemann had chosen to retain his Danish citizenship, but he later renounced it to become an American citizen. D. Hamilton Jackson, the main spokesman for the party, argued that once Stakemann had opted for Danish citizenship he would have to go through the normal naturalization process to change his citizenship. In the case of Armstrong, Jackson contended that this appointee,

though born in the Virgin Islands, was a British citizen because his father had been the British Consul.³⁶ The government made a strong case for the two men by liberally interpreting the treaty and by showing that Armstrong had an American passport and had served in the United States navy during the great war.³⁷ By these challenges, the native caucus hoped to generate a serious debate on the citizenship status of Virgin Islanders. This hope faded when the government lawyers simply ruled that the colonial council had no authority to question the governor's appointees. When the People's Party protested this ruling, Governor Williams again dissolved the council.³⁸

The dissolution of the colonial council in June 1925 inspired a movement by the People's Party to support the annexation of St. Croix to Puerto Rico. It was a desperate attempt to escape the domination of navy governors. The radicals tried to build support for annexation by holding public meetings, but the movement never gained the favor of most Crucians. Along with Cruian disinterest, opposition from St. Thomas and the navy soon killed the annexationist movement.³⁹ This ended the attempts of the People's Party to challenge the navy's domination of local politics. In July 1926 a new governor, Captain Martin Trench, signaled the navy's victory by reconvening the St. Croix colonial council.

On the eve of the tenth anniversary of American rule, the radicals seemed to be no closer to achieving their goals than they were in 1918. Their attempts at political and social reform failed to shake navy and elite control of the society. With the defeat of the People's Party, the radicals suffered a major blow in their drive toward United States citizenship, representative government and the withdrawal of the navy. Nevertheless, the hope that the Virgin Islands could be properly Americanized still persisted. Defeated locally, the radicals now took their fight to the national level.

Endnotes

¹St. Thomas Union to Governor, 19 November 1919, File 28759-464:15, RG 80, NA.

²Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 10.

³Commandant to Director of Naval Intelligence, 28 June 1918, File 64, RG 55/2, NA, and Governor to Secretary of the Navy, 28 June 1924, File 28759-788, RG 80, NA.

⁴Order of the Day for Meeting of St. Thomas-St. John Colonial Council, 5 February 1925, File 65, RG 55/2, NA.

⁵Evans, p. 243; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 22; Election Results, 11 and 12 May 1923, File 65, RG 55/2, NA; and Jackson to President, 21 January 1926, File 28759-827, RG 80, NA.

⁶Jackson to Governor, 30 November 1921, File 59, RG 55/2, NA; Jackson to Government Secretary, 17 February 1921 and Government Secretary to Jackson, 28 February 1921, File 64, RG 55/2, NA; and Governor to Secretary of the Navy and enclosures, 1 December 1922, File 28759-685, NA.

⁷Governor to Chief of Naval Operations, 27 March 1923, File 66, RG 55/2, NA, and Police Commission of St. Thomas-St. John to Governor, 24 January 1923 and enclosures, File 28759-708, RG 80, NA.

⁸Second Ordinary Session of St. Croix Colonial Council, 10 September 1928, File 41, RG 55/3, NA.

⁹Scott Nearing and Joseph Freeman, Dollar Diplomacy A Study in American Imperialism (New York: B. W. Huebsch and the Viking Press, 1926) pp. 218-19; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 6-7; File 66, RG 55/2, NA, covers many of Williams' activities as government attorney, police judge and district judge.

¹⁰Correspondence Pertaining the Several Attempts to Extend Trial by Jury, 1927, File 42, RG 55/3, NA.

¹¹Evans, p. 271.

¹²Dispatching Secretary to Government Secretary, 11 August 1927, File 58, RG 55/3, NA.

¹³Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 11-12.

¹⁴Virgin Islands Broadcaster, 25 February 1927, File 99, RG 55/2, NA, and Clippings of various newspapers, 1927-1931, File 70, RG 55/3, NA.

¹⁵Lewis, p. 52.

¹⁶Commandant to Director of Naval Intelligence, 28 June 1918 and Burnett to Governor, 21 April 1919, File 64, RG 55/2, NA; and Governor to Secretary of the Navy, 3 February 1919, File 89, RG 55/2, NA.

¹⁷A.H.R.C. to Governor, 27 December 1918, File 64, RG 55/2, NA.

¹⁸The Herald, 23 October 1918, File 64, RG 55/2, NA.

¹⁹Jarvis, pp. 141-142; Police Report, 27 December 1918, File 64, RG 55/2, NA; and Governor to Secretary of the Navy, 3 February 1919, File 89, RG 55/2, NA.

²⁰A.H.R.C. to Governor, 27 December 1918 and La Democracia, 11 January 1919, File 64, RG 55/2, NA, and New York News, 9 January 1919, File 89, RG 55/2, NA.

²¹Governor to Secretary of the Navy, 3 February 1919, File 89, RG 55/2, NA.

²²Mandate from Monster Mass Meeting, 26 July 1919, File 64, RG 55/2, NA.

²³File 28759-464:15, RG 80, NA, covers the currency controversy.

²⁴Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 12, and American Virgin Islands Federation of Labor to Governor, 13 August 1920, File 59, RG 55/2, NA.

²⁵Dispatching Secretary to Governor, 31 August 1921, File 66, RG 55/2, NA.

²⁶Working People's Committee Handbill, 31 March 1921, File 89, RG 55/2, NA; St. Thomas Mail Notes, 31 March 1921, File 28759-567:1, RG 80, NA; and The Bulletin, 31 March 1921, File 28759-571, RG 80, NA.

²⁷Brief for Appellee in Third Circuit Court, October Term 1922, Proceedings of Fredericksted Police Court, 18 March 1922 and Police Judge to District Judge, 28 May 1923, File 66, RG 55/2, NA.

²⁸ Governor to Secretary of the Navy, 1 December 1922 and enclosures, Government Attorney to Secretary of the Navy, 13 November 1922, and Government Secretary to Dispatching Secretary, 16 June 1924, File 66, RG 55/2, NA; and Stiffler to Secretary of the Navy, 24 January 1924, File 28759-685, RG 80, NA.

²⁹ Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 22; Governor to Chief of Naval Operations, 27 March 1923 and enclosures, File 66, RG 55/2, NA; and Governor to Police Commission, 24 January 1923 and enclosures, File 28759-708, RG 80, NA.

³⁰ Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 22 and Governor to Secretary of the Navy, 28 June 1924, File 28759-788, RG 80, NA.

³¹ Brief for Appellant in Third Circuit Court of Appeals and Brief for Appellee in Third Circuit Court of Appeals, October Term 1925, File 66, RG 55/2, NA, and Decision by Third Circuit Court of Appeals, October Term 1925, File 28759-788, RG 80, NA.

³² Proceedings of the St. Croix Colonial Council, 11 May 1925, File 28759-827, RG 80, NA.

³³ Proceedings of the St. Croix Colonial Council, 20 April 1925, File 65, RG 55/2, NA.

³⁴ Proclamation by the Governor, 1 September 1922 and Government Secretary to Daniel, 25 May 1925, File 65, RG 55/2, NA, and Proceedings of the St. Croix Colonial Council, 11 May 1925, File 28759-827, RG 80, NA.

³⁵ Dispatching Secretary to Government Secretary, 19 June 1929, File 58, RG 55/2, NA.

³⁶ Evans, pp. 246-47; Governor to Government Secretary, 22 May 1919, Government Attorney to Government Secretary, 12 May 1925 and Dispatching Secretary to Government Secretary, 19 September 1925, File 65, RG 55/2, NA; and Proceedings of the St. Croix Colonial Council, 22 June 1925, File 28759-851, RG 80, NA.

³⁷ Legal Aide to Governor, 10 June 1925 and Government Secretary to Dispatching Secretary, 8 July 1925, File 65, RG 55/2, NA.

³⁸Hearings before the Committee on Insular Affairs, House of Representatives, Sixty-Ninth Congress, First Session (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1926) 30 January 1926, and Report by Christiansted Police, 10 June 1925, File 62, RG 55/2, NA.

³⁹Governor to Secretary of the Navy, 16 July 1925, File 28759-851, RG 80, NA.

FIVE

The End of Navy Rule

After 1925 the center of the struggle for political reform shifted from the islands to the United States. Effective local opposition to reforms forced the radicals to undertake a concerted effort to get Congress to consider the problems of the Virgin Islands. Because the Act of March 3, 1917 had only established a temporary government for the Virgin Islands, the radicals believed that Congress had left unfinished the business of providing a permanent American constitution for the colony. As the frustration mounted over the inability to pressure the navy administration and the colonial councils to push for political reforms, the radicals began taking frequent trips to Washington, D. C. to talk directly to congressmen and senators. Unlike local agitation, this agitation in the national capital proved an important factor in ending navy rule in the Virgin Islands.

While 1925 marked the beginning of increased lobbying in Congress, the radicals had long before initiated contact with the national government. Rothschild Francis, in particular, travelled often to the mainland to enlist the aid of sympathetic federal officials. As early as 1919, Francis,

using the money raised at the "Monster Mass Meeting" of that year, journeyed to Washington to inform members of Congress about Virgin Island problems. In 1920 Congress responded by sending a joint commission to investigate the political, economic and social situation in the colony.¹ Then in 1924, Francis visited the United States secretary of labor, James J. Davis, and persuaded him to send a commission to the islands to investigate conditions there.²

The 1920 joint congressional commission and the 1924 Labor Department commission spent much time listening to radical opinions. While in St. Croix, the three senators and three congressmen of the congressional committee, led by Senator William Kenyon of Iowa, received a petition, sponsored by D. Hamilton Jackson and Ralph de Chabert, calling for civilian government, manhood suffrage, greater powers for the legislature, homesteads and increased federal appropriations. The commission also heard lengthy testimony from Jackson, who claimed that tax reform could possibly make the islands self supporting. But tax reform became the only radical demand that the commission incorporated into its final report. On all other issues, the commissioners sided with the conservative views of the merchants, planters and navy.³

The 1924 Labor Department commission also brushed aside the question of political reform. Attempting to ensure a

sympathetic delegation, Secretary Davis chose five black Americans to make the trip. Francis thought the black commission would understand the urgent need for political reform. However, the commission, led by George Woodson, an Iowa lawyer, made no specific suggestions for political changes, except to recommend the extension of United States citizenship.⁴ The common denominator of race did not compensate for the cultural and class differences between the commissioners and poor Virgin Islanders. Coming from an American middle class background that emphasized the "puritan work ethic," the commissioners quickly developed a condescending view of Virgin Islanders. The report they submitted to the Labor Department tended to moralize about the character of the islanders:

While, as had been suggested, there should be a new organic law reforming existing governmental processes, the most perfect political system will not avail to relieve this distress unless founded upon an industrial and economic readjustment of the Virgin Islands Our obligation to confer on them the high privilege of American citizenship and to assist in their economic uplift carried with it corresponding obligation on the part of the people of the Virgin Islands to renounce certain age-old customs, to adopt a higher conception of life and its duties, and to set up a standard conforming to true American ideals.⁵

This sounds very much like the admonitions of the elite and the navy telling the laborers to work harder. The class affiliations between the commissioner, local elite and navy officials proved stronger than the racial ties between the black Americans and the black lower class Virgin Islanders.

The recommendations of the Labor Department commission resulted in another federal investigation of the Virgin Islands. The black commissioners suggested that tax experts examine the islands' problems, and in 1925 the Treasury Department sent Rufus Tucker and Roswell Magill to investigate possibilities for tax reform. After touring the territory, Tucker and Magill called for increased income and property taxes, but their racist views damaged the cause of political reform.⁶ They condemned the character of Virgin Islanders even more harshly than had the Labor Department commission. The Treasury Department investigators called Virgin Islanders lazy and careless and claimed they had an "' . . . apparent inability to carry out instructions unless constantly supervised.'"⁷

As far as the radicals were concerned, none of these federal delegations, congressional, labor or treasury, produced any meaningful results. The views of these commissions combined with the intransigence of local political officials to convince radicals that they had to present Congress personally with a true picture of the situation in the islands. The radicals hoped to persuade Congress that all Virgin Islanders were Americans and entitled to the rights enjoyed by citizens of the United States.

In their efforts to influence Congress, the radicals sought help from the Virgin Island community in Harlem, New

York. By the 1920s several thousand Virgin Islanders had moved to Harlem in search of work.⁸ This movement conformed to the historic pattern of emigration from the Virgin Islands. Whereas earlier emigrants had gone mostly to the Dominican Republic, Cuba and the Panama Canal, the lifting of immigration restrictions in 1917 allowed an increasingly large number to make their way to New York City.

The transition from relatively isolated islands to the ferment of the Harlem Renaissance awakened the political consciousness of many of these people. Virgin Islanders in Harlem actively supported the struggle for political equality in the islands. The denial of citizenship especially concerned them since it restricted their ability to get jobs and exercise their legal rights. To advance political reform, the Virgin Island community in Harlem organized such societies as the Virgin Islands Protective League (1919), the Virgin Islands Congressional Council (1922) and the Virgin Islands Committee (1924). These societies sponsored mass meetings and sent petitions to the president and Congress calling for the end of naval rule, the extension of American citizenship, universal suffrage and other items on the radical agenda.⁹

Out of this political cauldron emerged Casper Holstein, the most important spokesperson of the Harlem community. Holstein, the brother-in-law of D. Hamilton Jackson,

reputedly amassed a fortune in gambling and rum-running and gave much financial support to the cause of political reform. In 1923 he joined the various Virgin Island societies in Harlem together to form the Associated Virgin Islands Societies of New York and, as its head, received a call for advice from the Labor Department before it sent the Woodson delegation to the islands.¹⁰

The political activities of the Harlem community drew some of the black and white liberal press to the side of Virgin Island radicalism. The Negro World of New York and the Nation particularly served as forums for Casper Holstein, Rothschild Franics and their American sympathizers. While much of the reporting exaggerated conditions in the territory by portraying the navy officials as brutal tyrants, the exposure generated some national interest in the Virgin Islands.¹¹

Virgin Island radicalism also gained an important ally in the American Civil Liberties Union. In 1920 Rothschild Francis contacted Adolph Berle Jr., counsel for the ACLU, to ask that organization's help in drafting a model constitution. Completed in 1922, this draft constitution called for the extension of United States citizenship to all Virgin Islanders, the institution of universal suffrage and the establishment of an elected unicameral legislature with the power to override a veto by the governor. In addition,

the navy administration would be replaced by a mostly civilian administration headed by the Bureau of Insular Affairs of the War Department.

Largely a product of Francis' personal initiative, the draft constitution reflected his biases. He ruined the document by stipulating that seven members would be elected to the legislature from St. Thomas and only five from St. Croix, which had the larger population.¹² This obvious imbalance can only be explained in terms of the small island jealousy that existed between St. Thomas and St. Croix. The geographic isolation of each island fostered a stronger loyalty to either St. Thomas or St. Croix than to the Virgin Islands as a whole. By succumbing to this narrow thinking, Francis spoiled what was otherwise a notable achievement.

Despite its shortcomings, Francis and Berle moved to get Congress to approve the constitution. In 1924 Berle persuaded Senator George McLean of Connecticut to introduce the ACLU constitution to the Committee on Territories and Insular Affairs. Because the drafting of the constitution and the push for a hearing by the Senate had been largely due to the private efforts of Francis and Berle, the introduction of the bill to the committee caught Virgin Island political leaders by surprise. However, once they received news of the hearing, Governor Philip Williams and the colonial councils quickly registered their objections. The councils deemed the

matter important enough to meet in joint session, a rare event. On April 24, 1924 this joint session issued a resolution saying that the McLean bill was " . . . not based on a knowledge of local conditions . . ." and that no political changes should be made until requested by the "people" of the Virgin Islands.¹³ Determined not to let the councils have the last word, St. Thomian radicals rallied a mass meeting of 500 people, which denounced the legislature as unrepresentative and sent Octavius C. Granady, Ralph J. Bough and Frederico Guirty to Washington to support the McLean bill.¹⁴ All this activity induced the Senate committee to scrutinize the constitution carefully. In the end, the imbalance in the allocation of elected representatives and the protests of the governor and the colonial councils persuaded the senators to take no action on the ACLU constitution.¹⁵

The McLean bill almost spurred the Colonial Council of St. Thomas-St. John to take control of the process of political reform. In 1925 the council designated two of its more liberal members, Lionel Roberts and George A. Mena, to draft an organic act. The Mena-Roberts constitution provided for United States citizenship, a franchise based on literacy and a large bicameral legislature with the power to override the governor's veto. However, the colonial council failed to pursue this opportunity to demonstrate that local political

leaders could accomodate popular demands for change. The council never acted on the draft, and the center of the struggle for a new constitution shifted back to Congress.¹⁶

Late in 1925 D. Hamilton Jackson and Halvor Berg, representing the People's Party, and Jean B. Hestres, representing the liberals of the St. Thomas-St. John council, travelled to D. C. to raise again the question of a new constitution. They met with Adolph Berle, Jr., and agreed to support the ACLU constitution after reversing the number of legislators from St. Thomas and St. Croix. This change made the allocation of elected seats more representative of the actual population in the islands. In January 1926 Jackson, Berg and Hestres convinced Felix Davila, the delegate from Puerto Rico, to submit the constitution to the House Committee on Insular Affairs.

When brought to discussion by the committee, the Davila bill soon ran into trouble. Still in the midst of the struggle between the People's Party and the navy governor, Jackson and Berg spent much time pleading for the annexation of St. Croix to Puerto Rico. By straying from the main issue of the merits of the constitution, Jackson and Berg confused the committee members and weakened the chances for the passage of the bill. Furthermore, former Governor Sumner Kittelle appeared before the committee to caution against universal suffrage and a representative legislature. Rufus

Tucker, the tax expert, also testified in favor of moving carefully on the question of political reform. The committee accepted the suggestions of Kittelle and Tucker to postpone any action until further studies could be made.¹⁷

Despite its failure, the Davila bill convinced some senators and congressmen that the constitutional problems of the Virgin Islands had to be resolved. Bearing in mind the objections of the governors and councils to the McLean and Davila bills, Senator Frank Willis of Ohio and Congressman Robert Bacon of New York asked Adolph Berle and Rufus Tucker to write an organic act that would be more acceptable to conservative opinion. These men revised the ACLU draft by retaining the separate colonial councils, complete with appointed members, and by placing literacy qualifications on the franchise. Between February and April 1926, Willis and Bacon, joined by Congressman Edgar Kiess of Pennsylvania, introduced this version of the territorial constitution to the appropriate committees of the Senate and House. Witnesses from the Navy Department, the Army Bureau of Insular Affairs and the Virgin Islands government gave the bill their cautious support. Likewise, a few radicals and their American sympathizers appeared before the committee and testified in favor of the revised constitution.

Yet the constitution failed to receive congressional approval. The merchants and planters of the colony inundated

the committees with letters protesting any changes. In March six members (three of them appointed) of the Crucian colonial council sent a letter to Congress saying that the people of the islands were unprepared for the extension of the franchise. Similarly, Robert Merwin, the leading white merchant of St. Croix, informed the Senate Committee on Territories and Insular Possessions that the business community opposed the bill. From St. Thomas, the committee received a petition signed by 127 businessmen asking for the retention of the navy administration. Faced with this substantial opposition, the committee members again postponed any decisions until they learned more about their new and troubled possession.¹⁸

In July 1926 Senator Hiram Bingham of Connecticut journeyed to the Virgin Islands to gather first hand information. Like other federal visitors, his views on class and race predisposed him to favor the opinions of the local elite. Bingham eagerly listened to the praise that the upper class members of the colonial councils heaped on the navy administration. On the other hand, his observations of poor Virgin Islanders suited his racist preconceptions, and he quickly developed a low opinion of the masses.

On his return to the mainland, Bingham prepared yet another constitution. Like the previous plans, his version called for the removal of navy rule and instituted literacy

based suffrage, but this plan introduced a new concept into the colonial political system. Bingham made the number of appointed members to each colonial council dependent on the amount of federal aid spent on the islands. The members appointed by the governor would increase in direct proportion to the percentage of federal money that comprised island revenues. This innovation allowed the number of elected members to fall as low as three out of eleven in St. Thomas and four out of thirteen in St. Croix.¹⁹ While meeting the demand for a broader franchise, Bingham's plan actually contemplated increased federal and local upper class control of the colony.

Hoping to finally put the matter to rest, a joint House-Senate committee conducted hearings on Bingham's bill only to find that the senator's plan satisfied no one. In December 1926 numerous witnesses testified against the bill. The strongest denunciations came from the radicals and their allies, who resented the possibility of reduced elected representation in the colonial council. A. A. Berle, Jr., D. C. Canegata, D. H. Jackson, Halvor Berg appeared before the committee and Rothschild Francis and Ralph de Chebert sent letters of protest. For the navy, Governor Martin Trench and the government secretary,²⁰ Captain Cecil Baker, made the trip to Washington to caution against removing property restrictions from the franchise. Similarly, two white

Crucian planters and council members, Robert Skeoch and Douglas Armstrong also came to protest universal suffrage. Finally, District Judge G. W. Williams and Folmer Andersen, the manager of the Bethlehem plantations, took the most conservative position by speaking in favor of the political status quo. Attacked from all sides, the Bingham constitution also perished in committee.²¹

Despite this setback, the committee members decided to seek at least a partial solution to the problems of Virgin Islanders. They initiated the process which ultimately led to the passage of a bill by Congress on February 25, 1927 granting American citizenship to all Virgin Islanders living in the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico or the United States on January 17, 1917 and February 25, 1927, or born in the islands since January 17, 1917.²² This step solved the most simple of the political problems. The more complicated issues required still further study. Another congressional delegation, headed by Congressman Burton French of Idaho, visited the islands to assess the situation personally.²³ Then, Congress authorized the Bureau of Efficiency to investigate and make recommendations to solve the remaining problems.

Herbert D. Brown, Chief of the Bureau of Efficiency arrived in the Virgin Islands just in time to witness the

effect of the great depression on the island society. The inability of the navy to deal with this catastrophe contributed to its removal as the governing body of the islands just as much as the political pressure of the radicals on Congress. Backed by the authority of Congress, Brown blamed the navy for improperly handling the economic disaster and persuaded President Hoover to transfer the islands to the department of the interior in March 1931. Thus, without a congressional act, navy rule ended in the Virgin Islands. Just as American naval personnel had replaced the Danish officials in 1917 without changing the political structure so now civilians from the federal bureaucracy replaced the navy.

The radicals certainly welcomed the withdrawal of the navy, but they contributed little to the decision to replace the navy. At the time the change occurred the radicals had largely retreated from activities on the political front. Two factors, the economic crisis and the liberal views of a new governor, Captain Waldo Evans, silenced radical agitation.

Most importantly the economic collapse sent the radicals, along with everyone else, scrambling to find solutions to the resulting massive unemployment. In the summer of 1930 the two large sugar companies of St. Croix, Bethlehem and La Grange, went bankrupt, throwing some 2700 people out of work. In addition, a decline in shipping seriously disrupted the economy of St. Thomas.²⁴

The other factor that quieted radical agitation was the decision of the navy to liberalize its regime. Captain Waldo Evans, who became the only navy governor to serve more than two years, personified the navy's concessions to the growing demands for popular government. This governor announced his support for suffrage for all adults who could read and write in English.²⁵ So well intentioned did Evans seem, that almost no demands for the removal of navy rule surfaced during the four years of his administration. First the granting of citizenship and then the promise of wider suffrage convinced many Virgin Islanders that political reform was becoming a reality. Even Rothschild Francis wrote an editorial in The Emancipator praising the governor.²⁶

Once the full force of the depression struck the islands, the issue of political reform paled before the problems of the economic crisis. The most important plan to stave off economic disaster centered on government aid for the sugar plantations. A few radicals, most notably D. Hamilton Jackson, urged the government to emphasize the development of homesteads for small farmers, but most political leaders rallied to the aid of the sugar estates.

In shaping the plan to help the estates, a major disagreement erupted over the extent of government support. In general, the administration preferred to follow a policy of selectively aiding the more financially strong planters

while most local politicians advocated major government aid to much of the sugar industry. The administration argued that money would be best spent in rebuilding a cornerstone of the sugar industry. The navy planned to lend enough money to the La Grange Sugar Company to help it resume operations. Since this concern was smaller and in better financial shape than the much larger West Indian Sugar Company (Bethlehem), the government could spend less money and be more certain of a good investment. In October 1930 Governor Evans asked the Colonial Council of St. Croix to lend La Grange \$15,000 from its immigration fund.²⁷ The colonial council objected vehemently to this scheme. While the People's Party had long dissolved, many of its former members formed a strong faction in the legislature. Leadership of the council rested with D. C. Canegata, Ralph de Chabert and Anselmo Fabio, another member of the brown middle class. Jackson, calling the colonial council a "farce," had not run for re-election in 1929.²⁸ These men wanted to lend \$30,000 to the West Indian Sugar Company, which employed 2,000 workers while La Grange could offer jobs to only 500 people. They also called for the creation of an economic-industrial commission to oversee sugar production and explore alternatives to that industry.²⁹

The council's protests only forced the governor to modify his position slightly. The final bill abandoned the proposal for an economic-industrial commission and authorized

the governor to loan \$30,000 to unspecified cultivators of sugar. Under this agreement La Grange received \$22,000 and Bethlehem got \$6,000. This loan restored La Grange to its pre-depression levels of production.³⁰ Bethlehem, on the other hand, lost many of its estates to various local buyers, including La Grange, and while it resumed operations in 1931, the company lost its dominance of the Crucian sugar industry.³¹

But while the politicians debated the merits of their economic proposals, something had to be done quickly alleviate the suffering of the Crucian people. In August 1930 the American Red Cross came to the rescue by giving the government \$10,000 for food relief. This prompted the colonial council to donate \$5,000 for the same purpose and \$5,000 more for public work projects.³² Besides distributing food directly to hungry people, the administration used some of the money donated by the Red Cross and the colonial council to purchase small tracts of estate land for the establishment of vegetable gardens. Supervised by the Agricultural Experimental Station, this program prevented wide spread starvation. At the end of 1930 the station operated 1600 such gardens, ranging in size from one-twentieth to one-quarter of an acre.³³

Combined with the bankruptcy of the sugar industry, the establishment of these gardens suggested possibilities for

organizing an economy based on small farms. However, the navy officials backed away from exploring this alternative. Governor Evans, believing that government should not meddle in business, repeatedly pointed to the temporary nature of the garden plots project. To emphasize the limited scope of the project, the government paid garden workers in food coupons redeemable only for food at local stores.³⁴ The gardens worked well as an emergency measure, but they did not deter the government from returning the planters to the business of growing cane.

The efforts of the administration to avert starvation and revitalize the sugar industry failed to impress Herbert D. Brown. The Chief of the Bureau of Efficiency decided that the islands needed more aggressive management than provided by the navy. Brown reported to Congress that the islands required a large injection of federal funds to launch a homesteading program, remodel hotels and further develop the bay rum industry. Unlike other persons who had proposed similar projects, Brown succeeded in getting the finances necessary for his program. In 1930 Congress appropriated \$141,000 for rehabilitation, in addition to the usual allotment of \$280,000.³⁵

However, problems arose when Governor Evans found fault with Brown and his program. One of the governor's objections centered on Brown's desire to control the rehabilitation

program. Evans felt that the navy administration should manage the plan. A more serious objection came from Evan's opposition to any scheme that would involve the government in homesteading, the major feature of the rehabilitation program.³⁶ These objections put Evans on a collision course with the Chief of the Bureau of Efficiency.

Unfortunately for Evans and the navy, Herbert D. Brown carried sufficient political clout to get his way. From the start, he had the backing of Congress, who would support his suggestions. With this backing, he convinced President Hoover that the navy was not the agency best suited to manage the economic development of the islands. On February 27, 1931 Hoover transferred the territory to the control of the department of the interior. The president also gave Brown the authority to pick a governor for the colony. Brown chose Paul M. Pearson, a Swarthmore college professor who heartily embraced the Bureau of Efficiency's proposals. Navy rule came to an end with Pearson's inauguration on March 18, 1931.

Once again, a change in governments raised the expectations of Virgin Islanders that their lives might improve. Fourteen years of navy rule had changed little in the islands. Except to upgrade basic social services, the navy left the Islands much as it had found them in 1917. Perhaps the new civilian administration would do more than just fill the same role as past colonial governments.

Certainly all the talk of rehabilitation suggested major social changes, but so had the navy's rhetoric of Americanization.

Endnotes

¹Evans, pp. 218-19, and Mandate from the "Monster Mass Meeting," 20 July 1919, File 64, RG 55/2, NA.

²Francis to Government Secretary, 6 January 1924, File 65, RG 55/2, NA.

³Evans, pp. 218-20; Notes on the Hearings of the Congressional Committee, 9 February 1920, File 58, RG 55/2, NA; and Report of the Joint Commission, 19 April 1920, File 28759-470:1, RG 80, NA.

⁴Evans, pp. 223-24; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 24; and Report of the Federal Commission, File 28759-775:1, RG 80, NA.

⁵Jarvis, p. 138.

⁶Evans, pp. 168-69, and Investigation of the Economic Conditions of the Virgin Islands, 1925, File 28759-837, RG 80, NA.

⁷Evans, p. 313.

⁸Lewis, p. 66.

⁹Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 14-15.

¹⁰Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 15-17, and Evans, pp. 221-22.

¹¹Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 17-18, and Lewis, pp. 54-55.

¹²Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 26; Evans, p. 225; and Draft Proclamation for a Provisional Government, 30 September 1922, File 64, RG 55/2, NA.

¹³Resolution of the St. Thomas-St. John Colonial Council, 4 April 1924, File 28759-648:55, RG 80, NA.

¹⁴Resolution of Mass Meeting, 25 April 1924, File 28759-648:55, RG 80, NA, and Granady to President, 17 November 1925, File 95, RG 55/2, NA.

¹⁵Evans, pp. 226-28.

¹⁶Evans, pp. 227-28; Proceedings of the St. Thomas-St. John Colonial Council, 17 September and 19 October 1925, and Draft of Organic Act, 1925, File 65, RG 55/2, NA.

¹⁷Evans, pp. 231-33; and Hearings before the Committee on Insular Affairs, First Session, House of Representatives, 30 January and 2 February 1926.

¹⁸Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 25-27, and Evans, pp. 233-39.

¹⁹Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 25-27, and Evans, pp. 240-44.

²⁰The position of Government Secretary was similar to a Lt. Governor.

²¹Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 26-28, and Evans, pp. 241-47.

²²Evans, p. 63.

²³Congressman File, March 1929, File 11, RG 55/3, NA.

²⁴Annual Report of the Governor, 1930, RG 55, NA, and Governor to Bingham, 5 December 1930, File 11, RG 55/3, NA.

²⁵Proceedings of the St. Thomas-St. John Colonial Council, 11 October 1928, File 40, RG 55/3, NA.

²⁶The Emancipator, 1 March 1930, File 32, RG 38, NA.

²⁷Governor to Dispatching Secretary, 31 October 1930 and enclosures, File 22, RG 55/3, NA.

²⁸Meeting to Report on Bill #25, 22 May 1929, enclosed in Governor to Chairman of the St. Croix Colonial Council, 8 August 1929, File 46, RG 55/3, and Schofield to Government Secretary, 26 September 1929, File 41, RG 55/3, NA.

²⁹Dispatching Secretary to Governor, 26 and 30 October 1930, Governor to Dispatching Secretary, 31 October 1930, File 22, RG 55/3, NA, and File on Sugar Factories, 26 November 1927, File 58, RG 55/3, NA.

³⁰Governor to Dispatching Secretary, 31 October 1930, and Commissioner of Industry to Acting Governor, 7 June 1932, File 22, RG 55/3, NA.

³¹Dispatching Secretary to Governor, 13 November and 10 December 1930, and Commissioner of Industry to Acting Governor, 7 June 1932, File 22, RG 55/3, NA; and Government Secretary to Dispatching Secretary, 9 March 1931, File 58, RG 55/3, NA.

³²Governor to Bingham, 5 December 1930, File 11, RG 55/3, NA, and Dispatching Secretary to Governor, 2 February 1931 and enclosures, File 58, RG 55/3, NA.

³³Dispatching Secretary to Governor, 2 February 1931 and enclosures, File 58, RG 55/3, NA.

³⁴Governor to Bingham, 5 December 1930, File 11, RG 55/3, NA; Dispatching Secretary to Director of Agricultural Experimental Station, 22 December 1930, File 58, RG 55/3, NA; and Governor to Captain Pykes, 28 July 1930, File 64, RG 55/3, NA.

³⁵Evans, pp. 159-61.

³⁶Evans, pp. 276-77 and 282-83.

Conclusion

Shortly after the inauguration of Governor Pearson, the president of the United States visited St. Thomas, as part of a tour of American possessions in the Caribbean. President Herbert Hoover's remarks concerning the colony dashed the hopes of Virgin Islanders that the establishment of the civilian government represented American enthusiasm to solve local problems:

The Virgin Islands may have some military value some time. In any event, when we paid \$25,000,000 for them, we acquired an effective poorhouse, comprising 90 percent of the population.

The people can not be self-supporting either in living or government without the discovery of new methods and resources.

The purpose of the transfer of the administration from the naval to a civil department is to see if we can develop some form of industry or agriculture which will relieve us of the present costs and liabilities in support of the population, or the local government from the Federal Treasury or from private charity.

Viewed from every point except remote naval contingencies, it was unfortunate that we ever acquired these islands. Nevertheless, having assumed the responsibility, we must do our best to assist the inhabitants.¹

By considering the islands only worthy for the fulfillment of "remote naval contingencies," the president insulted Virgin Islanders. Moreover, the speech angered Virgin Islanders, who rightly felt that the United States shared the responsibility for the poverty of the islands. But what hurt

Virgin Islanders the most was the realization that they were unwelcome as Americans. They had battled for, and gained, the right of American citizenship only to find they were considered an encumbrance upon the United States.

Yet Virgin Islanders had no choice but to swallow the harsh words of the president. Because the islands had always been a colony, Virgin Islanders looked to outsiders for aid and guidance. They lacked the national identity necessary to ignore the president's remarks and to seek their own solutions to problems. Of course, their anger at the president demonstrated that Virgin Islanders had a strong pride in their islands. They knew they were a separate people from Americans, or any other population, but this awareness never extended to a sense of nationalism.

A long history of colonialism inhibited the growth of nationalism and developed the belief that Virgin Islanders, while a separate people, were a subordinate part of some nation. This feeling grew even stronger under the Americans, who exerted much more influence on the islands' politics, economy and culture than had the Danes. Instead of seeking to develop a sense of themselves as a separate and equal nation, Virgin Islanders attempted to lose their subordinate status by becoming more American. No wonder the president's words hurt so deeply.

Fortunately for their sense of worth as Americans, the new civilian governor did not share Hoover's disdain for Virgin Islanders. Under Paul M. Pearson's administration, the Virgin Islands became incorporated into the New Deal policies of the United States. By the mid-1930s Pearson effected much of the rehabilitation program envisioned by Herbert D. Brown. The government purchased 5,700 acres on St. Croix and 500 acres on St. Thomas for the establishment of homesteads. Divided into plots of three to eight acres, this land provided small farms for several thousand families. In addition, the administration built a new hotel on St. Thomas and took measures to improve the harbor trade.²

On the political front, the administration moved to fulfill the last major demand of the radicals. The second civilian governor, Lawrence W. Cramer, worked hard to write a new constitution for the Virgin Islands. On June 22, 1936 Congress passed this organic act for the territory. The Organic Act of 1936 retained the two colonial councils, but it eliminated the appointed members and extended the franchise to all adults who could read and write in English. Furthermore, the Organic Act empowered the councils to override a veto by the governor with a two-thirds vote.³ These changes satisfied the radicals by moving the political system much closer to existing American political practices.

Indeed the passage of the Organic Act ended the radical movement. No issues remained to be contended. The battles for citizenship, the removal of navy rule, universal suffrage and a representative legislature were all decided in the radicals' favor. In this sense, the radicals succeeded in accomplishing their goals.

However, in another sense, the radicals lost the most important struggle. Except for the granting of citizenship, where radical pressure was decisive, all the political changes came from the initiative of the federal or local government. Despite their success on individual issues, the radicals failed to gain much more Virgin Island control over local affairs.

Here the radicals failed because their demands never strayed from within the context of the colonial system. By not challenging colonialism, they conceded to United States control of the islands. While political changes were made to give Virgin Islanders more responsibility for their government, the pace of this change continued to be dictated by the United States. In past times, the colonial system had accommodated the end of slavery and changing economic fortunes. Now colonialism proved it could adapt to political changes without altering its fundamental nature. American control of the islands still kept the Virgin Islands in subordinate position to the United States.

Endnotes

¹Evans, p. 289.

²Dookhan, A History of the Virgin Islands, pp. 271-73.

³Dookhan, A History of the Virgin Islands, pp. 279-80,
and Evans, pp. 249-58.

Appendix

NAVY GOVERNORS OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

Oliver, James Harrison, Rear Admiral, United States Navy
April 9, 1917 to April 8, 1919

Oman, Joseph Wallace, Rear Admiral, United States Navy
April 8, 1919 to April 26, 1921

Kittelle, Sumner Ely Wetmore, Rear Admiral, United States Navy
April 26, 1921 to September 16, 1922

Hough, Henry Hughes, Captain, United States Navy
September 16, 1922 to December 3, 1923

Williams, Philip, Captain, United States Navy
December 3, 1923 to September 11, 1935

Trench, Martin Edward, Captain, United States Navy
September 11, 1925 to January 6, 1927

Evans, Waldo, Captain, United States Navy
March 1, 1927 to March 18, 1931

Bibliography

Primary Source

Census of the Virgin Islands of the United States 1917.
Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1918.

Fifteenth Census of the United States 1930 Outlying Territories and Possessions. Washington, D. C.: United States Department of Commerce, 1932.

Hearings before the Committee on Insular Affairs, House of Representatives, Sixty-ninth Congress, First Session.
Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1926.

Hearings before the Committee on Territories and Insular Possessions, United States Senate, Sixty-eighth Congress, First Session. Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1924.

Hearings before the Committee on Territories and Insular Possessions, United States Senate, Sixty-ninth Congress, Second Session. Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1926.

Annual Reports of the Governors of the Virgin Islands, 1917-1943. Record Group 55, Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Service.

Records of the Government of the Virgin Islands Office of the Governor and Government Secretary General Files 1917-1927. Record Group 55 Entry 2, Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Service.

Records of the Government of the Virgin Islands Office of the Governor and Government Secretary General Files 1927-1932. Record Group 55 Entry 3, Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Service.

Records of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations Central Division Office of Island Governments. Record Group 38, Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Service.

Records of the Secretary of the Navy General Correspondence 1917-1927. Record Group 80 File 28759, Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Service.

Secondary Source

- Creque, Darwin D. The United States Virgins and the Eastern Caribbean. Philadelphia: Whitmore Publishing Company, 1968.
- DeBooy, Theodore and John T. Faris. The Virgin Islands Our New Possessions and the British Islands. Westport, Connecticut: Negro Universities Press, 1970 (Originally published in 1918).
- Dickinson, Thomas H. "The Economic Crisis in the Virgin Islands." Current History, XXVII (December 1927), 378-381.
- Dookhan, Isaac. A History of the Virgin Islands of the United States. Epping, Essex, England: Caribbean Universities Press in association with Bowker Publishing Company, 1974.
- Dookhan, Isaac. "The Search for Identity: The Political Aspirations and Frustrations of Virgin Islanders under the United States Naval Administration, 1917-1927." The Journal of Caribbean History, XII (May 1979), 1-34.
- Evans, Luther Harris. The Virgin Islands From Naval Base to New Deal. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ann Arbor Press, 1945.
- Jarvis, J. Antonio. Brief History of the Virgin Islands. St. Thomas, Virgin Islands: The Art Shop, 1938.
- Lewis, Gordon. The Virgin Islands A Caribbean Lilliput. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1972.
- Nearing, Scott and Joseph Freeman. Dollar Diplomacy A Study in American Imperialism. New York: B. W. Huebsch and the Viking Press, 1925.