

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: The Americanization of the Virgin Islands, 1917-1946: Politics and Class Struggle During the First Thirty Years of American Rule

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This study describes how the interaction between Virgin Islanders and their new American rulers shaped the political relationship between the Virgin Islands and the United States. Once control of the islands had passed from Denmark to the United States, Virgin Islanders forced American officials to take sides in local political struggles. These struggles pitted a mostly white upper class of merchants and planters against a black middle and working class alliance that had just recently won some important victories. After 1917, both sides appealed to the American administrators for assistance.

Over the course of the next thirty years, the middle and working classes achieved greater success than the planter and merchant elite in obtaining American support. The middle and working classes gained this support by emphasizing their loyalty to the United States, and imploring the Americans to extend to Virgin Islanders the same rights enjoyed by U.S. citizens on the mainland. By

same rights enjoyed by U.S. citizens on the mainland. By the end of the Second World War, black Virgin Islanders had not only gained control of the insular political system but also had convinced federal officials to extend substantial economic aid programs to the colony.

Whatever success the elite enjoyed resulted largely from appealing to the Americans from the common ground of race. These appeals worked fairly well for the first fourteen years of American rule, when the Department of the Navy administered the islands. Cooperation between Navy officials and the local elite prevented political reforms that would have granted greater political power to middle and lower class islanders.

However, numerous protests by black islanders, along with the Navy's inability to fashion an economic recovery, forced the federal government to transfer responsibility for the islands to the Department of the Interior. Less racially prejudiced than their Navy predecessors, the new civilian administrators realized that cooperation with black islanders was necessary to implement an economic recovery program. This cooperation formed the basis for the a lasting political relationship between the United States and the Virgin Islands.

THE AMERICANIZATION OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS. 1917-1946:
POLITICS AND CLASS STRUGGLE DURING THE FIRST
THIRTY YEARS OF AMERICAN RULE

by

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INTRODUCTION

Virgin Islanders welcomed American rule.¹ By 1917, when the United States acquired them as a naval base, the islands had suffered nearly two centuries of Danish rule that had left them impoverished. Impressed by the wealth and democratic politics of the United States, Virgin Islanders applauded when the first American rulers announced their intention to Americanize the colony. Unfortunately, Virgin Islanders had to convince their new rulers that Americanization should include a more democratic political system than that developed by the Danes, and a standard of living similar to that enjoyed by Americans on the mainland. Most Americans believed that Americanization should be limited to improving sanitary conditions and physical infrastructure, implementing American administrative procedures, and encouraging the adoption of American customs, such as playing baseball or celebrating the Fourth of July and Thanksgiving Day. Most importantly, contrary to the expectations of most islanders, American officials refused to challenge the social status quo, which vested political and economic control in a small elite of white

¹ The term "American" refers only to the United States. Although the entire New World can be correctly described as "America," people in the Virgin Islands, as well as most places in the Caribbean, conform to the meaning of the word as it is used in the United States.

planters and merchants. The black majority quickly learned that race and class defined the boundaries of Americanization. To benefit from Americanization, black islanders would have to tear down the racist barriers that excluded them from political power and economic advancement.²

During the first thirty years of U.S. rule, Virgin Islanders successfully convinced their new rulers to implement many policies that conformed with the local vision of Americanization. By continually demanding that they be treated as Americans, the islanders forced the federal government to democratize the political system and fund social programs to raise the standard of living. Political reforms gave black men control of the local legislatures for the first time in the islands' history. Similarly, federal economic development programs lifted Virgin Islanders above the dire poverty that afflicted most other Caribbean societies. By the end of the Second World War, Virgin Islanders had fashioned a relationship with the United States which made them proud to call themselves Americans.

² While the literature on the Caribbean often divides the region's societies into three racial strata--black, brown and white--I believe the term "brown" adds little to understanding the racial conflicts in the Virgin Islands. Though we can speak of the existence of a brown middle class, which included people of all racial hues, most middle class islanders had to decide whether to side with the predominantly white upper class or the mostly black working class.

To some extent, American rule attracted Virgin Islanders precisely because the United States claimed a moral superiority over European colonizers. Even as the United States acquired colonies and naval bases after its 1898 military victory over Spain, Americans sought to differentiate their colonial policies from those practiced by the Europeans.³ Citing their own heritage of struggle against the British, as well as their role in expelling the Spanish rulers of Cuba and Puerto Rico, Americans attempted to place themselves on the side of anti-colonial struggles. In contrast to the European attitudes which produced the 1885 Berlin Conference that carved up Africa, Americans cited the Monroe Doctrine, which was motivated by a desire to protect the New World from colonialism. Whereas European colonialism had been based on exploitation, American colonizers claimed only a wish to help the less fortunate people of the world. Colonial administration would be necessary only until these people had been taught to govern themselves.

³ While taking formal control only of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, American influence over Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic made the United States the supreme colonial power in the region. With the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914, U.S. military domination of the Caribbean became an important goal as American leaders sought to protect the entrances to the interoceanic passage. In this context, the acquisition of the Virgin Islands fulfilled a desire to complement the naval bases already established in Cuba and Puerto Rico.

Of course, the ample resources available to American colonial administrators allowed them to exude a moral superiority over their British, French, and Dutch counterparts. Simply put, U.S. officials could afford projects that were quite beyond the means of the Europeans. Whereas European colonial officials could scarcely balance their budgets, the U.S. government provided the funding and the personnel to upgrade infrastructure, improve health care and education, and increase employment in its colonies. By the 1930s, with the advent of Franklin Roosevelt's Good Neighbor policy toward Latin America, U.S. officials could even boast that they had granted more self-government to their colonies than the Europeans had allowed their colonial subjects. When a wave of violent labor protests rocked the British West Indies between 1935 and 1942, American administrators credited their more democratic and compassionate policies for avoiding similar outbursts in their two colonies, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. By contrasting American and European colonialism, U.S. policymakers aimed at embarrassing the Europeans into developing more progressive policies or, at least, recognizing American superiority in the colonial Caribbean. Given the vast discrepancies between the United States and any European country in resources available for colonial development, Britain, France, and Holland often yielded to

attempts by Americans to enhance U.S. influence and prestige in the region.⁴

For some years after purchasing the Virgin Islands, some Americans urged their government to acquire more Caribbean colonies. After the first World War, British tardiness on paying its war debts to the United States generated support for a movement to seek retribution through the cession of British colonies. Led by Senators James Reed of Missouri, William Kenyon of Iowa, and Frank Willis of Ohio, the movement focused on Bermuda, but Senator Reed envisioned American ownership of the entire British West Indies. While these proposals never received official government support, they revealed the desire of many Americans to increase their influence in the colonial Caribbean.⁵

Unfortunately for the Senators, their plans received a poor welcome in both Great Britain and the West Indies. In 1920, during a visit to Trinidad, the Prince of Wales dismissed any notion that Britain might begin negotiations

⁴ For a good analysis of the themes of moral superiority and anti-imperialism in U.S. foreign policy, see Jules R. Benjamin, "The Framework of U.S. Relations with Latin America in the Twentieth Century: An Interpretive Essay," Diplomatic History, 11:2 (Spring 1987), pp. 91-92. For a good contemporary sample of U.S. motives in the Caribbean, see Paul Blandshard, Democracy and Empire in the Caribbean (New York: MacMillan Company, 1947), pp. 14-16 and 321-322.

⁵ Edward W. Chester, The United States and Six Atlantic Outposts (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1980), pp. 5-6.

to sell any West Indian colony. When political leaders in the colonies sided with the Prince, any hope that Britain would part with her colonies faded further. Even among the many British West Indians living in New York City, who might have benefitted from closer ties between their adopted and native homelands, the proposals found little support. Often using the U.S. Virgin Islands as a reference point, neither the British government nor its colonial subjects were impressed by the American attempts to improve the standard of living in the Caribbean. On the contrary, the British claimed that the extension of Prohibition to the Virgin Islands had destroyed the islands' important rum industry, and that some islanders now supported transferring their allegiance to France. Moreover, many British West Indians expressed a fear that American racism would retard social progress in their own islands.⁶

To a large extent, the American proposals to acquire more colonies failed to attract British West Indian support because the reality of U.S. rule in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands failed to match the rhetoric of American moral superiority. While Americans certainly outspent their European rivals, the standard of living in the U.S. territories hardly improved, and the American rulers often stifled local initiatives for greater self-government. As

⁶ Chester, p. 6; St. Croix Avis, June 14, 1921, Sep. 15 and 16, 1922, Jan. 11, 1923, March 27, 1930, and July 27, 1932; St. Thomas Bulletin, Aug. 27, 1919 and June 17, 1931.

noted by the British, Prohibition largely negated the expected economic benefits of U.S. rule, and the relegation of colonial administration to military officials demonstrated a remarkable indifference to local political sensibilities. Once in operation, American colonial practices revealed that assumptions of racial superiority undergirded their claims to moral superiority. Assertions that American rule was superior to European meant little to black West Indians who were more concerned about American acceptance, or even encouragement, of existing racist colonial structures and policies.

The eagerness with which American officials sought advice from their European counterparts also belied their claims to a special ability to manage colonial societies. Despite the desire to separate themselves from the imperialism of Europe, the Americans faced the same problems in the Caribbean that troubled the older colonial powers. Economic stagnation and social unrest bedeviled every colonial government in the region. While expressing satisfaction that the U.S. territories had escaped the labor rebellions that plagued the British islands, American officials did encounter protests caused by conditions similar to those in other colonies. Knowing that "almost every colonial governor in the area is sitting on a political powder keg"⁷ the Americans turned to the more

learned imperialists for assistance. For example, the need to share experiences explained both the friendship between Governor Lawrence Cramer of the U.S. Virgin Islands and Governor-General Gordon Lethem of the British Leeward Islands, and their 1937 joint appeal for the creation of an agency to facilitate communication between colonial administrators in the West Indies.⁸ Rather than being profoundly anti-imperialistic, the Americans simply adjusted their policies to meet the already existing anti-colonial struggles in the region. As latecomers to colonialism, U.S. policymakers were not burdened with the imperial traditions that retarded political reform in other colonies, and therefore, were better positioned to anticipate West Indian demands for change. Nevertheless, the Americans agreed with the Europeans that the colonial powers should oppose radical change in the Caribbean. Change was necessary to prevent instability, but colonial administrators should guide those changes in a moderate direction. In encouraging moderate reforms, the Americans proved more capable than the Europeans, but given the common concerns of the colonial

⁸ National Archives of the United States, Record Group 55. Records of the Government of the Virgin Islands: Office of the Governor and Government Secretary. Entry 5: General Files 1934-1943, File 30 Government Secretary to Governor-General of the Leeward Islands, Dec. 30, 1937, and File 31 President, Carnegie Corporation to Governor, Jan. 4, 1938 and enclosure, and Governor to Governor-General of the Leeward Islands, Sep. 7, 1940.

powers, their various efforts to manage Caribbean societies amounted to no more than friendly rivalries.

Throughout the Caribbean, the Americanization of politics, economics, and culture followed the expansion of U.S. influence. Of course, this influence varied according to the exact nature of each island's ties to the United States, but hardly any Caribbean society escaped its impact. During the first half of the twentieth century, American businessmen, politicians, diplomats, and military officials enjoyed an increasing importance in Caribbean affairs. Caribbean people travelled to the United States, worked in island businesses owned and managed by Americans, bought goods manufactured in the United States, listened to American music on newly-invented radio, and encountered American businessmen, tourists, and military personnel. The vast differences between mainland America and the islands in available material resources generally impressed all levels of Caribbean society, prompting Eric Williams, the noted scholar-politician from Trinidad, to observe that

the lower classes of Caribbean society look to America as the land of opportunity. . . . To the people contact with the United States means material benefits, the opportunity of education and the monthly remittances from emigrants who have made good.⁹

⁹ Eric Williams, "Race Relations in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands," Foreign Affairs 23 (Jan. 1945), p. 10.

This admiring view of the United States spurred many attempts to duplicate American institutions and practices in the islands, and while no Caribbean society ever completely modelled itself after their northern neighbor, the "American way of life" became a constant reference point in debates on how the region should develop.

Nowhere else was the process of Americanization more intense than in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Even more than in Puerto Rico, where a different language and a stronger national identity mitigated American influence, the colonial administrators of the Virgin Islands applied American-style solutions to local problems. Given initial responsibility for governing the colony, the U.S. Navy concentrated on raising the health and educational standards of the populace, which meant that not only were some improvements made in these areas, but also that Virgin Islanders attended schools named after U.S. Presidents, studied curricula designed for territorial New Mexico and Utah, and learned to celebrate American holidays. Most importantly, in 1917 Congress rewarded the expressed desire of the native inhabitants to become more American by granting them U.S. citizenship.

Until 1931 the Navy administered the islands. Then, due to the failure of the Navy to counter the distress caused by the Great Depression, President Hoover charged the Department of the Interior with the responsibility for

implementing an Americanization program that would rehabilitate the insular economy. Utilizing concepts applied across the nation during the New Deal, the Department of the Interior fashioned an economic program that made the federal government the premier employer of native labor. More than ever before, the standard of living in the Virgin Islands now depended on maintaining close economic ties to the United States.

By the beginning of the Second World War, Virgin Islanders felt proud of their new status as U.S. citizens. Not only had federal aid programs prevented economic collapse, but Congressional approval of a constitution granting universal adult suffrage also gave islanders a more democratic political system than any found in the European colonies. During the war, the importance of the Virgin Islands to the Caribbean strategy of the United States further encouraged their Americanization. By fulfilling the military purpose for which they were purchased, the Virgin Islands gained inclusion in the national economic planning that was one result of the American wartime experience. The induction of several hundred islanders into the U.S. Armed Forces further encouraged Virgin Islanders to consider themselves an integral part of the larger nation.

Yet, Americanization was not a one-way street. Virgin Islanders constantly demanded that federal policies be

modified to meet local expectations. While embracing Americanization in general, Virgin Islanders rejected any plan as inadequate if it did not extend to them the same political rights and standard of living enjoyed by citizens on the mainland. Any governor whom Virgin Islanders deemed laggard in expanding their political and economic rights suffered a difficult tenure. Indeed, Virgin Island loyalty to the United States hinged on the ability of federal officials, both in the colony and in Washington, D.C., to implement policies that conformed to the local definition of Americanization.

Social conflict in the islands further complicated the Americanization process. Upon their arrival, American officials found themselves in the midst of a struggle that pitted newly organized labor unions against a ruling class of planters and merchants. While Virgin Islanders of all classes welcomed the anticipated economic benefits of American rule, the planter and merchant elite battled a working class of sugar and dock workers over the extent of political reform and the distribution of wealth. The extent to which one side or the other convinced the colonial administration to support its positions largely determined the course of Americanization.

The ruling elite most often appealed to the colonial officials on the common ground of race. Largely the descendants of British and Danish settlers, the elite

successfully used racist arguments to persuade Navy officials that the black majority was not ready for democratic government. Responding to the fears of this white ruling class, the Navy governors constantly harassed those black leaders who called for the democratization of the political system. As long as the unity between the local elite and the Navy officials lasted, the version of Americanization which prevailed in the Virgin Islands most closely resembled life in the southern United States.

Working class leaders attacked this alliance between the Navy and the elite by pointing to the inability of the planters and merchants to solve the severe economic woes of the colony. Indeed, most leaders of the labor unions, the islands' largest working class organizations, came from the small black middle class, which chafed against the restrictions imposed by the Danes on local self-government. Consisting of artisans, professionals, entrepreneurs, and managers, the middle class had grown increasingly confident of its ability to govern the colony. Many reached out for working class support to challenge the political domination of the planters and merchants. Citing the inefficiency of the archaic tax structure as the prime reason for economic stagnation, they argued that economic rejuvenation could not be accomplished without political reform. Once the franchise was widened, the masses would elect capable persons to the legislative councils. By linking their

demands for political change with the need for economic reform, middle class activists sought to remind their Navy governors that American ideals included a promise of democratic government.

During the 1930s, middle class activists and their working class supporters scored major victories when they, first, forced the withdrawal of the Navy government and, then, gained Congressional approval of a constitution for the islands based on universal adult suffrage. Activists not only organized a popular movement in the islands to agitate for political reform, but they also mobilized support in the large Virgin Island community in Harlem, New York. Working together, Virgin Islanders at home and abroad convinced several national organizations, such as the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, to aid their cause. They also learned how to lobby the President and Congress about the problems of the tiny colony. This campaign of newspaper articles, Congressional lobbying, and mass demonstrations, eventually forced President Herbert Hoover to transfer responsibility for the islands to the Department of the Interior. Then, after the civilian administration failed to quell native demands for more democracy, Congress sanctioned a new constitution.

Beyond their demands for a more representative legislature, Virgin Islanders also waged a struggle to

improve their standard of living. No less political than the effort to widen the franchise, the struggle for higher wages, more jobs, and increased spending on social programs sought to convince federal officials that U.S. citizenship entitled Virgin Islanders to certain economic rights.

Building upon the victories achieved by the labor unions during the last years of Danish rule, labor leaders wrested some concessions from the planters and merchants. However, divisions within the labor movement, as well as the general weakness of the economy, hindered further gains.

Nevertheless, the extension of New Deal programs to the territory offered the labor movement an opportunity to challenge federal officials to meet their promise to improve life in the islands. The ensuing clash between the colonial administrators and local leaders forced workers to choose between their feelings of being unfairly treated and their sense of gratitude for the federal aid programs. Throughout the 1930s, workers' complaints about the uneven distribution of federal aid harried the civilian administration. Any claim that federal programs had greatly benefitted the islands could be easily deflated by pointing to the great discrepancy in the standard of living between the white ruling class and that of the black masses.

In making their political and economic demands, Virgin Islanders appealed to the ideals of Americanization. Most islanders hoped that American rule would upset the Danish

social system on which the power of the planters and merchants rested. As stated by a prominent labor leader after being convicted for libelling a planter during the first years of U.S. rule: "the Stars and Stripes WILL stand for justice here . . . and will not permit of Judges in our Courts being coerced by Planter [sic] nor any others."¹⁰ Only after the Americans failed to meet their expectations for social justice did Virgin Islanders protest, and then every successful protest reinforced their commitment to Americanization. Virgin Islanders wanted to be Americans, but they refused to allow colonial officials to define the terms of Americanization.

By 1940, Virgin Island protests had achieved much success in shaping the process of Americanization. While the civilian administrators continued some of the same racist policies that had made the Navy officials so unpopular, they were more willing to cooperate with native demands for social change. Indeed, some cooperation with the popular movement was necessary to implement the progressive tax policies and the homestead program that federal officials hoped would stimulate economic recovery. Unlike the Navy officials, the civilian governors recognized that the planter and merchant class had abdicated responsibility for the economic development of the colony,

¹⁰ Avis, Jan. 8, 1920.

and that social progress required some concession to popular demands.

The U.S. entry into the Second World War solidified this cautious cooperation between the colonial administration and the majority of Virgin Islanders. In return for Governor Charles Harwood's reluctant approval of minimum wage and maximum working hours legislation, Virgin Islanders eagerly participated in preparing the islands for war. Moreover, the wartime construction projects created a surfeit of jobs, and Virgin Islanders could favorably compare their situation to that of the temporary immigrants who came to the U.S. colony in search of employment. At the beginning of an era when other colonial subjects had begun to explore the possibility of political independence, Virgin Islanders determined that their own interests would be best served by emphasizing their rights as U.S. citizens.

CHAPTER ONE

DANISH BACKGROUND

Virgin Islanders greeted their new American rulers with high expectations. Long before the United States purchased the islands from Denmark, their economy had become closely tied to that of the new mother country. By the beginning of the twentieth century, trade with Denmark represented only two or three percent of the overall commerce of the Danish West Indies, while the United States purchased most of the islands' exports and sold them over thirty percent of their imports.¹ Since they already depended so heavily on American trade, Virgin Islanders reasoned that full inclusion in the powerful U.S. economy would help the islands by eliminating tariff barriers and immigration restrictions, and by stimulating investment from American capitalists.

At the same time, the transfer to the United States created a political crisis in the islands. While Virgin Islanders agreed about the economic benefits of American rule, they differed over its political ramifications. Under Danish rule, a small elite of white planters and merchants had monopolized economic and political power by controlling

¹ Isaac Dookhan, A History of the Virgin Islands of the United States (St. Thomas, U.S.V.I., Caribbean Universities Press, 1974), pp. 246-247.

the major business enterprises and the colonial legislatures. They now hoped that the new American rulers would respect existing social relations. On the other hand, the majority of black and brown islanders called on the new rulers to democratize politics and open economic opportunities for the lower classes. They expected that the United States would extend to the islands the famed American principles of democracy and equality between men. But because the naval officers chosen to administer the islands sided with the local ruling class, a protracted struggle against naval rule characterized the first years of American rule.

For the most part, Navy officials ignored the social problems of the new colony precisely because the islands had been acquired for military purposes.² During the World War, the United States feared that Germany might obtain control of the Danish West Indies, thereby threatening the newly-opened Panama Canal. Once the Danes agreed to negotiate, in October 1915, the Americans pushed for a quick resolution of

² The most detailed diplomatic study of the transfer of the islands from Denmark to the United States can be found in Charles C. Tansill, The Purchase of the Danish West Indies (Baltimore, MD.: Johns Hopkins Press, 1932). Also see Dookhan, Virgin Islands, Chapter 14; Gordon K. Lewis, The Virgin Islands: A Caribbean Lilliput (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972), pp. 42-43; William W. Boyer, America's Virgin Islands: A History of Human Rights and Wrongs (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1983), pp. 77-86; Isaac Dookhan, "Changing Patterns of Local Reaction to the United States Acquisition of the Virgin Islands, 1865-1917," Caribbean Studies. 15:1 (April 1975), pp. 50-72.

the issue. At the end of March 1917, one week before declaring war on Germany, the United States took formal possession of the colony.

Yet the problems ignored by the U.S. had forced Denmark to sell the colony. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, control of the islands had allowed Denmark to share in the general European plunder of the Caribbean, but before the end of the nineteenth century, the Danish West Indies had become an economic liability. In 1672, the Danes established a permanent settlement on St. Thomas. In 1718, they annexed the tiny sister island of St. John, and in 1733, they acquired St. Croix from France. Like other European nations had done elsewhere in the Caribbean, Denmark had hoped to develop sugar plantations on St. Thomas and St. John, but their hilly topography proved unsuited to large-scale agriculture. But the Danes soon realized that St. Thomas' fine harbor and geographic location at the midpoint of the Caribbean archipelago made that island a perfect entrepot for trans-Atlantic trade. Denmark's policy of neutrality in European wars further strengthened the commercial position of the island. Between 1764 and 1782, the Danish government recognized the unique status of the island by passing a series of regulations which opened its harbor to ships of all nations.³ This breach of strict mercantilist principles soon established St. Thomas as the

³Dookhan, Virgin Islands, pp. 91-92.

premier port of the eastern Caribbean.⁴ Not until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when the development of steam engines and the telegraph lessened the need for ships to make frequent stops, did the island lose its importance as a port-of-call.

Unlike St. Thomas and St. John, St. Croix became a profitable sugar colony. Larger and flatter than her sister islands, St. Croix was divided systematically into 264 plantations, with an average size of about 120 acres.⁵ Early attempts at cotton cultivation were quickly abandoned as Crucian planters joined the rest of the Caribbean in pursuing the riches of sugar. From 1777 to 1807, as sugar cane speedily covered the island, the annual average of sugar exports reached 10,778 tons. Planters profited not only from selling sugar, but also from manufacturing rum.

⁴ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, pp. 101-103; Lewis, Virgin Islands, pp. 10-12; Lewis R. Fischer and Gerald E. Panting, "Island-Hopping: The Voyages of Canadian Deep-Sea Trading Vessels to the Caribbean, 1863-1890," The Journal of Caribbean History 21:1 (1985), pp. 19-42; N.A.T. Hall, "Slavery in Three West Indian Towns: Christiansted, Frederiksted and Charlotte Amalie in the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Century," in Trade, Government and Society in Caribbean History 1700-1920 (Kingston, Jamaica: Heinemann Educational Books [Caribbean] Ltd., 1983), pp. 29-30.

⁵ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, pp. 75-77. In 1936 a survey by the Agricultural Station on St. Croix found the average acreage of an estate (plantation) to be 240 acres. See NA RG 48 Records of the Department of the Interior, Entry 749: Central Classified Files, File 9-11-15 (Part 2) Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Dec. 1, 1936 and enclosure; and RG 126 Records of the Office of Territories, Entry 1: Central Classified Files, File 9-11-38 Governor to Secretary of the Interior, June 2, 1936.

During the same period, 1777-1807, St. Croix exported an annual average of 992,682 gallons of that liquor.⁶ But Crucian sugar produced profits only as long as the price remained high on the international markets. The expansion of cane production in Cuba, Africa and Asia, and the development of the sugar beet in Europe, adversely affected world prices. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Crucian planters found that they could not compete with more efficient producers elsewhere. Unable to raise the capital needed to construct modern sugar refineries, rum distilleries and irrigation systems, many planters turned to the less costly business of raising cattle.⁷ Between 1885 and 1915, average annual sugar exports fell only slightly to 10,187 tons, but rum exports plunged to 78,178. Even more telling was the decline in acreage planted in sugar cane: 20,195 in 1850, 16,508 in 1885, and 12,474 in 1915.⁸

As elsewhere in the Caribbean, the production of wealth depended on slave labor imported from Africa. Like Spain, Portugal, Holland, Britain, France, Sweden, and the United States, Denmark participated in the Atlantic slave trade. In 1660, even before settling St. Thomas, the Danes built their first fort on the Gold Coast of Guinea, in West

⁶ Longfield Smith, Sugar Cane in St. Croix, Virgin Islands Agricultural Experimental Station, Bulletin No. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1921), p. 5.

⁷ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, pp. 82-85.

⁸ Smith, Sugar Cane in St. Croix, pp. 3-4.

Africa.⁹ Before the end of the eighteenth century, they were providing hundreds of slaves a year to the thriving slave market at St. Thomas.¹⁰ By the time Denmark abolished its own slave trade in 1803, 88 percent of the 43,000 people in the D.W.I. were slaves.¹¹

The high percentage of slaves in the population was partly due to the failure of the Danish West Indies to attract many Danish citizens. To compensate for this, the Danes encouraged other Europeans to seek their fortunes in the islands. The Danes came to the colony as officials and soldiers, but relatively few succeeded as planters and merchants. St. Thomas, because of its free port privileges, attracted entrepreneurs of various nationalities. In the seventeenth century, merchants from Holland predominated, and Dutch Creole became the common language on the island. In the nineteenth century, especially after Great Britain occupied the islands during the Napoleonic Wars, English merchants replaced the Dutch and the language again changed according to the interests of the leading economic group.¹²

⁹ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, pp. 121-124.

¹⁰ J.D. Fage, An Introduction to the History of West Africa (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 75; Philip D. Curtin, The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), p. 85.

¹¹ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 23 and 53.

¹² Ronald E. Will, "Our Religious Heritage of the 19th Century," Freedom's Flame (Virgin Islands: Bureau of Libraries, Museums and Archeological Services, 1981), pp. 65-72; Gilbert Sprauve, "Pre- and Post-Emancipation Language

Yet the English only slightly outnumbered other nationalities. In the 1830s, of the forty-one importing firms that circled the harbor of St. Thomas, thirteen were English, eleven French, six German, four Italian and Spanish, four American, and three Danish.¹³ A penchant for business united this cosmopolitan elite, prompting one historian to describe St. Thomas as "a superb example of how a tropical community with tiny resources could lift itself into prosperity by keeping an eye on the 'main chance.'" ¹⁴

As on St. Thomas, foreign domination of the economy of St. Croix also produced a patriotism of economic convenience. On this island, British planters owned most of the land and an English creole was spoken by the masses.¹⁵ St. Croix differed from St. Thomas in that the nature of the plantation economy created a closed, relatively unchanging ruling class. Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, a local labor leader could aptly point to the semi-feudal nature of the society by terming its dominant clan--the Skeochs, Armstrongs, Flemings and Merwins--the "Royal Family."¹⁶

Development in the V.I," Freedom's Flame, pp. 88-94.

¹³ Lewis, Virgin Islands, p. 26.

¹⁴ Lewis, Virgin Islands, p. 11.

¹⁵ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, pp. 71-72 and 142; Sprauve, "Language Development in the V.I.," pp. 88-94.

¹⁶ Irene Armstrong, Robert Skeoch: Cruzan Planter (Christiansted, St. Croix: By the Author, 1971), p. 98.

On both islands, the small white elite depended on a growing number of free colored to help control the large slave population. Many of the free colored were the children of slave masters, who then granted freedom to their offspring. Other free colored had purchased their own freedom or had received their liberty as a favor from their former masters. Between 1789 and 1835, the free colored population grew from 1,129 to 10,319, when they equaled 25 per cent of the total population.¹⁷ On St. Thomas, where the requirements of the commercial economy both lessened the need for slavery and opened opportunities for free laborers, the rise of the free colored population was especially rapid. By 1835 the free colored outnumbered slaves 5,204 to 5,032.¹⁸ While most free colored eked out a living as semi-skilled wage laborers, some acquired enough property, even slaves, to become socially prominent members of society. This was especially true for the lighter-skinned free colored who had family ties to the white community.

Yet, even for the most successful of the free colored, the color of their skin barred them from the highest social circles of the colony. During the eighteenth century, the colonial government issued regulations that restricted the property they could own, the offices they could hold, and

¹⁷ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 38-41.

¹⁸ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 40-41; Hall, "Slavery in Three West Indian Towns," pp. 17-38.

the clothes they could wear.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the white elite could not ignore forever the growing importance of the free colored population. In 1834, the liberal Governor Peter von Scholten persuaded the King to grant them full equality with whites.

While legal equality did not end prejudice against the free colored, it did allow them to separate themselves further from the slaves. But when the 1848 Emancipation Proclamation ended the distinction between free and slave, the free colored scrambled to find a place in the new society. Those who possessed property and professional skills formed the basis of a black middle class that found itself torn apart by the conflicting demands of property and race. Its interest in maintaining the privileges of property usually meant that the middle class sided with the white elite, but the common bonds of race sometimes pushed at least some of its members to champion the demands of the black masses. Ultimately, it was the continued racism of the whites in the midst of a declining economy that alienated the black middle class from its Danish rulers. When the economic doldrums deepened in the last years of the nineteenth century, white families began to abandon the islands, thereby opening a few more positions in business

¹⁹ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 41-42.

and government to darker residents.²⁰ As its own confidence increased, the middle class began to question the capability of Danish officialdom, many of whose members could not even speak English. By the time negotiations began over the sale of the islands, its members had lost their loyalty to Denmark. Thinking that they might do better under the Americans, middle class islanders strongly advocated the sale to the United States.

The importance of the role of the free colored population should not obscure the fact that African slaves largely shaped the culture of the Danish West Indies. Whereas most white colonists planned to return some day to Europe, Africans had no choice but to make the islands their home.²¹ In the countryside, slave labor not only built the estate great houses and planted sugar cane, but also built the estate villages and planted vegetable gardens. As estate residents, slaves demanded respect for their families, the right to market produce from their gardens,

²⁰ George F. Tyson Jr., "A Slave Island: Robert Mackay Hughes and the Origins of Independence Sentiment in St. Thomas, Danish West Indies 1865-75," Freedom's Flame, pp. 169-202; The Avis, May 8, 1915.

²¹ See Gordon K. Lewis, Main Currents in Caribbean Thought: The Historical Evolution of Caribbean Society in Its Ideological Aspects, 1492-1900 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), pp. 321-329 for a general discussion of European and African contributions to Caribbean culture.

and free time for social activities.²² In the towns of Charlotte Amalie, Christiansted, and Frederiksted, slaves gained more control over their own lives. Not even the European architecture of the buildings could hide the reality of African-dominated public life. Despite legal restrictions on their free time, slaves organized markets, dances, and sporting events. Also, the nature of urban slavery allowed many slaves to earn wages or engage in business for themselves. Besides giving slaves opportunities to purchase their freedom, urban activities provided cover for marronage.²³

Out of this struggle to control the estate villages and town streets, slaves expanded their notions of customary rights and gained the confidence to challenge their masters' power over their lives. But while schemes and plots may have been part of the everyday discourse between slaves, the difficulties of organizing rebellion usually limited resistance to such devices as petty thievery or feigned sickness. Disagreements over method and timing, poor communication and even betrayal all hindered attempts at revolt. Knowing that brutal punishment awaited anyone

²² Arnold R. Highfield, "Conditions of the Working Class in St. Croix in the Period 1848-1878," Freedom's Flame, p. 19.

²³ Hall, "Slavery in Three West Indian Towns," pp. 17-38; Neville Hall, "Slaves' Use of their 'Free' Time in the Danish Virgin Islands in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century," The Journal of Caribbean History 13 (1980), pp. 21-43.

implicated in a conspiracy, slaves planned armed revolt cautiously, and very seriously.²⁴

Yet, the possibility of open rebellion kept the white population in constant fear. Grossly outnumbered, whites must have perceived conspiracy and revolt in any insolent gesture or unexplained drumbeat in the night. To prevent revolt the Danes stationed from 100 to 300 hundred soldiers in the colony. In addition, the soldiers were reinforced by a militia consisting of European settlers, regardless of nationality. In 1721, the fear of slave revolt even forced the colonial government to recruit a Free Negro Corps, thereby admitting that whites could not manage the society by themselves.²⁵

Facing the difficulties of defeating Danish troops and local militia, the slaves managed to organize only two major revolts. In 1733, slaves on St. John rebelled against their masters and took control of the tiny island for six months. Despite its small size and hilly terrain, the Danes had attempted to develop sugar plantations on St. John and by 1733, 208 whites supervised the labor of 1,087 slaves. In the summer of that year, a severe drought exacerbated an

²⁴ See Hilary Beckles, "Caribbean Anti-Slavery: The Self-Liberation Ethos of Enslaved Blacks," The Journal of Caribbean History 22 (1988), pp. 1-19 for an excellent discussion of the politics of slave revolt.

²⁵ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, pp. 142-144, & 166; J. Antonio Jarvis, Brief History of the Virgin Islands (St. Thomas: The Art Shop, 1938), pp. 125-126.

already serious food shortage caused by the planters' zealous devotion to sugar production. Then on September 5, Governor Philip Gardelin proclaimed a new law that prescribed severe punishments for slaves who ran away, stole, threatened a white person, or even held meetings or sold food without permission of their master. The drought, the new slave laws, and finally, the fact that only seven soldiers were stationed on St. John, spurred the slaves to act. They planned the rebellion for the Christmas season, when meetings could be more easily held under the cover of the annual festivities, but when Governor Gardelin visited St. John in November, the slaves decided to attempt his immediate capture. Gardelin escaped the trap, but slave attacks against the fort and many plantations killed most of the soldiers and about two dozen other Europeans. The white people who escaped, most of whom were saved by loyal slaves, fled to St. Thomas, leaving the rebels in complete control of the island. This situation lasted until April 1734, when two French warships with 228 soldiers sailed in to aid the Danes. Over the course of the next month, the experienced French soldiers scoured the island for rebel slaves. Some of the slaves were killed, some captured alive, and many committed suicide rather than surrender.²⁶

²⁶ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, pp. 166-170; Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 25-31.

The second major revolt rocked the islands in 1848, under quite different conditions. Together the Haitian Revolution of the 1790s and the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies in the 1830s signalled the demise of Caribbean slavery, and Danish West Indians, slave and free, realized that the days of slavery were numbered. In 1834, Peter von Scholten, the liberal Governor who had worked to obtain equal rights for the free colored, again persuaded the Danish king to modify the slave laws in force since 1733. The new laws limited whippings, shortened working hours, and allowed slaves to own land and engage in business. Finally, in 1847, Governor von Scholten committed the Danish government to promise that emancipation would be achieved within twelve years. However, many slaves refused to wait that long. In 1848, after hearing the news of working class revolution in Europe and successful slave rebellion on the French islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, slaves in western St. Croix took over the town of Frederiksted. On July 3, one day after the revolt began, Governor von Scholten issued a Proclamation of Emancipation, ending slavery in the Danish West Indies. Unfortunately, the Governor's proclamation did not stop the revolt, and, over the course of the next week, several plantations across the island were plundered before many slaves were convinced that they were truly free. In two clashes with Danish soldiers, several slaves were killed, and only the arrival

of 580 Spanish troops from Puerto Rico restored calm to St. Croix. Perhaps the turmoil following the Emancipation Proclamation represented a slow realization by slaves that the decisive event of the history of the Danish West Indies had been achieved through their direct action. For this reason, General Buddhoe, the leader of the revolt, became an important symbol in the cultural tradition of the islands.²⁷

After Emancipation, Danish West Indian workers began a new struggle to determine their rights as wage laborers. The struggle extended from the sugar estates to the loading docks of the harbor, and even into the halls of the colonial legislatures. Through it all, the workers learned how to organize for mutual benefit and collective action, decided who were their friends and enemies, and redefined social relations based on new concepts of property rights. By the first decades of the twentieth century, the working class had developed high expectations of its economic and political rights. Unable to meet these expectations, Denmark preferred to sell the islands to the United States.

On St. Croix, the planters did not respond kindly to emancipation. First, they succeeded in having von Scholten removed as Governor, then persuaded his replacement to issue a labor ordinance that bound estate workers to yearly contracts. At the beginning of October each year, anyone

²⁷ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, pp. 157-158 & 174-176.

who wished to reside on an estate had to sign a contract to work for its owner for the next twelve months. As under slavery, the planters designated as first class laborers the men who did the heaviest work of cutting cane and digging holes, and paid them fifteen cents a day. Second class laborers, mostly women who weeded and hauled cane, earned ten cents daily, and children received five cents. Each family was still entitled to a house and provision ground, but now had to pay for rations and medical care. The regular work week ran from Monday to Friday, but planters could oblige laborers to work on Saturday at the regular daily rate.²⁸

The Crucian planters designed the contract system to keep laborers tied to the sugar estates. Under slavery, most of the free colored population preferred to live in the urban areas, and emancipation threatened to deprive the planters of their labor force if many of the newly freedpeople decided to explore the opportunities of urban life. For this reason, the post-emancipation labor ordinances required freed persons to sign the yearly contracts unless they obtained alternate employment in the towns. Still, the planters could not halt the flow of people away from the estates. If the freedpeople could not find work or amass enough money to purchase a tradesman's

²⁸ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, pp. 225-226; Highfield, "Conditions of the Working Class," pp. 18-19; Mail Notes, Aug. 26, 1914; Avis, Feb. 5 & Dec. 6, 1916.

license, they simply did their best to evade the law.²⁹ If opportunities in the Crucian towns of Christiansted and Frederiksted proved too limited, people crossed the sea to search for work along the busy harbor of Charlotte Amalie. Between 1846 and 1870, the percentage of the Danish West Indian population living in urban areas increased from 39.6 to 54.5 percent.³⁰ Only the introduction of a passport system checked a larger migration from St. Croix to St. Thomas. At the same time, the planters accepted the inevitability of greater urbanization by agreeing to hire urban day laborers, known as porters, to work on their estates. Porters earned slightly higher wages than estate workers, but gave up their right to housing and provision ground.³¹

If no work could be found in the towns, workers used their newly won freedom to seek employment overseas. Especially after the economic downturn in the latter part of the nineteenth century, an increasing number of Danish West Indians found work on the sugar plantations of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, the canal in Panama, or in the

²⁹ Highfield, "Conditions of the Working Class," p.18.

³⁰ McElroy and Albuquerque, "Residential Patterns in the United States Virgin Islands, 1917-1976," South Atlantic Urban Studies 5 (1981), p. 291.

³¹ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, p. 226; Theodore DeBooy and John T. Faris, The Virgin Islands: Our New Possessions and the British Virgin Islands (Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1970), p. 291.

service economy of New York City. Try as they might, the planters failed to hold onto their estate workers, and by 1853, the Crucian rural labor force had declined by 25 per cent.³² To remedy the labor shortage, the colonial legislature created an immigration fund to pay for the importation of workers from other Caribbean islands. By the end of the century, this scheme had attracted a few thousand sugar workers from Barbados, St. Kitts, Antigua, and Nevis, all islands where wages were even lower than on St. Croix.³³ Even so, emigrants continued to outnumber immigrants. Between 1848 and 1917, the population of the Danish West Indies plunged from 39,600 to 26,000.³⁴

Along with upsetting social relations on the plantations, emancipation challenged elite control of the colonial legislatures. Traditionally, there had been a Burgher Council for St. Thomas-St. John and one for St. Croix, each appointed by the Governor in consultation with the islands' leading merchants and planters. The granting of civil equality to the free colored in 1834 had encouraged efforts to democratize politics, and emancipation increased these pressures by putting the freed people on the same legal footing as the free colored. In 1852, the Danish

³² Highfield, "Conditions of the Working Class," p. 20.

³³ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, p. 226; Census of the Virgin Islands, 1917 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918), p. 61.

³⁴ Census of the V.I., 1917, pp. 37-38.

government created a new, single Colonial Council for the whole colony. Members of the Council were to be elected by adult male residents who had a yearly income that exceeded \$500 or paid at least \$5 in land or building tax.³⁵ These property restrictions limited the franchise to about 25 per cent of the adult male population or to about five per cent of the total population. However, because of the inability of the merchants of St. Thomas and the planters of St. Croix to work together, this system had to be modified. In 1863, two separate Colonial Councils, one for St. Thomas-St. John and one for St. Croix, replaced the single Council. At the same time, new legislation slightly tightened property requirements. Now a voter had to earn \$500 or own property producing an annual income of \$150 on St. Thomas, or \$75 on St. Croix.³⁶ Despite these changes, the whole experience in changing the political system showed the elite's agility in moving from a society based on slavery to one based on wage labor. Emancipation had forced the elite to abandon slavery, but they reacted quickly to insure that property status would continue to determine social status.

³⁵ Figures are in Danish West Indian dollars. From 1850-1935, one DWI dollar was worth slightly less than one U.S. dollar. See Luther H. Evans, The Virgin Islands: From Naval Base to New Deal (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ann Arbor Press, 1945), pp. 188-202.

³⁶ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 64-66; Isaac Dookhan, "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 12 (May 1979), p. 3.

Excluded from formal politics, workers slowly learned to organize on their own behalf. In this, the churches played an important role in teaching workers the importance of collective action. On St. Thomas, the large free colored population had long used churches to promote their interests, and after Emancipation the churches provided ready teachers for the new wage workers. Because emancipation ended the masters' responsibility for the health care of their slaves, the churches began organizing mutual aid societies that collected dues to pay for the medical care of their members. The most important of these societies was the United Brethren of St. Joseph. Established in 1856, the United Brethren attempted to break down denominational barriers by appealing to the common Christianity of all workers.³⁷ On St. Croix, the smaller number of free colored and a social isolation fostered by the agricultural economy made organizing even more difficult, but the Moravian Church had some success in bringing workers together. In 1902, the Moravians founded the International Liberty Union, which reached out to workers all across the island.³⁸ While its purpose was primarily religious, the Union gave workers valuable experience in building their own institutions.

³⁷ Bulletin, Mar. 20, 1914.

³⁸ Avis, Dec. 2, 1914.

As valuable as these organizations were, they could not address the central concerns of workers. Once again, the Crucian sugar workers, the most oppressed members of the labor force, demonstrated that their exclusion from formal politics did not prevent them from altering the political and economic terrain of the colony. In 1878, the estate workers on St. Croix revolted against the serfdom to which they were subjected by the post emancipation labor ordinances.³⁹ By that year, wages for first class laborers had fallen to ten cents a day, well below the rate provided in the Labor Act of 1849. The news that the recently completed Central Sugar Factory was paying 35 cents a day convinced the workers that the contract system had become completely obsolete. Significantly, the revolt began on October 1, the one day of the year when workers could escape from their contracts. On that day, a large number of workers gathered in Frederiksted to celebrate and look for new jobs. Many of them hoped to obtain passage to St. Thomas, and the rumor that passports were no longer being issued sparked a riot which the police handled clumsily. In a few hours, the riot had blossomed into a large scale revolt, as people vented their frustration with police brutality, the passport regulations, and the whole contract system. Soon flames roared through the streets of

³⁹ See Dookhan, Virgin Islands, pp. 227-231, and Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 67-71, for more detailed accounts of the 1878 revolt.

Frederiksted, and groups of workers began marching into the countryside. By the end of the day, not only was much of Frederiksted in flames, but workers had started to burn and pillage nearby plantations.

Within a few days, the revolt had spread half way across the island, and the Danes hurriedly called for outside help. Only a year earlier, the appearance of peaceful conditions had prompted the Colonial Council of St. Croix to save money by reducing the military presence to a garrison of sixty soldiers stationed in Christiansted. To crush the rebellion, fifty-two more soldiers were transported from St. Thomas, and three warships, from France, Britain and the United States, anchored at Frederiksted. Still, the reduced number of troops allowed the angry workers to destroy fifty-three plantations before the rebellion was crushed. By mid-October, the troops had restored peace to the island at the cost of eighty-nine lives. Only three of the dead, including two soldiers, were white.

The spontaneity of the original riot meant that the whole revolt was rather disorganized, but the emergence of about a dozen recognized leaders attested to the existence of various worker organizations. One leader in particular, "Queen Mary," was glorified by local calypsonians and storytellers long after 1878.⁴⁰ Eventually, the Danes tried

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Armstrong, pp. 35-36.

403 laborers and sentenced 67, including "Queen Mary," to prison terms for their active roles in promoting the revolt. Despite the severity with which it was suppressed, the revolt persuaded the Colonial Council to abolish the 1849 Labor Act. Beginning on October 1, 1879, workers were allowed to negotiate their own contracts, and could not be put to work if found idle. Altogether, the "Great Fireburn" of 1878 provided valuable organizing experience for workers, and inspired later efforts at militant collective action.

While the events of 1848 and 1878 gave Crucian workers a militant reputation which St. Thomas could not match, workers on that island occasionally acted together to protest an economic system that depended on their labor but gave them little in return. Because of the greater variety of jobs and wages offered, Charlotte Amalie acted as a magnet for laborers from St. Croix and the nearby British island of Tortola. These people were often too thankful for escaping the brutal life of the sugar plantations to complain much about wages and working conditions on the docks of St. Thomas. Depending on the number of ships in the harbor, the thousand or so people who worked as stevedores, coal trimmers and coal carriers could earn more than \$1.00 a day. Most men found jobs as stevedores making between ten and twenty cents an hour, or as trimmers earning four to six cents for each ton of coal they shovelled into the hold of a ship. Most women became carried coal, the

most common unskilled job on the docks, but one that men refused to take because it paid the lowest wages. Coal carriers earned one penny for each 70-95 pound basket of coal they loaded onto a ship. But even then, each was obliged to pay one-third of her wages to the man who shovelled coal into her basket.⁴¹ In 1892 the coal carriers, as the most numerous and oppressed dock workers, organized a protest against the way laborers were being treated by the shipping lines and merchant houses.

By the 1880s, it had become common practice to pay dock workers in brass tokens redeemable at the various merchant houses lining the harbor. However, many merchants issued tokens far in excess of their specie holdings, and an economic downturn at the end of the decade threatened these merchants with bankruptcy, endangering the savings of the workers. On August 29, 1892, Governor C.H. Arendrup, prompted by the unstable economic situation, issued a proclamation prohibiting the further issuance of brass tokens and ordering the merchants to redeem those now in circulation. Two days later, after it had become clear that the merchants did not have the silver or gold to redeem all the tokens, the dockworkers, lead by "Queen Coziah," marched through town demanding redemption for their savings and a

⁴¹ Evans, Virgin Islands, p. 6; Census of V.I. 1917, p. 37; DeBooy and Faris, Virgin Islands, p. 72; Charles E. Taylor, Leaflets from the Danish West Indies (London: Wm. Dawson and Sons, 1888), p. 98; Bulletin, Nov. 22 & 24, 1916; Mail Notes, Nov. 28 & Dec. 15, 1916; Tidende, Dec. 6, 1916.

wage increase to be paid in gold or its equivalent. Only military force and the promise of a full hearing by the government persuaded the crowd to return to work. No one was seriously injured, but stones were thrown and prominent citizens threatened, causing many St. Thomians to fear an uprising similar to that of 1878 in St. Croix.⁴²

During the revolts of 1878 and 1892, working people flexed their economic and political muscles, but only the formation of labor unions gave them permanent organizations through which to press their demands. Here, the unskilled workers followed the lead of the better paid artisans, managers and professionals. Even though most of these people considered themselves solidly middle class and much removed from the world of unskilled laborers, they had good reasons to form alliances with poor islanders. While most middle class men earned an income high enough to allow them to vote, the restrictions on the franchise still kept the Colonial Councils safely in the hands of the planters and merchants. In addition, the middle class felt that the Danes discriminated against natives in the distribution of government jobs, and as economic difficulties mounted at the beginning of the twentieth century, the middle class attributed many of its problems to Danish indifference and

incompetence.⁴³ Discrimination also reminded the middle class that all black Danish West Indians shared a common history of slavery that set them apart from both the Danes and the local white elite. As they sought to increase their own political power, middle class leaders cast themselves as leaders of all black islanders. Racial solidarity became the glue that bound together middle and working class islanders and defined the politics of organizing labor.

The artisans of St. Thomas took the lead in forming an organization specifically to address the economic concerns of workers. In 1909, the Colonial Council of St. Thomas-St. John, in response to criticism that goods manufactured on St. Thomas were of poor quality, passed an ordinance requiring artisans who employed apprentices to show proof of skill and to pay for a license. In 1911, outraged artisans formed the United Labouring Association to lobby the Council for the abolition of the licensing fee. Widespread protests by the Association succeeded in lowering the one-time fee from \$33 to \$15, but the artisans still viewed the new law as an insult to their competency as craftsmen.⁴⁴ To

⁴³ In 1899, Adolph Sixto, a St. Thomian entrepreneur, published Time and I (San Juan, Puerto Rico: San Juan News), a critique of the problems of that island. While he professed love for Denmark, he also noted that the Danes had neglected St. Thomas, and that it was necessary for Danish West Indians to solve their own problems.

⁴⁴ NA RG 55 Records of the Danish Government of the Virgin Islands, St. Thomas Colonial Council: Forhandling, Sep. 30, 1909 & Jun. 15, 1911.

demonstrate that artisans were intelligent, responsible members of the community, the Association concentrated on providing mutual aid and improving the education of skilled workers.⁴⁵ While the Association shied away from addressing the important question of wages, it expanded the horizon of worker organizations by building a sense of pride among workers.

In 1914, the artisans took more militant action by organizing the St. Thomas Trades Union. Unlike the United Labouring Association, the Trades Union made the improvement of wages and working conditions its central concern.⁴⁶ Although the Trades Union limited its membership to artisans, its emphasis on wages pointed the way for a broader, more effective union of workers.

On St. Croix, the impetus for organizing this broader union came from middle class activists. In 1913, some two dozen middle class Crucians, led by physician David C. Canegata, founded the Mutual Improvement Society of Christiansted, with the intention of promoting the general social advancement of black islanders. Because the island lacked a public high school, the Society decided to improve adult education by sponsoring lectures and debates on important issues of the times. While the Society avoided local politics, instead emphasizing general discussions of

⁴⁵ Mail Notes, Feb. 13, 1912.

⁴⁶ Mail Notes, Jan. 7, 1915.

literature, religion, science and international events, the debates created a better understanding of different ways to address social problems in the Danish West Indies. A long debate on the merits of socialism in western Europe proved especially relevant to the problems of the plantation and dock laborers by raising the issue of general strikes.⁴⁷ In particular, David Hamilton Jackson, a schoolteacher turned newspaper reporter, took special interest in the possibilities that socialist ideas offered for organizing the working class. Within two years after the founding of the Society, Jackson began meeting with plantation workers to discuss ways of addressing the economic and political problems that affected the Crucian masses.

After the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914, these meetings acquired a special urgency. The war disrupted maritime commerce and raised the price of goods shipped to and from the islands. By mid-August, the rising price of food forced the government to take emergency measures to ensure that people got enough to eat. Governor Helweg-Larsen convened committees of merchants on St. Croix and St. Thomas to fix maximum prices on some two dozen food and other consumer items.⁴⁸ The public appreciated this effort, but as the war dragged on, rising wholesale prices forced

⁴⁷ Avis, Nov. 29, 1913.

⁴⁸ Avis, Aug. 6, 8, 15 & 19, 1914; Bulletin, Aug. 4 & 6, 1914.

the merchant committees to increase the fixed prices.⁴⁹ Public discontent increased with the soaring prices, and people wondered if the Danish king knew, or cared, about the distress of his overseas subjects. That something could be done seemed evident from the fact that rising prices for freight and sugar meant that some persons in Denmark and the colony were making money. As conditions worsened, the popularity of D. Hamilton Jackson increased. Workers came to hear lectures in which he argued that the Governor and the planters had done nothing for them, and that the improvement of living conditions required leaders who represented the working class. This emphasis on the need for better leadership also gained Jackson support from the many members of the middle class who pushed for political reforms.

By April 1915, his middle and working class supporters had raised enough money to send Jackson to Denmark to present the complaints of black Crucians directly to King Christian X.⁵⁰ Jackson received a warm welcome in Denmark, and the King assured him that the government was considering measures to improve conditions in the islands. Thankful for the warm reception, the Crucian leader professed love for Denmark and explained that it was only the insensitive

⁴⁹ Avis, Feb. 13, 1915; Bulletin, Aug. 25 & 26, 1915; Mail Notes, Mar. 17 & Apr. 5, 1916; Tidende, Dec. 2, 1916.

⁵⁰ Glen C. Kline, David Hamilton Jackson's Biography (St. Croix, 1965), Typewritten; Bulletin, Apr. 21, 1915.

policy of a few officials that blocked the progress of native islanders. Because of the war, the islands needed immediate economic assistance, but Jackson also pleaded with the King to express his confidence in his colonial subjects by widening the franchise and appointing more natives to government positions. Besides speaking with King Christian X, Jackson met with various government officials, representatives of political parties, newspapers, and private organizations. The Henry George Association gave Jackson the warmest welcome by buying him a printing press to establish his own newspaper.⁵¹

In September 1915, joyous crowds greeted Jackson on his return to St. Croix. Yet, while his trip had raised awareness in Denmark about conditions in the islands, Jackson brought back only promises of economic assistance and political reform. As he lectured to thousands of people in Frederiksted and Christiansted, Jackson realized that the deteriorating economic situation required immediate action.⁵² Although the war had doubled the price of sugar on the world market, the planters refused to raise wages. At the beginning of November, Jackson employed his new printing press to begin publishing a newspaper that called upon workers to organize a labor union.

⁵¹ Bulletin, Jun. 14, and July 15, 22 & 26, 1915; Avis, July 21 & 24, 1915; Tidende, July 3 & 7, 1915, and Nov. 11 & 15, 1916.

⁵² Mail Notes, Oct. 1, 1915; Avis, Sep. 15, 1915.

Workers responded quickly to his call, and Jackson soon announced the birth of the St. Croix Labor Union. By mid-January 1916, most rural laborers, about 5,000 people, had joined the Union, and Jackson demanded that the planters double the wages of workers.⁵³ When the planters ignored him, Jackson called a strike which soon idled every plantation on the island.

The planters responded to the strike by invoking memories of the 1878 Fireburn. To counter the demands of the Labor Union, the argued that wages could not be increased on the basis of a temporary increase in the price of sugar, and that the workers overstated their economic grievances, since two general increases in wages between 1880 and 1900 had raised the daily wage of first-class laborers, with corresponding rises for other classes, from 15 to 25 cents.⁵⁴ Instead they claimed that Jackson was stirring up race and class hatred to mislead the workers for his own purposes.⁵⁵ Fearing that "the intention of the Laborers was and still is to 'lay the island flat' and kill

⁵³ Census of V.I., 1917, pp. 37, 85 & 138; Bulletin, Jan. 26, 1916; AVIS, Feb. 5, 1916.

⁵⁴ DeBooy and Faris, Virgin Islands, p. 198; Jarvis, Brief History, pp. 102-103; NA RG 55 Records of the Danish Government of the Virgin Islands, St. Croix Council: Proceedings, Feb. 29, 1916; Avis, Oct. 30, 1915.

⁵⁵ Avis, Apr. 28, 1915 and Jan. 12, 1916.

every white and 'damned red-skin,' "⁵⁶ the planters demanded that the Governor take strong measures to restore order.

But Helweg-Larsen refused to intervene on the side of the planters. Despite personal contempt for Jackson, the Governor limited his actions to a libel suit against the union newspaper.⁵⁷ Because the right to strike was widely accepted in Denmark, the Governor risked a serious reprimand if he used force against the strikers. When the planters reported the intentional setting of canefield fires, the Governor dispatched a company of marines to the island, but no effort was made to force the strikers back to work.⁵⁸

Nor did the planters receive much support from Crucian merchants. Whereas the war increased profits for the planters, the high cost of imports cut into merchant earnings. Although most merchants feared that a long strike or too great an increase in wages might ruin the economy of the island, they knew that "a rise to the labourers means more money in circulation which is a benefit to the merchants and townspeople."⁵⁹ Searching for a solution, the merchants called an extraordinary session of the Colonial

⁵⁶ Bulletin, Jan. 27, 1916.

⁵⁷ Bulletin, Dec. 20, 1915.

⁵⁸ Mail Notes, Feb. 4 & 26, 1916; Bulletin, Feb. 29, 1916; Avis, Feb. 23, 1916.

⁵⁹ Mail Notes, Feb. 17, 1916.

Council and implored the Governor to overlook his disdain for Jackson and mediate a settlement.⁶⁰

By striking in the last week of January, after the sugar harvest had begun, the Union further weakened the position of the planters. Still, the planters resisted mediation for three weeks. They denounced the merchants for meddling in their affairs, and they boycotted the extraordinary session of Colonial Council. Then, they formed the Planters Association to present a united front against the strikers. Next, they sent representatives to Barbados to recruit workers. Only after the British government barred this attempt to interfere with its labor force did the Planters Association agree to begin negotiations with the labor union.⁶¹

At the end of February, after two weeks of mediation by the Governor, the two sides reached a temporary agreement. With a view to encouraging steady work, the immediate settlement gave a five cent a day raise to laborers who worked four days or less a week, and a ten cent a day raise to those who worked five or six days a week. The planters agreed to guarantee each worker five days of work a week, and to provide housing, provision plots, and medical care on the same conditions as before the strike. Both sides also

⁶⁰ NA RG 55 St. Croix Colonial Council: Proceedings, Jan. 29, 1916.

⁶¹ Avis, Feb. 16, 1916; Mail Notes, Feb. 17 & Apr. 15, 1916.

pledged to negotiate a more detailed contract before the end of November.⁶²

In November, the Union and the Planters Association signed a contract that regulated most areas of employer-employee relations. The agreement, which took effect on February 1, 1917, defined the work day as nine hours and raised wages 50 to 80 percent over pre-strike rates. Planters were now obligated to pay first class laborers forty cents daily, second class laborers twenty-five to thirty-three cents depending on the type of work done, and third class workers twelve cents a day. The contract also introduced the concept of overtime. First and second class laborers would now receive five cents and four cents, respectively, for each hour they worked beyond nine hours. Other practices, such as access to a house, provision ground, and medical care, remained the same, but now the rights of workers were protected by a written contract. In the event of a dispute, both planters and laborers agreed to abide by the decision of a board consisting of members from each side.⁶³

The victory of Crucian workers stimulated efforts to form a similar union on St. Thomas. In October 1915, D. Hamilton Jackson had traveled to St. Thomas, where he spoke to large enthusiastic crowds, who applauded his call for St.

⁶² Avis, Mar. 1, 1916; Mail Notes, Feb. 28, 1916.

⁶³ Avis, Dec. 6, 1916.

Thomian leaders to work for reforms.⁶⁴ By the enthusiasm with which they greeted Jackson, St. Thomian working people indicated their faith in the leadership of the black middle class. At the same time, they challenged the middle class to push for reforms that would benefit all black St. Thomians. For the middle class, the success of the St. Croix Labor Union demonstrated the potency of mass action under capable leadership.

As in St. Croix, the war in Europe caused hardship for the dockworkers in St. Thomas. The island's largest employer, the German-owned Hamburg American Line (HAL), drastically curtailed its operations, reducing the number of jobs available along the waterfront.⁶⁵ Workers had hoped that a new Danish corporation, the West Indian Company (WICO), would create new jobs, but they were disappointed by the installation of electric cranes and conveyors able to deliver 150 tons of coal an hour. In January 1916, when these electric machines began operating, the coal carriers, shovelers, and trimmers discovered that the company's promise of economic prosperity did not include them.⁶⁶

In September 1916, the mounting problems of the dockworkers spurred George Moorhead, a loading dock foreman, to organize a labor union for both skilled and unskilled

⁶⁴ Tidende, Oct. 13 & 20, 1915.

⁶⁵ Jarvis, Brief History, p. 97.

⁶⁶ Tidende, Feb. 2, 1916.

workers. Whereas the Trades Union had provided a model for organization, the success of the St. Croix Labor Union attracted hundreds of dockworkers to the new St. Thomas Labor Union. Along with campaigning for more jobs and better wages, the St. Thomas Labor Union gained support from aspiring black politicians by advocating the extension of the suffrage to all men and women.⁶⁷

The opportunity for the Labor Union to prove its strength came in the middle of October 1916 when a hurricane devastated St. Thomas, destroying the electric coaling cranes at the West Indian Company dock. A month later, the Union took advantage of the increased need for labor and called upon dock workers to demand higher wages. The coal carriers responded by asking that their wages be raised from seven to eight cents an hour for discharging and from one to two cents a basket for loading coal. Following the women, the coal trimmers demanded an increase from six to ten cents for each ton of coal they packed into the hold of a ship. In addition, the stevedores insisted they be paid fifteen cents an hour for day work and thirty cents an hour if they worked at night.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Bulletin, Sep. 21, 1916; NA RG 55 Office of the Governor and Government Secretary, Entry 2: General Files 1917-1927, File 59 R. Francis to Government Secretary, Jan. 19, 1923.

⁶⁸ DeBooy and Faris, Virgin Islands, pp. 65-66; Bulletin, Nov. 22 & 24, 1916; Mail Notes, Nov. 28 & Dec. 15, 1916.

On November 22, after the West Indian Company, the Hamburg American Line and the several smaller steamship companies that visited the island refused these demands, the workers went out on strike. As a result, the stevedores quickly received their desired raise, but ten days later, a British steamer balked at paying the wage increase. The stevedores walked out again and, a day later, all the companies that brought cargo to the island signed an agreement honoring the new wages. As the stevedores settled their differences with their employers, the coal workers also returned to work at WICO and HAL, only to have their agreement break down. On December 2, the women discharging 4,500 tons of coal from a U.S. steamer at HAL complained that the Line was evading the wage increase by overfilling their baskets. Only another day of haggling finally ended this strike. Across the harbor, WICO workers completed a day's work at two cents a basket and ten cents a ton, but the next day the Company claimed that the union had agreed to only a one day bonus, and that the new wage would be 1.5 cents a basket and nine cents a ton. Indeed, the Union leaders had agreed to the one day bonus and a temporary settlement of 1.5 cents a basket and nine cents a ton, but the carriers and trimmers refused to return to work unless their full demands were met. Six more days passed before WICO admitted defeat. On December 13, 1916 the St. Thomas

Labor Union and WICO signed a contract that solidified victory for workers all along the docks.⁶⁹

The strikes on St. Croix and St. Thomas intertwined with the negotiations to sell the islands to the United States. In the islands, the wartime economic hardships had deepened disillusionment with Danish rule, and the opening of sale negotiations only one month after D. Hamilton Jackson returned to St. Croix angered many Danish West Indians. The negotiations convinced Jackson that Denmark was not interested in solving the islands' problems, and the St. Croix Labor Union became a strong advocate of the sale to the United States. At the same time, the reluctance of the Governor to intervene in the sugar workers' strike worried planters that Denmark had lost its ability to manage the affairs of the colony. Similar feeling on St. Thomas prompted the Colonial council to declare in favor of the sale. Finally, as ratification of the treaty moved toward a vote in the Danish Rigsdag, officials in the West Indies warned the home government that rejection would lead to a violent reaction in the islands.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, p. 240; Tidende, Bulletin, and Mail Notes, Nov. 22 to Dec. 16, 1916.

⁷⁰ Dookhan, "Local Reaction," pp. 67-69; NA RG 55 Records of the Danish Government of the Virgin Islands, St. Thomas-Office of the Governor and Government Secretary, General Correspondence 1848-1917, Correspondence Regarding Sale of the Danish West Indies, Sep. 17 & 19, 1916.

The decision to sell the islands culminated fifty years of United States interest in the Danish West Indies.⁷¹ During the Civil War, U.S. leaders recognized that they needed naval ports in the Caribbean, and they became interested in the possibility that Denmark might sell its now unprofitable colony. After the war, the U.S. Secretary of State, William H. Seward, began exploring opportunities to acquire naval bases in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and the Danish West Indies. Nothing came of his efforts to obtain bases in Haiti or the Dominican Republic, but in 1867, Denmark agreed to sell St. Thomas and St. John for \$7.5 million. However, Seward failed to convince Congress of the need for Caribbean bases, and the Senate did not even bother to vote on the treaty. During the 1890s, Denmark again raised the question of a sale, and this time the U.S. Senate reacted favorably. A growing navy and the probability that the United States would soon control a canal across Central America heightened the importance of establishing naval bases in the Caribbean. Denmark further enticed the United States by hinting that Germany was interested in acquiring the islands. Then in 1898, the Spanish-American War gave the United States control of Cuba

⁷¹ Tansill, Purchase of the Danish West Indies; Dookhan, Virgin Islands, chapter 14; Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 77-86. Also see Loyld Gardner, Walter La Feber and Thomas McCormick, Creation of the American Empire (Chicago: Rand McNally Publications) for an analysis of U.S. expansion.

and Puerto Rico, and opened the chance for almost total U.S. domination of the Caribbean. In 1902, the U.S. Senate ratified a sale agreement between Danish and American negotiators to sell all three islands for \$5 million, but this time the Danish Rigsdag rejected the treaty by just one vote. Humiliated by the rejection of the 1867 treaty, and insulted by the drop in sale price, just enough Danish politicians felt that they could make another attempt to salvage their declining colony. However, a dozen years later, the war in Europe revived American concerns over German acquisition of the islands and made clear the hopelessness of rescuing their economy. In 1916, both the U.S. Senate and the Danish Rigsdag ratified the sale of the islands to the United States for \$25 million.

Agitation in the Danish West Indies, for or against sale, greatly affected the negotiations.⁷² In 1867, the Danes conducted a plebescite on St. Thomas and St. John to determine local opinion on the proposed sale. Even though only those people with franchise rights were allowed to vote, the lopsided count, 1244 to 22, in favor of the sale indicated that most Danish West Indians felt they would fare better under American rule. While a few merchants feared that incorporation into the U.S. economic system would end the freeport privileges on which St. Thomas had prospered, most St. Thomians believed that American economic aid would

⁷² See especially Dookhan, "Local Reaction."

more than offset such a loss. Just as importantly, the policies of Radical Reconstruction in the southern United States impressed many black islanders, raising hopes that the United States would democratize the political system of the colony. By 1902, the emergence of Jim Crow and U.S. policies in Cuba and Puerto Rico had soured enthusiasm for American rule. Although no plebescite was taken, the planters and merchants formed pro- and anti-sale parties, and their debates influenced the narrow vote in the Rigsdag.

After the defeat of the 1902 treaty, opponents of the sale pushed for reforms that would restore respect for Denmark in the colony. To revive the faltering economy, the reformers began to encourage Danish citizens to invest in the islands. In 1903, a group of Danish capitalists responded by forming the Danish Plantation Company, which soon became the largest landowner on St. Croix. A year later, another Danish company constructed a modern sugar factory on that island. The creation of the West Indian Company was also a result of the post-1902 reforms. In 1912, Danish investors announced the creation of this company, which they boasted would transform St. Thomas into the "Singapore of the West" by taking advantage of the nearly completed Panama Canal.⁷³

⁷³ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, p. 235; D.C. Canegata, St. Croix at the 20th Century: A Chapter in Its History (New York: Carlton Press, Inc., 1968), pp. 53-56; Tidende, Jan. 24, 1912.

In response to complaints by the islands' middle class that colonial schools failed to prepare natives for leadership positions, the Danes also attempted educational reforms. Even before Emancipation, the Danes had congratulated themselves on their liberalism by allowing Moravian missionaries to establish grammar schools for slaves. After 1848, the colonial government took control of the schools, but little progress was made to provide a public education beyond the elementary level.⁷⁴ The absence of a public high school meant that only students from wealthy families could attend the one private high school on St. Croix, or travel abroad for an education. Even at the lower levels, the continued usage of the stingy Lancasterian system hampered education by placing different classes in the same room. In 1911, a new energetic School Director, O. Rubner-Petersen, revised the existing school regulations to remedy many faults in the system. He divided the schools into classrooms for the teaching of different subjects, and expanded the teaching of religion and Danish in order to cultivate higher ideals and to prepare students for positions in government and business. These reforms did not meet the demand for a public high school, but Rubner-

⁷⁴ Patricia Gill Murphy, "The Education of New World Blacks in the Danish West Indies/U.S. Virgin Islands: A Case Study of Social Transition," (Ph.D dissertation, University of Connecticut, 1977), pp. 49-95; Ezra A. Naughton, "The Origin and Development of Higher Education in the Virgin Islands," (Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University, 1973), pp. 101-136; Highfield, p. 19.

Petersen believed that the changes reaffirmed Denmark's interest in its colonial possessions.⁷⁵

To meet the political demands of the middle class, the Danish governor used his powers to appoint black men to the Colonial Councils. Although black men occasionally won a few of the twenty-four elected seats in the Councils, none ever sat in the nine seats reserved for Crown members. In 1915, Governor Helweg-Larsen greatly increased his popularity by appointing five black Crown members.⁷⁶

The Governor also courted plantation workers by proposing legislation to reduce infant mortality and to implement land reform. To gain the support of the St. Croix Colonial Council, the Governor argued that better living conditions would ensure a more adequate supply of labor to the plantations. The infant mortality rate for the children of plantation laborers often surpassed 60 per cent, and the Governor sought to remedy this calamity by prohibiting female laborers from doing heavy work during the last two months of pregnancy and for seven week after giving birth. During this period, the government would pay mothers fifteen cents a day, and hire matrons to instruct them in proper

⁷⁵ NA RG 55 St. Croix Colonial Council: Proceedings, July 17 & Sep. 18, 1911, and St. Thomas Colonial Council: Forhandlinger, Oct. 17, 1912 & Aug. 7, 1913.

⁷⁶ NA RG 55 St. Thomas Colonial Council: Forhandlinger, May 10, 1915; Avis, May 8, 1915.

child care.⁷⁷ To promote land reform, the Governor proposed that the administration buy land from planters to be resold in small plots to laborers on easy terms of payment. Ever since Emancipation, the Danish government had entertained schemes to develop a stable society based peasant proprietorship, but objections from the planters had killed any extensive land reform program. This time, the Governor hoped to convince planters that reform was necessary for workers not to abandon sugar cultivation altogether.⁷⁸

Governor Helweg-Larsen expected too much from the planters. In December 1915, the Colonial Council of St. Croix gladly approved the plan to improve infant mortality, but protested a key provision of the land reform program. The planters praised the idea of land reform, but accepted the law only after the Council eliminated the power of the administration to expropriate land. Instead, each planter would decide which lands would become part of the program.⁷⁹ This stipulation made the program almost meaningless, since it relegated the proposed small farms to marginal lands. A month later, the beginning of the sugar strike revealed that

⁷⁷ Lewis, Virgin Islands, p.38; NA RG 55 St. Croix Colonial: Proceedings, Dec. 13, 1915; Avis, Sept. 25, 1912.

⁷⁸ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, pp. 233-234; NA RG 55 St. Croix Colonial Council: Proceedings, Dec. 13, 1915.

⁷⁹ NA RG 55 St. Croix Colonial Council: Proceedings, Dec. 13, 1915.

the Governor's inability to curb the power of the planters had cost him the confidence of the workers.

Given the ravages of the Great War, the attempts at reform did little to shore up loyalty to Denmark. On his way to Denmark, D. Hamilton Jackson had stopped in New York City, where he was greeted enthusiastically by thousands of Danish West Indian emigrants.⁸⁰ Leaders of that community convinced him that black Americans would support the struggles of black people in the islands, and even though Jackson continued to profess love for Denmark, he understood that the racial bonds between the descendants of Africans in the United States and the Caribbean might prove stronger than the national ties between the islands and Denmark. As sale negotiations continued into the summer of 1916, the issue of racism in the United States entered into the debate over whether the islands would fare better under Danish or American rule. Just as racial policies in the United States affected the views of Danish West Indians in 1867 and 1902, the problems of discrimination, segregation, and lynching concerned many Danish West Indians in 1916.⁸¹ At the same time, the figures of such people as Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois symbolized the progress made by black Americans. Adolph Sixto, a prominent black St. Thomian

⁸⁰ Tidende, July 7, 1915.

⁸¹ Avis, Aug. 18 & 23, 1916.

entrepreneur, expressed a typical view when he observed that:

The Danish West Indian dwells in the United States by the thousand and possess [sic] their societies and banks. . . . Our men and women are found as doctors, lawyers, nurses, electricians, and are not denied an existence because of their color⁸²

Stung by the decision to once again resume sale negotiations, Sixto explained that islanders preferred to chance American rule, rather than continue under Danish misrule and neglect.

On August 4, 1916, the U.S. State Department and the Danish Foreign Ministry concluded a sale treaty, and Danish West Indians clamored to express their support of the transfer. On August 15, a ballot conducted by D. Hamilton Jackson found 4,728 Crucians in favor of the sale and only seven voters opposed. Despite some irregularities in the balloting, the vote indicated the extent of public sentiment in favor of the sale. Also, within two weeks of this balloting, the Colonial Councils of St. Thomas-St. John and St. Croix voiced elite discontent with Danish rule by passing unanimous resolutions urging the transfer. Then, in early September, black politicians on St. Thomas imitated D. Hamilton Jackson by organizing the Civic League to marshal public support for the sale. Led by Councilmember Lionel Roberts, the League held several public meetings to denounce

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The Herald (St. Croix), Nov. 28, 1916.

the shortcomings of Danish rule. At a mass meeting convened by the League in October, hundreds of St. Thomians voted for a resolution asking the Rigsdag to ratify the Treaty.⁸³

Certainly discontent in the islands affected ratification. Ever since the opening of negotiations, notices of strikes, demonstrations, and resolutions had bombarded Denmark. By December, the transfer had become a tiresome subject and Danish voters approved a referendum in favor of the sale. Following the wishes of the voters, the Danish Rigsdag then ratified the treaty.⁸⁴ Recognizing that the islanders no longer appreciated Danish rule, the Danes voted to accept the money from the United States and be rid of their colonial problems.

On March 31, 1917, the Danish West Indies became the Virgin Islands of the United States. On that day, excited crowds on St. Thomas and St. Croix watched as the United States Navy took control of the islands from Danish colonial officers. Already, the onlookers knew that they would be known as American Virgin Islanders. They also knew that their new rulers could afford to spend much more money than the Danes for the improvement of the islands. What they did not know were the terms on which Virgin Islanders would be

⁸³ Dookhan, "Local Reaction," pp. 69-71; Bulletin, Sep. 21, 1916; Mail Notes, Sep. 15, & Oct. 9, 1916.

⁸⁴ Dookhan, "Local Reaction," p. 71.

permitted to shape the policies that would guide the islands under the American flag.

CHAPTER TWO

FIRST ATTEMPTS AT AMERICANIZATION

The Navy considered Americanization to be the most important part of its mission in the Virgin Islands. With naval bases on Cuba and Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands were important only if occupied by an unfriendly country; once under U.S. control, the islands lost their strategic value, leaving the Navy only the task of managing the internal affairs of the colony. Naval supervision of the islands followed established U.S. policy in Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. In all these countries, American policymakers felt that a firm military hand was necessary to guide their primitive inhabitants to a higher level of civilization.

The Navy rulers sought to construct a policy of Americanization that kept political control firmly in their own hands. Brushing aside native expectations of political reform, the Navy regime focused on fitting the government structure to American practices, improving infrastructure and health care, and familiarizing Virgin Islanders with American culture. Viewing themselves as teachers of the "American way of life," the Navy officials felt obliged to instruct an inferior people in a better manner of living. A few years after the Navy had assumed responsibility for the

islands, Governor Philip Williams, a Navy captain, best summarized the Navy's policy:

Americanization has been the main objective of successive 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

Left unstated by the Governor was the assumption that the Navy officials, and not the general populace, would decide which 'ideals' would apply to the Virgin Islands.

But the Navy could not accomplish its mission without support from the federal government. In 1919, Daniel Henderson, a journalist for McClure's Magazine, visited the new American colony and wrote an article urging Congress to support the Navy in its task. Representing what can be called a typical American view, Henderson claimed that "native ability does not strike one as having reached the stage where things will go efficiently without the brains and executive ability of the white American."² Furthermore, the United States had an obligation to protect the white population of the islands:

I visited a sugar planter on his lovely estate in St. Croix, where for every white face, one saw a hundred black ones. . . . The United States can

¹ NA RG 55 Records of the Government of the Virgin Islands Entry 27: Annual Reports of the Governor and Subordinate Offices 1917-1943, Annual Reports of the Governor, 1924.

² Daniel Henderson, The Country We Forgot (New York: McClure Publications, 1919), unpaginated.

forget many things about these islands but let it never forget that living in lonely sections of the island of St. Croix are families of pure Anglo-Saxon blood, the men, women and children of which are as much in need and as much entitled to police and military protection as those in the most populated sections of our country. . . . No American is more needed in the Virgin Islands than the Marine³.

But even the Marines could not bring civilization to the islands if Congress failed to appropriate sufficient money to upgrade the schools, hospitals, and basic infrastructure of the islands. Henderson argued that these improvements would aid the Navy and eventually make the islands an attractive place for American investors and settlers.

Their new rulers' racism shocked and disappointed Virgin Islanders. Perhaps their disenchantment with the Danes had caused many islanders to become overly optimistic about American rule. In any case, the promises of the Transfer Treaty overshadowed the qualms that Virgin Islanders felt about the prejudices of the Navy officials. The Treaty gave the Danish inhabitants of the colony one year to make a declaration in favor of retaining their Danish citizenship, or they would become U.S. citizens automatically. Furthermore, Danes could at any time renounce their citizenship and become U.S. citizens "on the same terms as may be provided according to the laws of the United States, for other inhabitants of the islands."⁴

³ Henderson (1919), unpaginated.

⁴ From the treaty of cession, quoted in Evans, p. 61.

Virgin Islanders interpreted this vague provision to mean that, except for those few Danes who chose to retain their loyalty to the old mother country, U.S. citizenship would be extended to all islanders. As U.S. citizens," Virgin Islanders could then claim that their rights under the Constitution conflicted with the property restrictions limiting the franchise to the wealthy. Compared to the prejudices of individual Americans, U.S. citizenship augured a political revolution.

At the time of the transfer, Congress reinforced the belief that Virgin Islanders would become citizens by granting U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans. In January 1918, with this precedent set, Virgin Islanders organized Citizenship Day parades to mark the end of the year long waiting period for Danes to declare their citizenship intentions. Because the St. Thomas parade was reviewed by the Navy governor, the islanders assumed that they had become citizens; but in the months following, no official announcement came from Washington. A year later, the refusal of the Governor to attend the second anniversary celebrations of Citizenship Day worried Virgin Islanders that they might not receive citizenship.⁵

Another year passed before the State Department settled the issue. In February 1920, a Congressional commission, led by Senator William S. Kenyon of Iowa, visited the

⁵ The Bulletin, Jan. 18, 1918 and Jan. 18, 1919.

islands to begin formulating Federal policy toward the colony. On his return to the mainland, Senator Kenyon asked the State Department to rule on the citizenship controversy. On March 9, 1920, Acting Secretary Frank L. Polk replied that Virgin Islanders were to be considered nationals, but not citizens, of the United States. The State Department based its ruling on the fact that black islanders had been subjects, but not citizens of Denmark.⁶ Contrary to the expectations of Virgin Islanders, the ruling revealed that American racism extended beyond the prejudices of the Navy.

Actually, several Supreme Court decisions at the beginning of the century should have forewarned Virgin Islanders that Congress was not obliged to extend citizenship to American colonies. After 1898, the acquisition of the Spanish colonies in the Caribbean and the Pacific forced the United States to begin formulating a colonial policy. In Downes v. Bidwell (1901), Hawaii v. Mankichi (1903), and Dorr v. United States (1904), the Supreme Court elaborated the doctrine of incorporation to differentiate territories settled by Americans from countries where Americans ruled over populations with darker skins and different cultures. This new doctrine held that only when Congress decided to "incorporate" new territories into the Union did their inhabitants gain Constitutional

⁶ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 136-137; Evans, pp. 62-63; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 24.

rights. Until then, neither Constitutional principles nor Federal laws would be effective in "unincorporated territories" unless specifically stated by Congress.⁷ These Supreme Court rulings pushed small colonies such as the Virgin Islands into an often desperate struggle to get Congress to pay attention to their particular needs.

By the Congressional Act of March 3, 1917, "to provide a temporary government for the West Indian islands acquired by the United States from Denmark," the Navy gained authority over the Virgin Islands. Although the government was described as temporary, Congressional disinterest gave the Navy control over the islands for the next fourteen years. According to the Act, the President had the right to appoint the islands' governor, but in actual practice, the Secretary of the Navy chose the Naval officers he wished to fill the post. Furthermore, Section I of the Act placed "all military, civil and judicial powers" in the hands of the Governor.⁸ This meant that Naval officers had extraordinary powers to manage the internal affairs of the colony. As military chiefs, the Navy governors commanded

⁷ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 99-103; Lewis, The Virgin Islands, pp. 43-44.

⁸ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, pp. 266-267; Evans, pp. 51-52.

the 400 sailors and marines stationed in the islands.⁹ As the leading civil officials, they filled the top administrative posts with naval officers and appointed friendly merchants, planters, and government officials to the nine unelected seats of the Colonial Councils. Also, their "judicial powers" allowed the Navy governors to appoint and dismiss judges.¹⁰ Contrary to the expectations of many Virgin Islanders, U.S. administration was no more democratic than Danish rule.

To emphasize the continuity between Danish and American sovereignty, Section II of the Act stipulated that the Danish Colonial Law of 1906 would remain the basic law of the Virgin Islands. Except for slightly lowering the property qualifications for the franchise, from \$150 to \$140 annual rent on St. Thomas, and from \$70 to \$60 on St. Croix and St. John, the 1906 legislation largely kept intact the Colonial Law of 1863.¹¹ After 1917, as under Danish rule, only about a thousand voters elected thirteen members to the Colonial Council of St. Croix and eleven members to the Colonial Council of St. Thomas and St. John.¹² The

⁹ Census of the V.I. 1917, p. 86; U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Fifteenth Census of the United States 1930, Outlying Territories and Possessions (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932), pp. 275-276.

¹⁰ Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 5-6.

¹¹ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, pp. 210-214; Evans, p. 52.

¹² Dookhan, Virgin Islands, p. 210.

continuance of the Danish Colonial Law of 1906 suited the Navy governors. Not only did they tend to sympathize with the views of the planters and merchants who dominated the Councils, but as military men, they also relished the power to command conferred on them by the Danish laws.

Yet, the continuance of Danish laws contradicted the Navy's stated mission to Americanize the structure of local government. Although the policy of Americanization suggested that the principle of separation of powers be applied to the political system, the Navy governors hesitated to introduce reforms that might force them to negotiate with native leaders. Instead, the governors selectively used the separation of powers doctrine to strengthen their own power. When challenged by local politicians, the Governors simply responded that they knew what was best for the islands.

Shortly after the Transfer, the first Naval governor used the separation of powers doctrine to constrict the powers of the Colonial Councils. Under the Danes, the governors had shared some executive functions with commissions made up of members from the Councils. These commissions helped supervise the hospitals, schools, road maintenance, poor relief, and virtually every other administrative area of government. In June 1918 however, Admiral James H. Oliver persuaded the Councils that wartime circumstances demanded the expansion of executive power, and

he absorbed the functions of the numerous commissions. Then at the end of the war, the Admiral refused to resurrect the commissions by declaring that he would not tolerate such an un-American encroachment on the executive branch by the legislature. Eight years later, the Colonial Council of St. Thomas and St. John, regretting its decision to turn some of its power over to the executive, urged the present governor, Captain Martin E. Trench, to restore the commissions. Trench refused, and the Council could do nothing.¹³

While arguing separation of powers with the Colonial Councils, the governors abandoned the logic of Americanization in regard to the judicial system. Instead of working to establish an independent judiciary, the governors sought to retain their powers over judges granted them by the Danish laws. In 1921, the second governor, Admiral Joseph Oman, worked with the Colonial Councils to streamline the judicial system by replacing the separate district judgeships for St. Thomas and St. Croix with one judge for the whole territory. This district judge then presided over three police judges, in Charlotte Amalie, Christiansted and Frederiksted. While these judicial reforms also introduced trial by jury, they were made more for the sake of efficiency than Americanization, since the

¹³ Evans, pp. 105-106 and 116; NA RG 55/2, File 58 Governor to Chairman of the Colonial Council of St. Thomas & St. John, May 1, 1920, and Governor to Chairman of the Colonial Council of St. Croix, May 1, 1920; RG 55/27, Annual Report of the Governor, 1926.

governor kept the power to appoint and dismiss all these judges without any requirement to consult with the Councils. Moreover, any illusion that these courts made decisions independent of the executive disappeared with the governor's practice of appointing the government attorney of St. Thomas as police judge of that island, and the government attorney of St. Croix as police judge for both Christiansted and Frederiksted. 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 to travel to the Philadelphia Court to overturn a decision of the Virgin Islands District Court.¹⁴

An early, but unsuccessful, attempt to challenge the governor's control of the judiciary demonstrated the extent of his power. In September 1920, when two separate judgeships still existed, Governor Oman appointed Lucius Malmin, a white American, 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

¹⁴ Evans, pp. 115-116 & 210-211; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 4-6; Darwin Creque, The U.S. Virgins and the Eastern Caribbean (Philadelphia: Whitmore Publishing Co., 1968), pp. 78-79; NA RG 55/2, File 66 Governor to Secretary of the Navy, Oct. 6, 1919, and District Judge to Governor, June 11, 1923; RG 80 Records of the Secretary of the Navy, Entry 19: General File 1897-1926, File 28759-542:22 Secretary of the Navy to the President, July 12, 1921.

permission. Then, in 1921, Malmin secured orders from the Third Circuit Court and President Harding, directing his appointment as district judge. However, Oman's successor, Captain Summer Kittelle, refused to honor the orders on the grounds that the district judgeship of St. Croix had been abolished. Pressure from the Secretary of the Navy then induced the President to revoke Malmin's appointment.¹⁵

Of course, the Navy governors encroached upon the powers of the Councils and the judiciary precisely because they saw themselves as teachers of the "American way of life." Understanding the importance of education and culture, the governors pushed for the Americanization of the schools, music, sports, and holidays. In 1917, shortly after arriving in the islands, Governor Oliver picked a talented young native musician, Alton Adams, to organize a Navy band. As the first all-black Navy band, Adams and his musicians inspired Virgin Islanders to love the U.S. Navy and American patriotic music.¹⁶ Along with recruiting Adams to start a Navy band, Governor Oliver encouraged the sailors and marines under his command to teach baseball to the islanders. In September 1918, Oliver's efforts were rewarded when he "threw the first ball" at the inauguration of the St. Thomas Baseball League. In a few years, baseball

¹⁵ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, p. 125; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 6; NA RG 80 File 28759-542:1-45.

¹⁶ Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. "Alton Augustus Adams," The Black Perspective in Music, 5:2 (Fall 1977), 173-187.

rivalled cricket as the islands' most popular sport.¹⁷ In 1919, Governor Oman followed Oliver's example by persuading the Colonial Councils to rename the public schools after U.S. presidents. Then, three years later, the American School Director began to reorganize the curriculum of the schools according to the courses of study used in New Mexico and Utah.¹⁸ At the same time, the Colonial Councils responded to Oman's requests by bringing local holidays in line with those celebrated in the United States. The Fourth of July, especially, quickly became a boisterous occasion as Virgin Islanders sought to demonstrate their loyalty to the United States.¹⁹ From concerts featuring the music of John Philip Sousa to cookouts and baseball games on Independence Day, Virgin Islanders were learning how to become Americans.

In carrying out their Americanization policies, the Navy governors also believed that had a duty to remind Congress to include the Virgin Islands in laws applicable to the rest of the nation. In 1921, Congress responded to

¹⁷ Romel V. Wallace, "A Brief History of Amateur Baseball in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands," (St. Thomas Public Library, 1980), Typewritten; Bulletin, Sep. 3, 1918; Avis, Dec. 30, 1918.

¹⁸ Jarvis, Brief History, p. 133; Charles W. Turnbull, "The Structural Development of a Public Education System in the Virgin Islands, 1917-1970: A Functional Analysis in Historical Perspective." (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1976), pp. 45 and 125; Bulletin, August 18, 1919.

¹⁹ Avis, June 27, 1919 and Sep. 5, 1919; Bulletin, Sep. 13, 1919 and July 6 and 7, 1920.

suggestions from the Department of the Navy by extending to the colony the federal income tax, and by prohibiting aliens from sitting in the Colonial Councils or from holding public office.²⁰ Actually, the extension of the federal income tax was only an administrative change, since it replaced a slightly higher local income tax instituted in 1918, and since the taxes collected were returned to the colonial treasury. More significant was the ban on aliens holding public office. Native islanders applauded this measure as a chance to curb the power of those planters and merchants who were citizens of foreign countries. Natives only complained that the ban did not deprive resident aliens of the right to vote.²¹

Unfortunately for Virgin Islanders, the most controversial national legislation of the 1920s adversely affected the local economy. In November 1921, Congress extended the Volstead Act to the territory, prohibiting the

²⁰ Evans, pp. 146-147; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 4; NA RG 55/2, File 65-1 Governor's Address to Colonial Council of St. Thomas and St. John, Aug. 4, 1921.

²¹ Evans, pp. 82-83; Lewis, p. 48, writes that "the electoral roll in 1926 contained a mere 700 voters, of whom some 40 per cent were estimated to be aliens." Actually Lewis is referring only to the St. Thomas-St. John rolls. See NA RG 55/27, Annual Report of the Governor, 1926. However in RG 55 Office of the Governor and Government Secretary, Entry 3: General Files 1927-1932, File 40 Director of Police to Governor, Oct. 28, 1928, 181 of 747 voters on St. Thomas-St. John are registers as aliens.

manufacture, sale, and consumption of alcoholic beverages.²² Because the production of rum on St. Croix and the transshipment of liquor through the harbor of St. Thomas were important economic activities, Prohibition threatened financial disaster. Both Josephus Daniels, Secretary of the Navy at the time of the transfer, and Admiral Oliver, the first Naval governor, favored Prohibition. Even before Congress acted, Governor Oliver had implemented local prohibition. In the summer of 1918, both Colonial Councils passed ordinances banning the importation, manufacture, and sale of alcoholic beverages. However, they exempted from the ordinances the importation of malt liquors and the manufacture of rum for export, thereby softening the harshness of the law for both local consumption and business. By closing these two loopholes, the Volstead Act triggered widespread protests, making life difficult for several governors and causing at least a few Virgin Islanders to question their ties to the United States.²³

On February 3, 1922, only two days after Governor Summer Kittelle proclaimed the official beginning of

²² See Isaac Dookhan, "Volsteadism or National Prohibition in the United States Virgin Islands: An Aspect of Administrative Control, 1917-1934," The Journal of the College of the Virgin Islands, 5 (May 1979), pp. 5-39 for a detailed account of Prohibition in the Virgin Islands.

²³ As prohibition director, the governor faced the thankless task of enforcing an unpopular law. Although no one suggested that the V.I. break away from the United States, several letters to newspapers imply profound disillusionment with American rule. For example, see Bulletin, Apr. 29, 1922.

Prohibition, the Colonial Council of St. Thomas and St. John elected four delegates to travel to Washington, D.C. to protest against the Volstead Act.²⁴ Shocked by the Council's insolence, Governor Kittelle refused to cooperate with the delegation, and several months passed before it was ready to depart. In July, Conrad Corneiro and George Moorehead, representing the Council, and Adolph Sixto, selected by a popular referendum, finally made their way to the nation's capital. But as the Governor predicted, neither Prohibition Commissioner Roy Haynes, nor President Harding, showed any interest in exempting the Virgin Islands from the law of the land.²⁵

Despite the apparent futility of such actions, Virgin Islanders continued to protest against Prohibition. The Colonial Councils passed resolutions, businessmen sent telegrams, and civic leaders circulated petitions. On May 18, 1923, St. Thomians organized a large protest march after hearing that the Supreme Court, in Cunard Steamship Company, Ltd. v. Mellon, had ruled that foreign vessels could not bring liquor into U.S. territorial waters, even if the alcohol was never unloaded. Because of the importance of foreign shipping, St. Thomians feared that the court decision would devastate their economy. The signs carried

²⁴ Bulletin, Feb. 1 & 4, 1922.

²⁵ Dookhan, "Volsteadism," pp. 10-11; Bulletin, Feb. 18 & 20, and July 26 & 29, 1922.

by the marchers displayed the frustration Virgin Islanders felt with Congress:

Thousands of people were involved including . . . citizens from all walks of life. The procession was preceded by a flag borne by members of the Labor Union, there were banners bearing slogans like 'We are not citizens of the Nation,' 'We protest against the 18th Amendment,' and 'Help the starving people, and the protesters marched to the sound of a muffled drum associated with funerals. The procession stopped in front of Government House where a written protest symbolizing 'the cry of a starving people to be relieved of the burdens imposed upon them' was submitted to Governor [Henry] Hough.²⁶

Clearly, Virgin Islanders could not understand why Congress would force them to comply with Prohibition while, at the same time, denying them citizenship.

Fortunately for St. Thomas, several foreign countries persuaded the United States to sign treaties permitting them to bring sealed liquors into American waters. These treaties, all concluded between January 1924 and April 1925,²⁷ mitigated the worst effects of Prohibition. Still, St. Thomian merchants complained that they were being treated unfairly, since the Philippines and the Panama Canal Zone, both U.S. territories, were exempt from the Volstead Act.²⁸ The merchants argued that Prohibition restrictions

²⁶ Dookhan, "Volsteadism," p. 15.

²⁷ Dookhan, "Volsteadism," p. 17. The treaties: Britain (Jan. 23, 1924), Norway (July 2, 1924), Denmark (July 25, 1924), Germany (Aug. 11, 1924), Sweden (Aug. 18, 1924), Italy (Oct. 22, 1924), and the Netherlands (Apr. 9, 1925).

²⁸ Avis, Nov. 2, 1923; Bulletin, June 20, 1924.

caused the number of ships calling at Charlotte Amalie to fall from 609 in 1920-21 to 384 in 1921-22. Due to the liquor treaties, the number of ships rose to 432 in 1925-26, but St. Thomas continued to suffer from the lack of opportunities open to other ports. Yet by 1928-29, when 655 ships visited, most steamship lines had adjusted to the new realities, and the worst of the crisis seemed to be over.²⁹

To counter the effect of Prohibition on the St. Thomian economy, the Navy officials worked to open the U.S. market to Virgin Islands bay rum. This product had long been famous in the British West Indies as a bath rub and aftershave lotion, but it was also used for beverage purposes. Workers in St. John, where most bay plants were grown, picked and distilled the leaves, and then shipped the bay oil to St. Thomas, where it was mixed with alcohol imported from St. Croix and Puerto Rico. Since Prohibition required that bay rum be made from denatured alcohol, the Virgin Islands lost much of the British West Indian market. At the same time, as rival bay rum factories established themselves in the British islands, their government placed tariffs on V.I. bay rum. To their credit, the Navy governors quickly established contacts in the United States,

²⁹ Dookhan, "Volsteadism," p. 18; Bulletin, Jan. 11, 1929.

and bay rum sales actually increased from 73,859 gallons in 1921-22 to 138,065 gallons in 1930-31.³⁰

On St. Croix, where planters complained that the outlawing of rum production threatened them with bankruptcy, the Navy encouraged the production of industrial alcohol. In 1925, Governor Philip Williams permitted a group of American investors to establish the Virgin Islands Products Corporation to manufacture and export alcohol from the molasses produced by the Bethlehem Sugar Factory. Although the loss in rum production to individual planters cannot be calculated, by 1928, the V.I.P.C. was exporting as many gallons of industrial alcohol as St. Croix had exported rum before Prohibition.³¹

Judging from ship arrivals or gallons exported, the Virgin Islands seemed to have recovered from the worst of Prohibition by mid-decade. Federal officials often claimed that Prohibition had only a marginal negative effect on the economy, since the islands were already in the midst of a severe decline.³² Still, for Virgin Islanders who expected so much from American rule, Prohibition came as a great shock. The first two or three years of Prohibition, before

³⁰ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, p. 235; Dookhan, "Volsteadism," pp. 18-23.

³¹ Dookhan, "Volsteadism," pp. 8-9 and 23-25.

³² Evans, pp. 5-6; NA RG 51 Bureau of the Budget, Entry 13.1: Bureau of Efficiency, File 19.V7 Report by Herbert Brown (Part I), Mar. 10, 1930.

the countermeasures took effect, hurt the economy, and even the recovery brought none of the expected prosperity. Before Prohibition became the law on the mainland, V.I. businessmen could dream of opening a market for their rum in the United States; once the Volstead Act became law, they could hope that exemption for the Virgin Islands would entice tourists to a place under the American flag where they could still drink legally. However, after 1921, as potential tourists travelled to other lands, Virgin Islanders could only wait for the United States to end its great experiment in temperance.

Despite not solving either the economic or political frustrations of Virgin Islanders, the Navy achieved a near miracle in public health and public works. In vaccinating children, and in building schools and sewers, the Navy excelled at carrying the 'white man's burden.' In the first governor's report to the Secretary of the Navy, Admiral Oliver catalogued the ills left behind by the Danes. He described filthy streets, dilapidated buildings, sick children, and idle workers. To remedy these problems, he proposed that Congress expend the necessary funds to support a program of building sewers, water reservoirs, schools, health clinics, and roads.³³

³³ NA RG 55/27, Annual Report of the Governor, 1917.

For the most part, Congress complied with the Navy's requests. Compared to Denmark, the United States treated the islands lavishly. For the last seven years of Danish rule, only four per cent of the revenues came directly from the mother country. In contrast, under the Navy regime, money from the U.S. government constituted 43 per cent of the revenues available to the local government. Like Denmark, the Navy paid the salaries of the governor and his staff, but Congress funded several projects that were not included in the colonial budget. Accounting for such large scale projects as the building of rain water reservoirs, federal expenditures often surpassed the revenues raised from local taxation.³⁴

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 appropriation of \$100,000 in 1917, Congressional funding 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 1929.³⁵

³⁴ Evans, pp. 140-153, 193-198.

³⁵ Evans, pp. 153-162.

With this money, Navy officials concentrated on fighting disease and illiteracy. Average annual expenditures of the departments of health, education, and public works totalled 70 per cent of the budget of the St. Thomas-St. John government, and 65 per cent of the St. Croix government.³⁶ To combat disease, the Navy upgraded hospital facilities, and Navy doctors and nurses provided extensive medical care to thousands of people. The Navy even attempted to develop local self-sufficiency in health care by establishing a nursing school for native women. The administration also improved the sewage disposal system, and constructed huge reservoirs which doubled the water supply. All these efforts saved many lives. During the last decade of Danish rule, infant mortality had often surpassed 320 per thousand live births. By 1928, the Navy doctors had reduced these deaths to just over 200. During the same period, the overall death rate also fell from 35 to 25 per thousand.³⁷ 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.

³⁶ Evans, pp. 197-198.

³⁷ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, pp. 267-268; Evans, pp. 266-270; NA RG 55/3, File 44 Governor's Address to the Graduating Class of the Municipal Hospital, Feb. 21, 1930, and File 48 Report by the Governor, May 1, 1928; RG 55/27, Annual Reports of Governor, 1927-1929, and Annual Report of the Commissioner of Health, 1933.

guaranteed every child an American-style ninth grade public school education. Consequently, school attendance rose from 3,770 in 1917, to 4,500 in 1930, and illiteracy dropped from 25 per cent to 16 per cent over the same period.³⁸

These achievements almost countered a growing discontent with Navy rule. Virgin Islanders welcomed the Navy doctors and the projects to improve the infrastructure, but they chafed at the racist attitudes of the governor and the men he appointed to the top administrative posts. Navy officials shared with the local elite the belief that the masses could not govern themselves, and most Navy governors scorned those islanders who called for political reforms. Once it became clear that the Navy stood in the way of greater local self-government, the cry for a 'civil government' became part of the reform movement.

At the same time, the Navy failed to stimulate an economic revival. The cut in federal appropriations after 1924 resulted from Congressional disillusionment with the Navy's program for economic recovery. While the governors could point to their success in countering the worst effects of Prohibition, they could not justify the continuation of federal largesse. Actually, in keeping with the dominant economic philosophy of the time, neither Congress nor the Navy believed that government should intervene too deeply in

³⁸ Creque, p. 78; Evans, pp. 272-274; Fifteenth Census 1930, Outlying Territories, pp. 267-268; NA RG 55/3, File 46 Chart prepared by Director of Education, Oct. 3, 1929.

economic matters. Once basic social needs were met, the Navy governors believed that Virgin Islanders would succeed on their own efforts. Besides expanding the Agricultural Experiment Station begun by the Danes in 1910, and creating a Department of Agriculture, Commerce, and Labor to gather statistics, the Navy did little to develop a comprehensive economic program.³⁹ After 1924, Congress refused to consider requests to fund public works programs that seemed to do nothing to rejuvenate the economy. Still, general federal disinterest kept the Navy in control of the islands. Until the economic collapse of 1930 forced President Hoover to intervene, Virgin Islanders wondered if their new country had not forgotten them.

³⁹ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, pp. 268-270; NA RG 55/2, File 55 Headbookkeeper to Dispatching Secretary, Nov. 13, 1920, and File 110 Director of Agriculture, Commerce and Labor to Governor, Apr. 12, 1927; RG 55/3, File 22 Government Secretary to Dispatching Secretary, Jan. 7, 1929; RG 55/27, Annual Report of the Governor, 1926.

CHAPTER THREE

LABOR STRUGGLES

On their arrival in the Virgin Islands, the Navy officials encountered a labor movement which had just begun to test its newly-found strength. After the victories of 1916, the labor unions of St. Croix and St. Thomas expected American rule to open even more opportunities for workers to increase their wages. Indeed, the announcement by the Planters' Association of St. Croix, that wages would be raised 25 per cent if the transfer to the United States included the elimination of tariffs, contributed to a general feeling that the islands had entered a new era of prosperity.¹ But as firm believers in free enterprise, the Navy officials only reluctantly intervened in economic affairs, leaving such questions as wages and working conditions to be settled by the leaders of capital and labor. Also, the few times the Navy officials did intervene in economic matters, they opposed any plan that might threaten the social status of the white elite. Within a few years, these attitudes of the Navy rulers earned them the enmity of the labor movement. Left on their own to struggle against the planter and merchant elite, labor leaders soon

¹ Dookhan, "Changing Patterns of Local Reaction," 69-72; Avis, Dec. 6, 1916.

shifted the arena of battle from the plantations and harbor to the Colonial Councils.

On St. Croix, the 1916 strike had radicalized the attitudes of estate laborers toward their work and their employers. Estate owners complained that their field laborers not only worked less hard, but had lost the respect they formerly held toward the upper class.² What the planters refused to see was that the strike had taught workers that social status was not sacred. Workers had always understood that white planters talked about working hard when only blacks worked. Now, after the strike, the laborers knew that black people had a right to a wage that would afford a decent living.³

Much to the dismay of the workers, the Navy officials tended to side with the planters. Navy officials frequently blamed the laziness of the workers for the poverty of the island. Some officials understood the negative effects of climate, malnutrition, and disease on worker productivity, but others believed that Virgin Islanders were simply too stupid to grasp the value of thrift and hard work.⁴

Governor Henry Hough best expressed this racist view when he

² Armstrong, pp. 98-104; Avis, Feb. 21 and 28, 1917.

³ Blanshard, pp. 54-56; NA RG 51/13.1, File 19.V7 Conditions in the Virgin Islands (Part I): Labor, Mar. 10, 1930; Avis, Jan. 12 and Feb. 6, 1916; Herald, Nov. 28, 1916.

⁴ NA RG 55/27, Annual Reports of the Governor, 1918 and 1921; Avis, Jan. 28, 1929.

complained to the Secretary of the Navy that "it does 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 surrounding or living conditions."⁵ In this view, workers required constant supervision by white men with higher intelligence and training.⁶ Of course, any laborer could have observed that 'it does not seem to strike the average' Navy official that no white persons worked all week long under the tropical sun. Furthermore, the planters could not always guarantee five or six days of work each week, and many laborers preferred to ply a trade in town or to cultivate a small plot of rented land. Even those who chose idleness knew that the low wages paid on the estates would not greatly improve their living conditions.

Within a few months of the Navy's arrival, a dispute between the St. Croix Labor Union and the Planters' Association gave the first governor the chance to express his views of social conflict on the island. Unhappy with the contract signed after the 1916 strike, the planters attempted to change the nature of work in the canfields by introducing a "task system" that would tie wages to the completion of specific jobs. During the strike, several planters had suggested the task system as the basis for

⁵ NA RG55/27, Annual Report of the Governor, 1923.

⁶ NA RG55/27, Annual Report of the Governor, 1923.

settlement, but the laborers had resisted the idea as a trick to get them to do more work.⁷ In the summer of 1917, with the post-strike agreement due to expire at the end of October, the Planters' Association again proposed the task system as a way to meet the labor demands of estate owners while allowing hard working laborers to earn more money. Since the logic of the task system appealed to the Navy administrators as a way to increase worker productivity, Governor James Oliver decided to help the planters implement the system. The Governor invited Edmund Enright, Assistant Commissioner of the Interior of Puerto Rico, to establish a task system that would be fair to both planters and laborers. Trusting in the good faith of the government, the Labor Union also accepted Enright's services. On August 17, 1917, the Planters' Association and the Labor Union agreed to a complex set of tasks that would supposedly allow the average first-class laborer to increase their daily wage from forty to fifty-five cents.⁸

The task system did not work well. In the first place, the system only applied to first class laborers; women, children, and the men who minded cattle received daily wages

⁷ Isaac Dookhan, "Labour Relations in St. Croix, United States Virgin Islands, 1917-31: A Case of Administrative Failure," Journal of Caribbean History 18 (1984), p. 87; Avis, Feb. 2 and 12, 1916.

⁸ William W. Boyer, "The Navy and Labour in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, 1917-31," The Journal of Caribbean History 22:1 (1985-86), p. 84; Dookhan, "Labour Relations in St. Croix," pp. 86-90.

ranging from fifteen to fifty-five cents. Even many of the jobs done by first class laborers remained as day work. Furthermore, several planters who had never joined the Planters' Association felt no obligation to honor the cumbersome agreement.⁹ Altogether, only about a third of the island's 5,000 rural laborers ever tried the task system.

Difficulties with the task system increased when the government demonstrated its inability to resolve disputes between the Labor Union and the Planters' Association. In January 1918, the laborers on the estate of G.B. Fleming charged that they had received only half their wages for completing a full day's task. Following the August 1917 agreement, the Labor Union submitted the charges to Governor Oliver, who ruled in favor of the laborers. However, Fleming claimed that, since he had quit the Planters' Association in November, he would not obey the ruling. Eventually, the government fined the Planters' Association for violating the August 1917 agreement, and then the Planters' Association took Fleming to court to recover the amount of the fine. In October 1918, the police judge for Frederiksted ruled that Fleming could not be bound by an

⁹ Dookhan, "Labour Relations in St. Croix," p. 86; NA RG 55/2, File 59 Agreement to Govern Relations Between Employers and Agricultural Laborers of St. Croix, V.I., Aug. 15, 1917. According to the Agreement, laborers retained their rights to a free house and provision ground; Mail Notes, Aug. 26, 1914.

agreement he did not sign.¹⁰ This surprising ruling invalidated the agreement and undermined the efforts by the Naval administrators to achieve peace on the estates.

The judge's decision left the planters and laborers to settle their disputes without government help. By the 1918 planting season, the task system had almost completely broken down amid complaints by the planters that workers were doing careless work to finish a given task quickly.¹¹ For their part, the laborers complained that rising wartime food prices outdated the 1917 agreement. Between January 1917 and November 1918, prices for such staples as cornmeal, flour, rice, beans, and herring had risen nearly thirty per cent, and the Labor Union demanded that the agreement be redrawn on a basis allowing first class laborers to earn sixty-five cents a day during the harvest and sixty cents at other times.¹²

In October 1918, as the Labor Union and the Planters' Association began negotiations, internal divisions weakened the position of the Union. When the Union was organized in 1915, its President, D. Hamilton Jackson, had promised to aid laborers in the acquisition of small farms. Using membership dues, Jackson established the Labor Union Savings

¹⁰ Dookhan, "Labour Relations in St. Croix," pp. 87-88.

¹¹ Armstrong, p. 103.

¹² NA RG 55/2, File 59 The Labor Union and the Planters' Association to the Governor, Oct. 3, 1918; Avis, Jan. 3, 1917 and Nov. 2, 1918.

Bank, which soon secured the mortgage on several estates, amounting to some 1,400 acres and 300 cattle.¹³ In October 1918, as negotiations with the planters began, a serious argument over the management of the bank erupted between Jackson and Ralph de Chabert, the Union's vice-president. Soon, accusations of mismanagement, fraud and even theft prompted a government investigation of the bank. The Navy officials quickly turned the investigation into a personal attack on the leadership abilities of D. Hamilton Jackson. Previously both Edmund Enright, the assistant commissioner from Puerto Rico, and Marine Major Jesse Dyer, the Governor's Aide in St. Croix, had submitted to Admiral Oliver negative reports on Jackson's character, accusing him of incompetence, racism, and having socialist tendencies. In December, the accusations by de Chabert and pressure from the government forced Jackson to resign the presidency of the Labor Union. Ralph de Chabert then took charge of the Union, and presided over the liquidation of the ill-fated Savings Bank.¹⁴ Thus weakened, Union threats to strike only won a small concession from the planters. In late February 1919, the two sides agreed to changes in the task system to

¹³ Armstrong, p. 101; NA RG 55/2, File 58 Hearings before the Congressional Committee, Feb. 9, 1920; RG 80/19, File 28759-518:17 Governor to Secretary of the Navy, Feb. 23, 1923.

¹⁴ Boyer, "The Navy and Labour in St. Croix," pp. 85-87; NA RG 55/2, File 59 Major Jesse F. Dyer, Aide to the Governor, Nov. 1, 1918; Avis, Nov. 30, Dec. 12 & 18, 1918.

increase first class wages to an average of sixty cents daily.¹⁵

A year later, the situation changed drastically. At first, the refusal of most planters to continue following the dictates of the Planters' Association rendered almost impotent the February 1919 contract, but the post-war sugar boom soon enabled the island's largest cane growers to offer substantial wage increases. In January 1920, De Chabert negotiated a contract with the Association, bringing first class wages to \$1.00 a day. Although the Association could not hold nonmembers to the contract, the island's three large sugar factories, the West Indian Sugar Factory at Bethlehem Estate, the St. Croix Central Sugar Factory near Christiansted, and the La Grange Sugar Factory outside Frederiksted, supported the new wages. Because these factories also owned most of the cane fields on St. Croix, independent planters risked losing their laborers if they balked at paying the new wages.¹⁶

¹⁵ Dookhan, "Labour Relations in St. Croix," p. 91.

¹⁶ Armstrong, pp. 87, 117-119; Boyer, "The Navy and Labour in St. Croix," p. 89; Dookhan, "Labour Relations in St. Croix," p. 92; Lightbourn's Annual and Commercial Directory of the Virgin Islands of the USA (St. Thomas: Alberic G. Lightbourn, 1919), pp. 94-95 & 113; Avis, Nov. 29, 1918 and Jan. 24, 1920.

The "dance of the millions"¹⁷ continued into the summer of 1921, until a calamitous drop in the price of sugar sparked new conflict between laborers and planters. In August, the three sugar factories, without consulting the Union, announced a 50 per cent wage cut. This announcement caught the Labor Union in a disorganized state. In 1920, the Union lost the services of D. Hamilton Jackson when he left St. Croix to study law at the University of Indiana in Indianapolis. To make matters worse, Ralph de Chabert proved unable to hold the Union together as higher wages weakened worker commitment to collective action, and Union membership dwindled to 2,000.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the sudden wage cut jolted the Union into action, and De Chabert called on the workers out on strike on August 22, 1921. Shocked by the dramatic wage cuts, almost every worker on the factory-owned plantations responded to the strike call.

However, unlike 1916, this time the planters had outmaneuvered the Union. By forcing the Union to strike in the off-season, the three sugar factories could afford a much longer wait before the workers would be needed to harvest the sugar crop. In retaliation for the strike, the factories evicted resident laborers to deny them use of

¹⁷ This phrase is often applied to the Cuban sugar boom of 1920, but it also describes conditions throughout the Caribbean.

¹⁸ Boyer, "The Navy and Labour in St. Croix," p. 90; Kline, unpaginated; NA RG 80/19, File 28759-518:17 Dispatching Secretary to Governor, Feb. 10, 1923.

their provision grounds. As most independent planters followed suit, the strike spread across the island, and soon the Union faced the task of feeding the hundreds of families who crowded into Christiansted and Frederiksted.¹⁹

But even faced with starvation, the workers persisted through the months of October and November. The strike might have collapsed except for the efforts of a new claimant for the leadership of the Crucian labor movement. In 1919, Morris Davis, formerly an estate worker, had returned from St. Thomas, where he had been helping Rotschild Francis, a shoemaker, to organize a local branch of the American Federation of Labor. To avoid directly challenging the St. Croix Labor Union, Davis concentrated on building a union among the still unorganized Frederiksted dock workers. In August 1919, this Porters' Union negotiated higher wages for the workers of Robert Merwin, owner of the largest merchant house in Frederiksted. This victory, and the friendship of Rothschild Francis, gained Davis the backing of the AFL to establish a local of that organization on St. Croix. Within a year after his success on the Frederiksted docks, Davis had not only drawn several hundred estate workers away from the St. Croix Labor Union,

¹⁹ Dookhan, "Labour Relations in St. Croix," pp. 93-96.

but had secured a \$1.15 daily wage for his first class workers.²⁰

A fiery orator, Davis toured the island, encouraging the workers to continue defying the planters. 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 per cent of the sugar workers participated in the strike, which now threatened cane planting season.²¹

Finally in November, worker resistance crumbled. Hearing about the strike, D. Hamilton Jackson hurried back to St. Croix. Finding the Union penniless and the workers starving, he rushed to conclude an agreement with the planters. On November 26, 1921, Folmer Andersen, the director of the Bethlehem sugar factory and its many estates, agreed to resume work at sixty cents a day, and to begin negotiations on new task rates. As Bethlehem was the island's largest employer, this agreement laid the basis for

²⁰ Dookhan, "Labour Relations in St. Croix," p. 91; Lightbourn's Annual and Commercial Directory (1919), pp. 55-58; NA RG 55/2, File 59 Agreement Between Mervin and Porters' Union, August 5, 1919, and American V.I. Federation of Labor to Governor, March 19, 1920; Avis, July 17 & 18, 1919, Jan. 27, Sep. 1 & 2, 1920; Bulletin, Sep. 17, 1919.

²¹ Smith, p. 13; NA RG 55/2, File 59 Speeches by Davis, Aug.-Nov. 1921, and Daily Reports of the Police Department, Aug. 22-Dec. 2, 1921.

ending the strike. Within a few days, most workers had returned to their jobs.²²

The agreement ended workers' hopes for improving their living conditions. In March 1922, the Labor Union signed an agreement with the three sugar companies, setting wages back almost at pre-sugar boom levels.²³ The new contract established a task rate schedule "that will enable a good average first class laborer to earn 70 to 75 cents a day."²⁴ When the task system could not be used, the companies would pay first class laborers sixty cents for a nine-hour day during the harvest, and forty cents during the summer and fall. As the planters argued, these wage cuts were somewhat offset by falling food prices, which had receded to 1916 levels, but they did not meet worker expectations of the new era of American rule.²⁵ For the rest of the decade, until the Great Depression brought even more severe economic problems, first class wages remained at the rates

²² Dookhan, "Labour Relations in St. Croix," p. 96; Boyer, "The Navy and Labour in St. Croix," pp. 91-92; NA RG 55/2, File 59 Speeches by Davis, Aug.-Nov. 1921, and Daily Reports of the Police Department, Aug. 22.-Dec. 2, 1921.

²³ Avis, Mar. 16, 1922.

²⁴ Avis, Mar. 16, 1922.

²⁵ Avis, Jan. 3, 1917, Nov. 2, 1918, Aug. 19, 1920, Apr. 2, 1921, and Feb. 6 & 7, 1923.

established in the 1922 contract.²⁶ The planters had almost completely reversed the great labor victory of 1916.

Despite defeating the Union, the refusal of the planters to raise wages created a labor shortage on the estates.²⁷ More workers left the plantations, preferring to risk a livelihood in the towns. Even those who remained in the estate villages often worked only the four day minimum required by contract to avoid paying rent. Instead, they devoted their free time to tending their provision grounds, either for their own consumption or for sale.

Furthermore, Americanization of the islands curtailed the ability of the planters to import laborers from the eastern Caribbean, where wages were lower than on St. Croix. Under the Danes, the St. Croix Colonial Council had established an Immigration fund for this purpose, but fearing increased social welfare costs, the Navy governors discouraged any immigration schemes. Then in 1925, Governor Philip Williams, on his own authority, began enforcing the Immigration Act passed by Congress in 1924, making the importation of alien laborers almost impossible.²⁸

²⁶ NA RG 55/2, File 59 Agreement for the 1926 Crop and Fall, Jan. 20, 1926; Avis, Dec. 24, 1930.

²⁷ NA RG 51/13.1, File 19.V7 Conditions in the Virgin Islands (Part I): Labor, Mar. 10, 1930.

²⁸ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, p. 226; Evans, p. 66; Dookhan, "Labour Relations in St. Croix," p. 100.

Although more concerned with conforming with U.S. law than interfering with the labor supply, the decision to enforce the 1924 Immigration Act placed the Navy governors at odds with the planters. Knowing that it would be useless to challenge Governor Williams, the planters pleaded with his successor, Captain Martin Trench, to modify the immigration restrictions. In October 1926, Folmer Andersen introduced a resolution in the Colonial Council, asking the President of the United States to allow the importation of alien laborers into St. Croix. Arguing that Congress never officially extended the Immigration Act to the Virgin Islands, the resolution asked the President to authorize the Governor of the V.I. to use his own discretion in allowing aliens to enter the colony. By attempting to circumvent the logic Americanization, Andersen hoped to gain the support of the Governor. But while the resolution easily passed in the Council, Captain Trench refused to support it on the grounds that the importation of workers from the British Colonies would lead to labor trouble, higher unemployment, and greater Federal expenditures on poor relief.²⁹

By citing possible labor trouble as a reason for opposing the resolution of the Colonial Council, the Governor recognized that Crucians would resent the importation of laborers from islands where first class wages

²⁹ Dookhan, "Labor Relations in St. Croix," pp. 100-101; Avis, Nov. 1-6, Dec. 11, 1926, and Jan. 26, 1927.

averaged forty cents daily.³⁰ However, neither the Governor nor the planters had much to fear from the leadership of the St. Croix Labor Union. In November 1926, Alfred Francis, the new President of the Labor Union, joined some three dozen planters in a petition to Governor Trench requesting the importation of alien laborers.³¹ Yet only a month earlier, Folmer Andersen had noted that the Labor Union favored the continuation of immigration restrictions. More importantly, D. Hamilton Jackson strongly attacked the plan to import laborers from the British islands. Both the Governor and the planters knew that, despite his lack of official standing in the Union, Jackson retained his popularity with the laboring class.³² Possibly, with mortgages to pay on its estates, Francis felt the Union would improve its financial condition by cooperating with the planters. Certainly, the importation of workers could increase Union membership and dues. In any case, the position of the Union on alien labor demonstrated that it could only play the margins in the struggle between capital and labor.

³⁰ W. Arthur Lewis, Labour in the West Indies: The Birth of a Workers' Movement (London: New Beacon Books, 1977. Originally published in 1938), p. 15; NA RG 55/27, Annual Report of the Governor, 1927; RG 55/2, File 59 American Consul in Barbados to Government Secretary, July 5, 1921.

³¹ NA RG 55/2, File 65 Planters of St. Croix to Governor, Nov. 26, 1926.

³² NA RG 55/2, File 65 Dispatching Secretary to Governor, Oct. 20, 1926; Avis, Nov. 6, 1926.

Unable to get laborers from the eastern Caribbean, the planters turned to Puerto Rico. Since Puerto Ricans were already U.S. citizens, the 1924 Immigration Act did not exclude them from migrating to St. Croix. Also, the Navy governors encouraged Puerto Rican immigration, believing Puerto Ricans more industrious than Crucians, and that any increased social welfare costs would at least be spent on U.S. citizens. Between April 1927 and June 1928, the planters enticed some 800 Puerto Ricans, mostly from the depressed island of Vieques, off that colony's eastern coast, to move to St. Croix.³³

The planters soon discovered that the importation of Puerto Rican workers would not solve their wage problems. Accustomed to receiving higher wages than paid in St. Croix, even unemployed Puerto Ricans refused to work for sixty cents a day.³⁴ The importation of Puerto Rican laborers exerted an upward pressure wages, enabling the St. Croix Labor Union to gain a pay increase for its members. From 1927 to 1928, first class day wages rose from sixty to

³³ Dookhan, "Labour Relations in St. Croix," pp. 101-109; Boyer, "The Navy and Labour in St. Croix," p. 97; Clarence Senior, The Puerto Rican Migrant in St. Croix (San Juan: University of Puerto Rico Social Science Center, 1947), pp. 1-2 & 18-21.

³⁴ NA RG 55/3, File 41 Municipal Committee Meeting, Nov. 8, 1929, enclosed in Minutes of the Colonial Council of St. Croix, Oct. 18, 1929; Avis, Aug. 18, 1921; Bulletin, Dec. 2, 1921. These sources suggest that wages in Puerto Rico ranged from ten to forty cents a day higher than those in St. Croix.

eighty cents during the harvest, and from forty to sixty cents in the off season, with corresponding increases for other classes of labor and for task work. This increase pleased Crucian workers, and D. Hamilton Jackson urged the continued importation of Puerto Ricans, but after 1928, the planters lost interest in the scheme. Disgruntled by the low wages, some Puerto Ricans returned home; by 1930, only 700 remained on St. Croix. This number did not even offset the number of Crucian emigrants who left their home in search of a better life elsewhere. Between 1917 and 1930, the population of St. Croix fell from 14,900 to 11,400.³⁵

Unwilling to pay higher wages, Crucian planters could not stop the slow decline of the island's sugar industry. After the profits of the war years, many planters hesitated to contend with falling prices, Prohibition, and several years of drought. In 1916 and 1920, sugar exports totaled 15,000 and 12,000 tons, surpassing 10,000 tons for the first time since 1907. But except for 1925, when a hurricane in the previous year pushed production to 10,653 tons, sugar exports remained below 7,000 tons for the rest of the decade. As their sugar profits dwindled, many planters turned to raising cattle, for which there was a ready market

³⁵ Dookhan, "Labour Relations in St. Croix," pp. 100-101; Fifteenth Census ... 1930 Outlying Territories and Possessions, pp. 259 & 271; NA RG 55/27, Annual Report of the Governor, 1928; RG 55/3, File 41 Meeting of the St. Croix Colonial Council, Nov. 12, 1927; Avis, Nov. 18, 1927.

in Puerto Rico.³⁶ Though cattle raising was not very profitable, ranches needed few laborers, and they allowed landowners to hold onto their property to await the much expected American investors.

In these adverse economic conditions, the smaller planters abandoned control of the sugar industry to the sugar companies. In particular, the Danish-owned West Indian Sugar Company, with the island's most modern factory on Bethlehem estate, achieved near total dominance of the sugar industry. At the time of the Transfer, Bethlehem already owned 5,000 of the 12,600 acres planted in cane, and produced 70 per cent of the island's sugar. Whereas total cane acreage on St. Croix fell to 9,200 during the first decade of American rule, Bethlehem managed to maintain its cane production. Then in 1928, the Danish company further increased its share of the sugar industry by purchasing the St. Croix Sugar Company, with the Central factory and 750 acres of cane land. Only the La Grange Sugar Factory, with 450 acres planted in cane, continued under local ownership.³⁷

³⁶ Smith, p. 3; NA RG 55/27, Annual Reports of the Governor, 1920-1930; RG 55/2, File 84 St. Croix Chamber of Commerce to President, Dec. 10, 1924; RG 55/3, File 48 Report by the Governor, May 1, 1928.

³⁷ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, pp. 235-236; NA RG 55/27 Annual Reports of the Governor, 1927-28; RG 55/2, File 109 Dispatching Secretary to Governor, July 17, 1926; RG 55/3, File 48 Report by the Governor, May 1, 1928, and File 58 Sugar Factories, Nov. 26, 1927; Avis, Feb. 6, 11, and 25, 1928.

Even as they lost control of the sugar industry, most independent planters refused to give up their lands. Knowing that land ownership meant political power, the planters resisted schemes for land reform. With the options of either raising cattle or selling cane to the sugar factories, they could prevent estate laborers from gaining control of very much land. Using its meager resources, the St. Croix Labor Union developed a few homesteads, but this affected few workers. As Robert Skeoch, a prominent planter who turned to cattle ranching in the 1920s, put it: "true it is hard to live on sixty cents a day, but are we to become all socialistic as Russia?"³⁸ More than anything else, this comment revealed the rigidity of the planter mentality, which preferred to see workers starve rather than consider alternative forms of social development.

But Skeoch would have been more accurate to compare St. Croix to the United States. Unable to challenge directly the economic power of the planters, labor leaders used the rhetoric of Americanization to attack the political rules that gave large landowners control of the local government. After the 1921 strike, the St. Croix Labor Union lost its former importance in the labor movement, but both D. Hamilton Jackson and Ralph de Chabert garnered enough votes to gain seats in the Colonial Council. Although the

³⁸ NA RG 55/3, File 41 Meeting of the St. Croix Colonial Council, Nov. 12, 1927. See Armstrong, pp. 119-120 & 133 for Skeoch's reasons for abandoning sugar cane.

restrictive franchise requirements kept the Council safely in planter hands, Jackson and de Chabert used the political platform to push for American citizenship and universal suffrage. The struggle for workers' rights shifted from the economic to the political arena.

Labor struggles on St. Thomas shared many similarities with those on St. Croix. Like its Crucian counterpart, the St. Thomas Labor Union failed to repeat its victory of 1916, and many workers deserted the Union's ranks to join the more radical local affiliate of the American Federation of Labor. The labor movement also confronted the problem of alien workers, but this proved even more divisive than on St. Croix, since many St. Thomians had relatives in the nearby British Virgin Islands. Finally, as labor leaders realized that they could not effectively challenge the economic power of the merchants and shipping companies, they turned to politics.

With the Transfer to the United States, the West Indian Company became the largest employer on St. Thomas. American entry into the World War forced the Hamburg-American Line to suspend its operations, and its docks became the property of the United States Shipping Board and the small, British-owned St. Thomas Coaling Company.³⁹ These two companies

³⁹ Lightbourn's Annual and Commercial Directory (1919), pp. 52-54; NA RG 55/2, File 59 Pettigrew to Mallette, June 23, 1921, and File 63 St. Croix Sugar Factory to Dispatching

offered an alternative source of employment to some workers, but the relationship between the Labor Union and WICO largely determined wages and working conditions along the harbor.

Because the St. Thomas Labor Union had gained wage increases for the dockworkers during the temporary debilitation of the shipping companies in the wake of the October 1916 hurricane, the Union found itself in a weakened position once the shipping companies had repaired their broken cranes and conveyors. As the electric machinery resumed operation, Union President George Moorehead could only plead for the protection of the jobs of the 400 women who depended on carrying coal for their livelihood. In 1925, after WICO completed the construction of its new ship tending facilities, the situation became even worse for the Union. Along with building new wharves and deepening the harbor, the Company built new, large electric conveyors and pumps that greatly increased its capacity for supplying coal, oil, and water. Under these circumstances, the Union could hardly demand more money for the coal carriers, and wages remained at two cents a basket for the entire decade.⁴⁰

Secretary, July 30, 1919, and Williams to Governor of Panama Canal Zone, May 16, 1924; Bulletin, June 7, 12, & 18, 1919.

⁴⁰ Rufus S. Tucker, Economic Conditions in the Virgin Islands. U.S. Senate, 69th Congress 1st Session, Document #41 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1926), p. 9; NA RG 51/13.1, File 19.V7 Conditions in the Virgin Islands (Part

The other important segment of the dockworkers, the stevedores, also made slight progress in obtaining wage increases. The 1916 agreement increased their basic wage from ten to twenty cents an hour, but rising wartime food prices spurred these men to demand even higher pay.⁴¹ In 1920, the Union signed agreements with WICO and the smaller shipping companies that brought wages to twenty-two cents an hour. Yet when the end of the postwar sugar boom reversed food prices, the shipping companies demanded that stevedores cut their hourly wage to nineteen cents with time and a half, instead of double pay, for overtime. From November 1921, when this agreement took effect, until the end of the decade, wages remained at this level.⁴²

As indicated by the 1921 agreement, the St. Thomas Labor Union decided to collaborate with the shipping companies in the interest of job preservation. In return for labor peace, the shipping companies attempted to meet the wage demands of the Union. The companies also agreed to

I): Labor, Mar. 10, 1930; RG 55/3, File 63 WICO to U.S. Legation, Buenos Aires, Dec. 20, 1923, and WICO brochure, 1925.

⁴¹ Mail Notes, Nov. 28 and Dec. 15, 1916; Tidende, Dec. 6, 1916; Bulletin, Nov. 22 & 24, 1916, May 14, 1917, Oct. 2, 1919, and Jan. 5, 1920.

⁴² Tucker, pp. 8-9; NA RG 55/2, File 59 Acting Government Secretary to Governor, Mar. 5, 1924, File 63 Construction Engineer Ernest Durr to Commandant U.S. Naval Station (V.I.), Oct. 30, 1920, and Government Secretary to Marine Superintendent, Panama Canal, Jan. 7, 1924; Bulletin, Nov. 14, 1921.

hire only Union members, and George Moorehead promised to provide the required number of laborers.⁴³

The friendly relationship between the shipping companies and the Labor Union gave George Moorehead enormous power over the dockworkers. On the West Indian Company dock, the Labor Union actually paid the coal carriers and then was reimbursed by WICO. Across the harbor, the U.S. Shipping Board employed Moorehead as a foreman, which gave him additional control over those workers.⁴⁴ Moorehead further reinforced his power by carefully grooming his image as a figure of authority. The annual Labor Day festivities that began with U.S. rule especially became an event to demonstrate the importance of Moorehead and the Labor Union to the community.⁴⁵ Decades later, an elderly St. Thomian described the eccentric character of the labor leader:

Moorehead, as I remember him, was a showy actor. He could shift his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other like a comedian. In the public parades he looked like a general of some army. His khaki uniform coat, decorated with a red, white, and blue sash, was balanced by black boots

⁴³ NA RG 51/13.1, File 19.V7 Conditions in the Virgin Islands (Part I): Labor, Mar. 30, 1930; NA RG 55/2, File 59 American V.I. Federation of Labor to Governor, April 5, 1920, Frances to Government Secretary, Jan. 19, 1923, and File 63 Construction Engineer Ernest Durr to Commandant U.S. Naval Station (V.I.), Oct. 30, 1920; Tidende, Dec. 16, 1916.

⁴⁴ NA RG 55/13.1, File 19.V7 Conditions in the Virgin Islands (Part I): Labor, Mar. 30, 1930; NA RG 55/2, File 59 Francis to Government Secretary, Jan. 19, 1923, and File 63 Construction Engineer Ernest Durr to Commandant U.S. Naval Station (V.I.), Oct. 20, 1920.

⁴⁵ See especially the Bulletin, Sep. 3 & 6, 1921.

and a black cap with a plume. The prancing of his chestnut gelding made him spectacular as the grand marshal ahead of the parade⁴⁶

In everything he did, Moorehead sought to remind workers that it was his Labor Union that was responsible for the great victory of 1916.

However, some workers rejected the paternalistic leadership of George Moorehead. In September 1919, Rotschild Francis, a shoemaker, founded the American Virgin Islands Federation of Labor, with the intention of fighting more vigorously for the political, as well as economic, rights of workers.⁴⁷ Earlier in the same year, the already popular Francis had emphasized his commitment to political reform by polling enough votes to obtain a seat on the Colonial Council.⁴⁸ In the Council, Francis eloquently championed such pro-worker issues as higher wages, fairer taxation, universal suffrage, and U.S. citizenship.

With his ability to speak forcibly and clearly about the issues affecting workers, Francis gained both the backing of the National American Federation of Labor and the support of a large number of laborers. As President of the AVIFL, Francis blasted the conservatism of the St. Thomas Labor Union:

⁴⁶ Geraldo Guirty, Harlem's Danish-American West Indians 1899-1964 (New York: Vantage Press, 1989), p. 3.

⁴⁷ Bulletin, Sep. 17, 1919.

⁴⁸ NA RG 55/2, File 65 Election Results, Charlotte Amalie, Apr. 24, 1919.

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 to society it follows that society should enact laws to give him a decent livelihood.⁴⁹

From his seat on the Colonial Council, Francis also expressed a keen understanding of the meaning of the transfer to the United States.

It gets one mad always to hear some people saying that the U.S. bought these islands for \$25,000,000 as if that concerns us. We had no voice in the price and besides the United States did not buy the islands because they love us (a bunch of rude negroes, etc.). . . . When some people speak of Americanization it is all well and good as long as they mean for us to become a straightforward and courageous people, who are not scared to express our opinions, . . . All court fees, registration fees, medical fees etc., should be cheap; we should have as few officials as possible, everything should be done to further trade, . . . There is another important thing, when all other expenses are cut down, labor can get a better pay.⁵⁰

Although Francis espoused more radical views than many labor leaders in the United States, the American Federation of Labor recognized his leadership abilities. In March 1920, the AVIFL became a regional member of the national organization, giving Francis the resources to launch a

⁴⁹ NA RG 55/2, File 64 Working People's Committee handbill, 1921.

⁵⁰ Bulletin, June 19, 1920.

campaign that soon increased AVIFL membership to some one thousand workers.⁵¹

With great difficulty, the AVIFL carved out a place for itself on the docks. In 1920, the Federation organized a boycott of the steamships served by the commission merchant Emile Berne, forcing him to hire Federation members. In response, Moorehead accused the Federation of denying Labor Union members access to Berne's ships and fomenting discontent at the U.S. Shipping Board.⁵² Francis had hoped that affiliation with the American Federation of Labor would force the Naval administration to recognize the legitimacy of his union, but Navy officers quickly branded him as a radical who fostered 'race-hatred.' The Navy governors not only ignored the AVIFL, but also delighted in the inability of the Federation to surpass the Labor Union as the major union on the island.⁵³ By 1925, while Francis claimed to

⁵¹ NA RG 55/2, File 59 AVIFL to Governor, Mar. 19, 1920, and File 108 Resolution by Mass Meeting in St. Thomas, Nov. 4, 1925.

⁵² NA RG 55/2, File 59 AVIFL to Governor, Apr. 5, 1920, Moorehead to Chairman of Harbor Board, July 6, 1920, and File 63 Construction Engineer Ernest Durr to Commandant U.S. Naval Station, (V.I.), Oct. 30, 1920.

⁵³ NA RG 55/2, File 59 Francis to Government Secretary, Jan. 19, 1923; RG 80/19, File 28759-684 Memorandum by Governor attached to Petition to the President from Inhabitants of St. Thomas and St. John, Sep. 23, 1923, File 28759-788 Governor to Secretary of the Navy, June 28, 1924, and File 28759-838 Annual Report of the Governor, 1925.

represent 1,500 workers, the Labor Union boasted a membership of 4,000 people.⁵⁴

Nothing separated the two unions more than the problem of alien labor. Close economic and family ties bound St. Thomas to the nearby British Virgin Islands, and people travelled often between the two areas.⁵⁵ Even after the implementation of the 1924 Immigration Act, the flow continued as it was impossible to monitor all the people moving over the short distances between the islands. Attracted by higher wages, many British Virgin Islanders sought work on the St. Thomas docks, where they were welcomed by the St. Thomas Labor Union. In contrast, Francis denounced the British Virgin Islanders for taking jobs from native St. Thomians, and accused the Labor Union of boosting its membership with "cheap, ignorant labor."⁵⁶ Certainly, Francis rightly criticized Moorehead for exploiting alien laborers in the interest of filling Union coffers and promoting a friendly relationship with the shipping companies, but Francis wrecked any chance for a strong, radical labor movement by turning his back on a

⁵⁴ NA RG 55/2, File 108 Resolution by Mass Meeting in St. Thomas, Nov. 4, 1925.

⁵⁵ In 1926, the Naval government figured that 21% of St. Thomas residents were born in the B.V.I. See NA RG 55/27, Annual Report of the Governor, 1926.

⁵⁶ NA RG 55/2, File 59 Francis, "Class War in the Virgin Islands" excerpt from The New Day: A Socialist Weekly, Mar. 12, 1921.

substantial number of workers. Unable to reconcile the push for 'American rights' with the shared family and cultural ties of U.S. and British Virgin Islanders, the squabble between the two unions produced a weak and tragic labor movement. As St. Thomas became more Americanized, a growing split would develop between the workers born in the different islands.

In part, divergent views of the two unions on alien labor stemmed from class differences. While both unions were open to workers of various occupations, the Federation tended to attract artisans, while most unskilled dockworkers remained loyal to the Labor Union.⁵⁷ Along with British Virgin Islanders, the coal carriers especially felt grateful to Moorehead for his successful efforts in persuading WICO to set aside a certain amount of coal to be loaded by hand. Fearing unemployment, members of the Labor Union preferred to cooperate with the powerful shipping companies and merchants. On the other hand, many artisans hoped that the Federation's emphasis on political reform would give middle class St. Thomians control of the Colonial Council. Already, the income of some artisans gave them the right to vote, and Francis had counted on their support to win election to the Council. Federation members believed that conditions for working people would not change as long as the merchants controlled the Colonial Council.

⁵⁷ Guirty, p. 3.

Indeed, Francis' election had pushed the struggle for workers' rights into the Colonial Council. Recognizing that Francis threatened his position as premier labor leader, Moorehead entered the next Council election. Testifying to his support in the merchant community, Moorehead received the most votes in the 1922 contest. In contrast, Francis was reelected by the same narrow margin he had obtained two years earlier.⁵⁸ Despite their differences, both men sometimes cooperated to promote such pro-worker legislation as universal suffrage.⁵⁹ Yet, Moorehead gave only lukewarm support to the efforts to obtain U.S. citizenship, and Francis accused Moorehead of needing the support of alien voters to keep his Council seat.⁶⁰

The two men also split on the question of Naval rule. Moorehead defended the Navy as a source of employment and income for the island, while Francis argued that the Navy governors blocked political reform.⁶¹ As St. Thomians

⁵⁸ NA RG 55/2, File 65 Chairman of the Electoral Board to Governor, Sept. 25, 1922. The winners of the election for Town District of St. Thomas: G.A. Moorehead, 200 votes; A. Burnett, 194 votes; L. Stakemann, 174 votes; J.E. Kuntz, 161 votes; C.G. Thiele, 152 votes; C. Corneiro, 148 votes; J. deJongh, 140 votes; R. Francis, 100 votes.

⁵⁹ NA RG 55/2, File 65 Draft Ordinances to Extend Franchise, May 31, 1922, Sep. 11, 1924, Feb. 5, 1925 and Apr. 7, 1927.

⁶⁰ NA RG 80/19, File 28759-648:55 Resolution of the St. Thomas-St. John Colonial Council, Apr. 4, 1924; Bulletin, Sep. 14-23, 1926.

⁶¹ NA RG 55/2, File 65 Meeting of the St. Thomas-St. John Colonial Council, May 28, 1926; Bulletin, May 29, 1926.

debated the reasons for the delays in obtaining U.S. citizenship, universal suffrage, and economic development, Francis gained popular support. Moreover, Francis soon discovered that political reformers on St. Croix also disliked the Navy. Working together, political reformers on both islands made the inadequacy of Naval rule the central political issue of the 1920s.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE NAVY

The reluctance of the Navy to address political problems slowly frayed the initial good feelings most Virgin Islanders felt toward the advent of U.S. rule. Once Virgin Islanders realized that their new governors had no intention of curbing the power of the planters and merchants, they began to criticize the Navy regime. Then, the repressive methods used by the Navy officials to silence this criticism sparked demands for the removal of the Navy government. By the end of the 1920s mass protests in favor of a civilian government forced policy makers in Washington, D.C. to realize that the Navy could not solve the pressing political and economic problems of the small colony.

Led by Rothschild Francis and David Hamilton Jackson, these protests invoked the principles of American democracy. On St. Thomas, Rothschild Francis pushed for citizenship Navy rule for the same reasons that the encouraged workers to reject cooperation between the St. Thomas Labor Union and the shipping companies. He warned that both the Navy officials and the merchants promoted paternalistic views that kept workers ignorant of their rights and their power. On St. Croix, D. Hamilton Jackson blamed the racism of the Navy for the lack of progress in achieving political reform.

Although Jackson remained interested in the fortunes of the St. Croix Labor Union, he increasingly focused his attention on prodding the native black middle class into political activism.

The Navy officials branded Francis, Jackson, and their supporters as 'radicals.' Using the language of the Red Scare, then prevalent in the United States, the Navy officials accused the radicals of misleading the masses, stirring up race hatred, and promoting socialism.¹ Ridiculing the demands for political reform, the Navy claimed that a government led by radicals would produce the same kind of chaos that forced the United States to intervene in Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Actually, the Navy officials only used the radical label to cover their racist views. In order not to alienate the many black islanders who sought to cooperate with the Navy, the governors refrained from publicly airing their true opinions of the radicals, but their private reports reveal their feelings. In a February 1922 letter to the Secretary of the Navy, Governor Sumner Kittelle clearly expressed the views of the local Navy administration:

¹ Lewis, p. 53; John W. Walters, "A Political History of the United States Virgin Islands, 1917 to 1967" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1979), pp. 58-61 & 83-100; NA RG 55/2, File 89 Governor to the Secretary of the Navy, Feb. 3, 1919; RG 80/19, File 28759-518:17 Governor to the Secretary of the Navy, Feb. 23, 1923 and enclosures, and File 28759-684 Memorandum by Governor attached to Petition from Inhabitants of St. Thomas and St. John to the President, Sep. 23, 1923.

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 schools. 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.²

These remarks revealed a fear of the black masses that twisted the radical demand for political equality into the stirring of race hatred toward whites. From this viewpoint, the survival of a civilized society depended on the denial of equality to the black population.

Despite their cautious public comments, the Navy officials could not hide their racism. The openly racist policies of the new rulers differed so sharply from those of the last Danish governors that they shocked Virgin Islanders. For instance, the Navy governors seldom invited important black islanders to business or social gatherings at Government House, and appointed none to major government positions. Moreover, Navy policies apparently encouraged white-owned social clubs, hotels, and restaurants to deny entry to black persons. On the streets, the presence of sailors and marines not only made islanders aware of the complete segregation existing in the U.S. military, but also

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

led to fights between the servicemen and the local populace.³

Yet, the Navy's racism became a powerful weapon for the radicals. When attacked by government officials as incompetent opportunists, the radicals claimed that the Navy insulted the rights and dignity of black Virgin Islanders. Navy criticism of such a prominent figure as D. Hamilton Jackson may have pleased white planters, but it turned public opinion against the government. Through public lectures and the few newspapers to which they had access, the radicals waged a propaganda battle that overwhelmed the Navy administrators. As aptly described by one historian:

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 struggles that predated the period of American rule⁴

Even the St. Croix Avis, the newspaper of the business establishment, recognized the success of the radicals when it admitted that Jackson's paper, The Herald, which constantly emphasized black pride and consciousness, had nearly twice as many subscribers as the older paper.⁵

³ Lewis, The Virgin Islands, pp. 51 & 54; Guirty, pp. 27-28; Jarvis, Brief History, pp. 136 & 141-142; Bulletin, May 15, 1917.

⁴ Lewis, The Virgin Islands, p. 52.

⁵ Walters, p. 86 and Avis, Oct. 16, 1918.

But the language of racial conflict could not conceal that the demand for political reform was essentially a class struggle. The lines of conflict were drawn between the white planters and the black field laborers, and between the white merchant and the black workers. Along these lines stood the middle class of each island, with enough property and income to vote, but not enough to control the political system. On one hand, the elite sought their loyalty by arguing that Navy rule was necessary for the social stability and economic vitality of the islands. On the other, the radicals claimed that the present system prohibited economic development that would benefit the black majority and prevented talented Virgin Islanders from having a voice in their own affairs. That the radicals had expected the new American rulers to help them in the struggle against the elite made the fight against the Navy especially bitter.

In short, the radicals felt betrayed by the United States. The Navy officials often charged the radicals with being 'un-American,' but the radicals claimed they wanted a true Americanization of the islands. As Rothschild Francis stated: "We in the Virgin Islands believe implicitly in America; we are Americans geographically, we are Americans in customs and everything."⁶ Unlike the Navy, the radicals

⁶ U.S. Senate, 68th Congress, 1st Session. Hearings before the Committee on Territories and Insular Possessions (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1924), Mar. 15,

felt that Americanization should extend beyond the improvement of health services and infrastructure. They had hoped for a government that would bring to the colony the general principles of American democracy, especially universal suffrage.

This faith in American democracy explained why those who cried out against the Navy never rejected U.S. rule. Rather, the critics of Navy rule emphasized a vision of America different than that presented by the admirals and captains sent to oversee the islands. At the time of the transfer negotiations, D. Hamilton Jackson remarked: "If the Danish government won't help [us], the ten million negroes in America will."⁷ More than anything else, this statement recognized the progress made by black people in the United States, and expressed a desire to join that larger movement. For similar reasons, Rothschild Francis affiliated his local labor union with the American Federation of Labor. Indeed, given the support that the Socialist Party enjoyed at that moment in the United States, the radicals saw no necessary contradiction between socialist ideals and Americanization.

This same faith in America persuaded the radicals to take the fight against the Navy to the United States. Radical leaders not only wrote letters and articles for

1924.

⁷ Bulletin, Jan. 26, 1916.

stateside newspapers and magazines, but they also travelled to Washington, D.C. and New York City to enlist the aid of sympathetic Congressmen and the large Virgin Island population living in Harlem. As the plight of the islands became known on the mainland, the radicals also received considerable support from the American Civil Liberties Union, which guided legislation through Congress. In time, this unrelenting campaign put the Navy on the defensive, and forced Congress to reconsider the act "to provide a temporary government" for the Virgin Islands.

Earlier than anyone else, Rothschild Francis understood both the ramifications of Navy rule, and the need for action on the national level. From the day they arrived on St. Thomas, the U.S. marines began harassing people, and during the Christmas holidays of 1918, the resulting bad feelings culminated in a two day riot that seriously injured three natives.⁸ Francis responded by writing letters to newspapers in New York City, blaming the riot on "race hatred pure and simple"⁹ Francis continued his criticism of the Navy administrators until Governor Oliver reported to the Secretary of the Navy that the shoemaker "was fined in

⁸ Jarvis, Brief History, pp. 141-142; NA RG 55/2, File 64 Police Report, Dec. 27, 1918, and File 89 Governor to Secretary of the Navy, Feb. 3, 1919.

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

the police court for writing libelous remarks on a blackboard and exposing same outside his shop."¹⁰

This punishment persuaded Francis to strengthen his efforts against Navy rule. In 1919, the same year he gained election to the Colonial Council and founded the American Virgin Islands Federation of Labor, Francis helped organize a "Monster Mass Meeting" which elected him to carry a petition to Congress. Demanding that "our island, St. Thomas, be Americanized as quickly as possible," the petition called for a Bill of Rights, universal adult suffrage, worker compensation laws, regulation of wages, the establishment of homesteads, an independent judiciary, a public high school, more efficient postal service, and preference for Virgin Islanders in government jobs.¹¹ Although the petition did not directly attack Navy rule, it clearly implied that the administration was not fulfilling Virgin Islander expectations of Americanization.

Congress responded to this petition by sending the Kenyon commission (see Chapter 2) to investigate conditions in the Caribbean territory.¹² From February 5-9, 1920, this joint commission, consisting of three senators and three congressmen, visited St. Thomas and St. Croix, and met with

¹⁰ NA RG 55/2, File 89 Governor to Secretary of the Navy, Feb. 3, 1919.

¹¹ Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 12; NA RG 55/2, File 64 Mandate from Monster Mass Meeting," July 26, 1919.

¹² Evans, pp. 218-220; Jarvis, Brief History, p. 140.

Navy officials, Council members, and other prominent citizens. The commissioners sympathized with the complaints that Washington had neglected the islands, but sided with conservative opinion that political reform should be undertaken cautiously. The visiting politicians seemed particularly affected by the testimony of the planters, who claimed that the Crucian working class might threaten the stability of the island. The commissioners even went so far as to warn the laborers:

against listening to any Bolshevik propaganda, which advised them to try and run the planters out of the island, so the land would belong to them, as it never would for that was a false doctrine that would never be allowed to take place.¹³

Not surprisingly, this view of the working class influenced the commission's recommendations on political reform. In their report to Congress, Senator Kenyon and his colleagues found that most Virgin Islanders, and especially the St. Thomas merchants, favored the retention of the Navy administration.

While the Kenyon commission sided with the Navy, Francis' success in drawing Congressional attention to the colony stimulated Virgin Islanders residing in the United States to take a more active role in shaping policies toward their homeland. Beginning in the latter part of the nineteenth century, thousands of Virgin Islanders had settled in the Harlem ghettos of New York City, and the

¹³ Avis, Feb. 25, 1920.

Transfer had placed them in a good position to lobby for the islands.¹⁴ In the fall of 1919, as word spread of the impending Congressional investigation, several Harlem residents organized the Virgin Islands Protective League, and prepared to send their own delegation to the colony. In January 1920, two delegates of the League, Ashley Totten and Elizabeth Hendrickson, arrived in the islands ahead of the joint commission. Unfortunately for the radical cause, the two delegates, who remained in the islands to testify before the Congressmen, reported no substantial opposition to Navy rule. Moreover, Ashley Totten, who had achieved prominence in the Harlem community as one of the founders of the national Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, angered radicals by accusing D. Hamilton Jackson of stirring up race hatred. In response, Jackson and his supporters charged Totten with confusing race consciousness with race hatred, and attacked him for fraternizing with rich islanders. Totten defended himself by saying that Virgin Islanders should strive to make a good impression on the joint commission, but his remarks offended even his co-delegate, Elizabeth Hendrickson. On their return to New York City, the quarrelling between the two eventually wrecked the Virgin Islands Protective League.¹⁵

¹⁴ Guirty, Chapter One; Lewis, Virgin Islands, p. 66.

¹⁵ Guirty, pp. 22-23; Avis, Jan. 21, 26, 27, 28, and Sep. 28, 1920.

In July 1920, Rothschild Francis again attempted to interest mainland Americans in the Virgin Islands. Authorized by his supporters to raise money to buy a printing press,¹⁶ Francis traveled to New York City to meet with the leaders of the National Urban League, and then wrote an article for the New York Call which caught the attention of Roger Baldwin, director of the American Civil Liberties Union. The problems of the small colony so impressed Baldwin that he contacted Francis to offer the services of the ACLU in support of political reform.¹⁷ Francis accepted the invitation, and together the two men raised enough money to enable the St. Thomian to return home with his printing press. In May 1921, Francis began publishing The Emancipator, which joined D. Hamilton Jackson's Herald in incessantly attacking Navy rule.¹⁸

Besides helping Francis to start his newspaper, the ACLU worked to make political reform in the Virgin Islands a national issue. Baldwin wrote letters to newspapers, contacted appropriate government officials, and guided

¹⁶ Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 12

¹⁷ Isaac Dookhan, "The American Civil Liberties Union in the U.S. Virgin Islands," Revista Interamericana, 12:3 (Fall 1982) details the work done by the ACLU for the Virgin Islands. Also, Lewis, Virgin Islands, p. 53, notes "... that the files of the American Civil Liberties Union on civil liberties violations in the Virgin Islands rapidly became among the largest in its collection."

¹⁸ Dookhan, "The American Civil Liberties Union," pp. 425-426; Walters, pp. 97-98.

Virgin Islanders through the national bureaucracy. Within a short time, the ACLU became the national "center-post around which the activities of Virgin Islanders . . . hinged and turned."¹⁹ Conservative islanders tried to discredit the ACLU as 'un-American,'²⁰ but its involvement moved the question of political reform from the radical fringe to center stage.

Its activities brought the ACLU in close contact with the growing political activities of Virgin Islanders in Harlem. The floundering steps of the Virgin Islands Protective League had marked only the beginning of an increased political consciousness created by the transition from relatively isolated islands to the difficulties of big city life and the ferment of the Harlem Renaissance. The denial of citizenship especially concerned them, since it restricted their ability to obtain jobs, participate in local politics, and even to travel to and from the Virgin Islands.²¹ The interest of the ACLU in the Virgin Islands now offered the Harlem community access to national policy makers, and Roger Baldwin became an honored guest at Harlem meetings.

¹⁹ Dookhan, "The American Civil Liberties Union," p. 425.

²⁰ Bulletin, Feb. 24, 1923.

²¹ Dookhan, "The American Civil Liberties Union," pp. 434-435.

At these meetings, Baldwin developed a friendship with Casper Holstein. Born in St. Croix, Holstein had come as a young boy to New York, where he learned to survive in the rough underworld of the large city. Holstein not only survived, but eventually prospered as a 'numbers' banker. But instead of keeping his riches to himself, he gave generously to community projects and less fortunate islanders.²² In 1922, he took charge of the political movement by founding the Virgin Islands Congressional Council. Two years later, he persuaded the Virgin Islands Protective League, the Virgin Islands Committee of the ACLU, and several smaller organizations, to join his V.I.C.C. in forming the Associated Virgin Islands Societies of New York. Certainly, Holstein's money gained him his positions of leadership; even the ACLU depended on his contributions to continue its Virgin Islands work.²³ At the same time, no one doubted his commitment to improving life for his fellow Virgin Islanders, and his relationship with the ACLU gave him the respectability that would have otherwise been denied a Harlem gambler.

²² Francis A.J. Ianni, Black Mafia: Ethnic Succession in Organized Crime (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974), pp. 110-111; Guirty, pp. 42-46; Hazel May McFerson, "The Impact of a Changed Racial Tradition: Race, Politics and Society in the U.S. Virgin Islands, 1917-1975," (Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1976), pp. 86-87.

²³ Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 15-17.

Along with Baldwin, Holstein became a nationally recognized expert on the Virgin Islands. In 1923, when protests against Prohibition in the islands had reached their peak, the Department of Labor contacted Holstein to ask his opinion on conditions there. In response to a letter from the Department's Commissioner of Conciliation, Holstein listed a series of demands ranging from the lifting of Prohibition, to the institution of universal suffrage. Holstein reinforced his demands by asking Rothschild Francis to write to the Secretary of Labor. Although Secretary James Davis only forwarded the letter to the Secretary of the Navy, who dismissed its allegations, the Department of Labor decided to send a commission to the islands.²⁴

Because the problems of the Virgin Islands were being publicized largely in the black-owned press, Secretary Davis determined that black Americans should be brought into the official discussions. In January 1924, he arranged for a commission of five prominent black Republicans to visit the colony for two weeks. Headed by George Woodson, an Iowa lawyer, the commission blamed the islands' problems on a weak economy and the natives' loose morals. The findings disappointed the radicals, who had hoped for a strong denunciation of the Navy regime. Although the commissioners believed that citizenship should be granted the islanders,

²⁴ Evans, pp. 221-223; Guirty, pp. 56-59; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 24n.

they made only vague references to political reform.²⁵ Overall, their views closely resembled the condescending attitudes of the Navy officials:

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. Civic rights give small comforts to women and children poorly housed and underfed. Unemployment, inadequate wages, and even hunger appear on every hand. . . . 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 age-old customs, to adopt a higher conception of life and its duties, and to set up a standard conforming to true American ideals.²⁶

Clearly, this was a report colored more by class distinction than racial solidarity. Like the Congressional joint commission of 1920, the Woodson commission did little to further the cause against the Navy.

The radicals' best hopes remained with the ACLU. Realizing that civil liberty issues could not be properly addressed until the Danish Colonial Law of 1906 was replaced by an American-style constitution, Baldwin asked Adolph A. Berle, Jr., a New York lawyer familiar with Virgin Island conditions, to draft a new organic law. In 1923, Rothschild Francis again traveled to New York to assist Berle, and the

²⁵ Evans, pp. 223-224; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 24; Walters, pp. 62-64.

²⁶ Jarvis, Brief History, p. 138.

ACLU searched for sympathetic legislators to lay the matter before Congress. In early 1924, Connecticut Senator George McLean agreed to introduce the new constitution to the Senate Committee on Territories and Insular Possessions as S. 2786.²⁷

The McLean bill embodied the radical demands for an Americanized government, but contained provisions that testified to its hurried preparation. The new constitution would extend U.S. citizenship to all Virgin Islanders, grant universal suffrage, and establish a unicameral legislature. In addition, it would replace the Navy administration with a mostly civilian government, under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Insular Affairs of the War Department. Unfortunately, Berle and Francis 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.²⁸ Shortly after its introduction, Francis defended the bill by admitting that it was full of errors, and was intended only as a first step to begin the debate on a new organic act.²⁹ Still, the discrepancy in the number of legislators between St. Thomas

²⁷ Evans, p. 224; Dookhan, "The American Civil Liberties Union," pp. 429-432.

²⁸ Evans, pp. 225-226; Dookhan, "The Search for Identity," pp. 24-26.

²⁹ Avis, Apr. 10-12, 1924.

and St. Croix left Francis open to the charge of favoritism, and spoiled an otherwise notable document.

The bill soon died for lack of support. The hurried, private nature of its drafting and introduction to Congress surprised and angered most V.I. political leaders. Upon hearing the news, Governor Phillip Williams quickly registered his objections with the Department of the Navy.³⁰ The Colonial Councils deemed the matter important enough to convene a rare joint session. On April 4, 1924, this joint session issued a resolution stating that the McLean bill was "not based on a knowledge of local conditions" and that no political changes be made until requested by the "people" of the Virgin Islands.³¹ In an attempt to counter this action by the Councils, radicals on both islands rallied mass meetings to denounce the legislators as unrepresentative of the general population. On St. Thomas, some 500 people listened to Rothschild Francis, and voted to send two delegates, Octavius C. Granady and Frederico Guirty, to speak at the Senate committee hearings. On St. Croix, the provision for an unequal number of legislators from each island kept radicals there from supporting the bill, but D. Hamilton Jackson spoke in support of a civilian government to a large crowd, which sent its own delegate, Ralph J.

³⁰ Evans, p. 227.

³¹ NA RG 80/19, File 28759-648:55 Resolution of the Colonial Councils of St. Thomas-St. John and St. Croix, Apr. 4, 1924.

Bough, to the nation's capital. However, these mass demonstrations evoked little interest in Congress, and after hearing of the objections of the Governor and Councils, the Senate committee decided to take no action on the bill.³²

The Navy bridled at the criticism from the radicals. Given control of the islands because of their strategic value, the Navy governors ran the colony like a battleship. While sincere in their efforts to improve health, education, and infrastructure, their narrow vision of Americanization led them to view political agitation as subversion. In 1922, Governor Kittelle expressed these sentiments when he stated that "this place is too small for politics."³³ In response to what would have passed for ordinary political discourse in most American towns, the Navy administration meted out fines, jail sentences, and, when possible, deportation.

To silence the radical threat, the Navy officials counted on their control of the judiciary. During much of this period, George Washington Williams, who quite willingly used his powers against the radicals, headed the court system. In 1921, Williams came to the colony to take up the

³² Evans, pp. 227-228; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 13; NA RG 55/2, File 95 Granady to the President, Nov. 17, 1924; RG 80/19, File 28759-648:55 Resolution of Mass Meeting, St. Thomas, Apr. 25, 1924; Avis, Apr. 17, 1924.

³³ Avis, Sep. 23, 1922.

posts of government attorney and police judge for St. Thomas and St. John. Making little attempt to hide his racial prejudices, Williams offended many Virgin Islanders, but the Navy registered its appreciation of his efforts by promoting him to the district judgeship of the Virgin Islands.³⁴ As district judge, Williams made liberal use of the charge of libel to protect the government. Any radical who attacked Navy rule faced being fined or imprisoned for libel. Williams 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. The radicals protested this power by calling for jury trials in all cases involving more than twenty dollars, but Williams asserted that such a move would not only waste time and money, but could possibly result in the wrong verdict.³⁵

The local police force supplemented the power of the courts. After the Transfer, the Navy replaced the Danish gendarmerie with a smaller native police force, but filled the positions of director of police for each island with Americans. Because the police often seemed more interested

³⁴ Scott Nearing and Joseph Freeman, Dollar Diplomacy: A Study in American Imperialism (New York: B.W. Huebsch and the Viking Press, 1926), pp. 218-219; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 6-7; NA RG 55/2, File 66 covers many of Williams' activities as government attorney, police judge and district judge.

³⁵ NA RG 55/3, File 42 Correspondence Pertaining to the Several Attempts to Extend Trial by Jury, 1927.

in arresting natives than punishing the arrogant behavior of the servicemen stationed in the islands, many Virgin Islanders continued to believe that not much had changed with the end of Danish rule.³⁶

Repression of the radicals began before the end of the first year of Navy rule. In January 1918, Octavius C. Granady, a native lawyer who had obtained his license in Illinois, was jailed for allegedly defrauding a client. Although soon freed for lack of evidence, District Court Judge C.G. Thiele, a Dane, revoked Granady's license. Five months later, Granady was arrested again for supposedly writing an anonymous letter accusing the judge of treason. Although again freed for lack of evidence, Granady received no sympathy from the governor. Admiral James Oliver not only refused to restore Granady's license, but sided with the judge in calling the lawyer mentally unstable. Convinced he was being persecuted for political and racial reasons, Granady soon joined Rothschild Francis in the fight against Navy rule. By the end of the year, when Judge Thiele fined Francis for displaying libelous remarks against the Navy on the blackboard outside his shop, the battle lines had been drawn.³⁷

³⁶ Evans, pp. 128-129 & 271; NA RG 55/3, Dispatching Secretary to Government Secretary, Aug. 11, 1927; Bulletin, June 2, 1917; Avis, June 8, 1918 and Feb. 17, 1928.

³⁷ NA RG 55/2, File 64 Commandant of the St. Thomas Naval Station to Director of Naval Intelligence, June 28, 1918 and enclosures, American Historical Research Council to

The fine against Francis warned Virgin Islanders that criticizing the unruly behavior of the marines could lead to trouble. For some time after the Christmas disturbances of 1918, relations between the marines and local residents remained fairly calm, but riots erupted again during the fourth anniversary celebrations of the Transfer. At the end of March 1921, fights on both St. Thomas and St. Croix severely injured one marine and several civilians.³⁸ When Morris Davis and Reginald Simmons of the Crucian branch of the American Federation of Labor made speeches denouncing the brutality of the marines, the police arrested them and impounded the funds of the union.³⁹ While the government claimed that the two men were jailed simply for disturbing the peace, the fact that they were engaged in building a radical labor union certainly influenced the decision to arrest them.

The Transfer Day riots marked the beginning of an intensified campaign against the radicals. After four years of Navy rule, Virgin Islanders became impatient with the lack of political change, and began to support the radicals.

Governor, Dec. 2, 1918 and Burnett to Governor, April 21, 1919, and File 89 Governor to Secretary of the Navy, Feb. 3, 1919.

³⁸ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, p. 115; NA RG 55/2, File 89 Working People's Committee handbill, Mar. 31, 1921; RG 80/19, File 28759-567:1 Mail Notes, Mar. 31, 1921; Bulletin, Mar. 31, 1921.

³⁹ Dookhan, "The American Civil Liberties Union," pp. 426-267.

At the same time, the Navy administrators as yet felt little pressure from the national government to change their autocratic policies. In August, during the Crucian sugar strike, they again arrested Morris Davis, this time for disturbing the peace. A month later, the police jailed Reginald Simmons for criminal slander. The authorities also arrested George Audain, the editor of the St. Thomas Mail Notes, for accusing the St. Croix police chief of inefficiency.⁴⁰ The arrest of this respectable editor of an established newspaper notified Virgin Islanders that not only radicals would be persecuted.

Early the following year, the government punished D. Hamilton Jackson. In October 1918, Jackson had earned the enmity of the Navy rulers by chastising the marines for shooting of several Crucians.⁴¹ Since then, Jackson continued his attacks on the Navy officials, who found no way to silence him. Finally, in March 1922, Jackson wrote an editorial in The Herald criticizing the Frederiksted police judge for fining the Labor Union fifteen dollars for not repairing the roads adjacent to one of its properties while failing to fine several planters for the same offense. In response, the judge slapped a ten dollar fine on Jackson, and sentenced him to six days in jail for contempt of court.

⁴⁰ Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 21-22; NA RG 55/2, File 66 Dispatching Secretary to Governor, Aug. 31, 1921.

⁴¹ NARA. RG 55/2, File 64 The Herald, Oct. 23, 1918.

Jackson took the case all the way to the Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia, but George Washington Williams, as government attorney, convinced the judges that Jackson had written the editorial to smear the Navy administration. Jackson lost the appeal and went to jail for six days.⁴²

Radicals who were not born in the Virgin Islands faced an additional reprisal: deportation. In September 1922, the administration used this weapon against the assistant editor of The Herald, Reginald Barrow. Born in St. Vincent, Barrow, an Anglican priest, came to St. Croix from Barbados in 1919. 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 organized a local branch of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and continued to agitate in favor of workers' rights. At the same time, personal disputes with the leaders of the St. Croix Labor Union led him to start his own organization, the St. Croix Benevolent Society. In 1921, when Jackson returned from the States to help mediate the sugar strike, he praised Barrow for having developed a better land settlement than the St. Croix Labor Union.

⁴² Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, p. 129; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 21; NA RG 55/2, File 66 Brief for the Appellee in Third Circuit Court, October Term 1922, Proceedings of Frederiksted Police Court, Mar. 18, 1922 and Police Judge to District Judge, May 28, 1923. In May 1923, while serving his week in jail, Jackson won election to the Colonial Council.

Jackson hired Barrow as an editor for The Herald, thus giving the radical preacher a far reaching pulpit with which to attack both the planters and the colonial government. When these attacks became unbearable, Governor Kittelle had Barrow arrested for slander, but two separate trials ended in hung juries. At this point, Kittelle decided to bypass the legal system by deporting Barrow as an undesirable alien. Fearing that publicity might cause disturbances, the police packed Barrow off to the British West Indies without the benefit of a court hearing.⁴³

The same fate befell the assistant editor of The Emancipator, Thomas Morenga-Bonaparte. Originally from Grenada, Morenga-Bonaparte worked as a policeman in the Panama Canal Zone, until he was fired for insubordination. From there, he moved from island to island giving boxing lessons, and in 1921, he arrived in St. Thomas. He quickly befriended Rothschild Francis, who appreciated the boxer's knowledgeable criticism of the St. Thomas police department. Following the precedent set by Kittelle, Captain Henry Hough ordered Morenga-Bonaparte deported for writing an editorial

⁴³ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, p. 130; Boyer, "The Navy and Labour in St. Croix," pp. 92-94; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 21-22; NA RG 55/2, File 59 Jackson to Governor, Nov. 30, 1921, File 64 Jackson to Government Secretary, Feb. 17, 1921 and Government Secretary to Jackson, Feb. 28, 1921; RG 80/19, File 28759-685 Governor to Secretary of the Navy, Dec. 1, 1922 and enclosures, Reverend James Stifler to Secretary of the Navy, Jan. 24, 1924 and enclosures. Boyer, "Navy and Labour in St. Croix" notes that Rev. Barrow fathered Errol Barrow, the first prime minister of independent Barbados.

ridiculing the police for not following proper arrest procedures. In January 1923, to escape deportation to Grenada, Morenga-Bonaparte fled to the nearby island of Tortola.⁴⁴

The attacks on the radicals intensified in 1924 and 1925. In January 1924, Octavius Granady again lost his right to practice law. He had managed to regain his license three years earlier, but his continued criticism of the Navy provoked the V.I. district court into reversing that decision.⁴⁵ In August the administration suspended Halvor Berg, a member of the Colonial Council of St. Croix, from his job as a manager of the telephone company. Berg, a white crucian, had not been considered a radical, but he had become critical of the Navy's reluctance to appoint natives to positions of responsibility. In March 1925, when he remained recalcitrant, Berg was dismissed from his job.⁴⁶ Two months later, the police again arrested the always troublesome Morris Davis. This time he was jailed for sixty

⁴⁴ Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 22; NA RG 55/2, File 66 Governor to Chief of Naval Operations, Mar. 27, 1923 and enclosures; RG 80/19, File 28759-708 Police Commission of St. Thomas-St. John to Governor, Jan. 24, 1923 and enclosures.

⁴⁵ NA RG 55/2, File 64 Burnett to Governor, Apr. 21, 1919, and Granady to Governor, Nov. 18, 1919; RG 80/19, File 28759-788 Governor to Secretary of the Navy, June 28, 1924.

⁴⁶ Evans, pp. 230-231 & 243; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 22; NA RG 55/2, File 65 Election Results for Colonial Council of St. Croix, May 11 & 12, 1923; RG 80/19, File 28759-827 Jackson to Secretary to the President, Jan. 21, 1926.

days, ostensibly for wife-beating, but because of his antagonism toward the administration the charges may have been politically motivated.⁴⁷

Beginning in 1925, the Navy administration also entangled Rothschild Francis in a legal web from which he could not escape. In January 1925, George Washington Williams, now district judge despite vigorous opposition from the ACLU, sentenced Francis to thirty days in jail for writing an editorial libelously accusing a policeman of brutality. With the help of the ACLU and Casper Holstein, Francis appealed the case to the Third Circuit Court in Philadelphia, and wrote another editorial criticizing Williams for refusing to allow a trial by jury. In response, the district judge charged Francis with contempt of court and sentenced him to another thirty days in jail and a \$100 fine. Again, Francis appealed to the Philadelphia court, and the ACLU widely publicized the cases as attacks against freedom of speech in the Virgin Islands. In February 1926, the Philadelphia judges issued their decision on both cases. On the libel charge, they reversed the ruling of the district judge because Francis did not name anyone in his editorial. However, the appeals court upheld the contempt charge on the grounds that Williams had the legal right to decide the case without a jury. A month later, Francis wrote yet another editorial, claiming that he

⁴⁷ Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 22.

was being persecuted for his opposition to the appointment of Williams to the district judgeship. Once again, Williams charged the editor with contempt of court and sentenced him to another thirty days and a \$200 fine. This time, the Third Circuit Court refused to hear Francis' appeal, and he faced two months' imprisonment.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, the police arrested Francis on the charge of embezzling from a woman, Zepheria Mathias, who had left money in Francis' care. This charge proved quite effective, since the ACLU could not intervene in a simple criminal case. In April 1926, Williams easily dismissed claims that Francis had been framed, and sentenced the radical editor to a year in prison and a \$100 fine. In October, Francis entered the St. Thomas jail to serve his first thirty day sentence. A year later, after the failure of his appeal on the second contempt charge, he was incarcerated in the St. Croix penitentiary on the contempt and embezzlement convictions. He remained in prison until May 1928. Believing that there was no justice in the Virgin Islands,

⁴⁸ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 131-136; Dookhan, "The American Civil Liberties Union," pp. 435-440; NA RG 55/2, File 66 Brief for Appellant in the Third Circuit Court of Appeals and Brief for Appellee in Third Circuit Court of Appeals, October Term 1925, RG 80/19, File 28759-788 Decision by Third Circuit Court of Appeals, October Term 1925.

Francis exiled himself to New York City shortly after his release.⁴⁹

Ultimately, the Navy failed to silence the radicals. Certainly, deportation rid the islands of Barrow and Morenga-Bonaparte, but harassment of the other radicals only increased their popularity. While serving his week in jail, D. Hamilton Jackson won election to the Colonial Council. At mass meetings both Octavius Granady and Halvor Berg were chosen as delegates to travel to Washington, D.C. to lobby for a civilian government. Even Rothschild Francis continued his criticism of the Navy from his new home on the mainland. While the Navy continued to describe the radicals as ignorant agitators with few followers, even those Virgin Islanders who had welcomed the Navy officials as harbingers of a new American prosperity began to understand that Navy rule offered neither economic development nor political progress.

The growing popularity of the radicals challenged the Colonial Councils to confront the Navy on the issue of political reform. Claiming to represent the popular will, Council members could only sidestep the radical demand for universal suffrage by initiating their own projects to

⁴⁹ Valdemar Hill, Sr., Rise to Recognition: An Account of Virgin Islanders from Slavery to Self-Government (St. Thomas Graphics, 1971), p. 85; Dookhan, "The American Civil Liberties Union," p. 440.

democratize the political system. Increasingly frustrated by their lack of political power, middle class voters began to elect candidate more eager to reassert the power of the Councils vis-a-vis the governors. In October 1925, the St. Thomas Council attempted to outmaneuver Francis' Congressional lobbying by resolving to draft its own constitution for a civilian government. On St. Croix, the opposition of the conservative planters prevented like legislation, but progressive legislators on that island warned the governors that they could not expect the cooperation of the Council unless more black natives were appointed to government positions. On both islands, at times the relations between the Navy administration became so strained that the governors were forced to dissolve Council sessions to bring unruly members into line.

The administrations responded to Council demands for political reform by faulting the politicians for not raising taxes. The Navy governors argued that the Councils had no right to manage local affairs unless they levied the taxed necessary to reduce the annual Congressional appropriation. According to the governors, self sufficiency would lead to local political empowerment. Until that time, not even the leading planters and merchants should question the decisions made by the administration.

Ironically, the problem of taxation brought the radicals and the Navy together against the Councils.

Whereas the Navy hoped that increased taxes would reduce the federal appropriations, the radicals hoped that higher levies on unused acreage would spur land reform. Since the existing property taxes allowed owners to pay almost nothing on unused buildings and land, tax reform portended a large transfer of idle plantation land to small farmers. Especially on St. Croix, possible results of tax reform prompted such radicals as D. Hamilton Jackson to envision a society dominated by small farmers. While rejecting any plan that would endanger the social status quo, the Navy governors conceded that financial stability required increased taxes. For quite dissimilar reasons, the radicals and the Navy made tax reform an important item on the agenda of the Colonial Councils.⁵⁰

Afraid that increased taxes would cut into the revenues of the planters and merchants, the Council resisted tax reforms. Because the transfer to the United States eliminated custom duties on American products, both Councils agreed to tax individual incomes to offset the resulting loss in revenues. But since neither this tax, nor the

⁵⁰ Evans, pp. 140-145 & 167-175; NA RG 55/2, File 58 Notes on the Hearings of the Congressional Committee, Feb. 9, 1920; File 59 AVIFL to U.S. Senate and House Committees on Territories, Dec. 2, 1921; File 65 Resolution to appoint a Commission to investigate a tax on uncultivated land, Colonial Council of St. Thomas-St. John, 1921; RG 80/19, File 28759-828 Governor to Colonial Council of St. Thomas-St. John, Apr. 3, 1925 and Colonial Council of St. Thomas-St. John to Governor, Apr. 28, 1925; Bulletin, June 2, 1917 and Dec. 29, 1921; Avis, Apr. 6, 1923.

federal income tax which soon superseded it, fully replaced the lost custom duties, the governors insisted that the Councils consider substantial property tax increases. In 1921, the St. Thomas Council relented to administration pressure by replacing the ground, building, and house levies with higher real and personal property tax measures. Whereas the old taxes had raised \$16,000 each year, the new taxes averaged over \$24,500. Mostly because of the new law, average annual tax revenues for St. Thomas increased from \$97,500 to \$119,400, which still did not even match the Congressional appropriations for the island. On St. Croix, the Colonial Council would not even accept these minimal tax increases. Between 1917 and 1930, yearly tax revenues fell from \$162,600 to \$148,000.⁵¹

Unwilling to raise taxes, the Colonial Councils still chafed at the limits placed on their autonomy by the governors. By handing over their legislative commissions to the executive branch, the Councils had forfeited a large part of their role in government, and could do nothing to regain their former authority. In September 1922, Governor Sumner Kittelle simply dissolved the St. Thomas Council when that body protested its exclusion from consultation on the

⁵¹ Evans, pp. 146-162 & 193-196. Figures are in Danish West Indian dollars.

appointment of judges.⁵² In February 1925, Governor Philip Williams again adjourned the St. Thomas legislature when it insisted on passing resolutions authorizing investigations of the police force, the franchise laws, and the possibility of a new organic act.⁵³ These two dissolutions lasted only a short time, but they were followed by a bitter quarrel between Governor Williams and the Crucian Council that curtailed legislative activities on St. Croix for over a year.

By 1925, frustration with Navy rule had pushed several moderate Crucian politicians to cooperate with the radicals. For that year's election, David C. Canegata, a prominent black physician and member of the Council, joined with D. Hamilton Jackson, Halvor Berg, and Ralph de Chabert to form the People's Party. The dignified Canegata had not been an opponent of the administration, but the arrogance of the Navy officials had convinced him that the governors would continue to block even minimal political reform. The formation of the People's Party was a significant departure from the traditional practice of running for office only as individuals. More a loose coalition than a formal organization, the People's Party worked to get middle class

⁵² Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 7; NA RG 55/2, File 65 A Proclamation by Governor, Sep. 1, 1922 and enclosures.

⁵³ Walters, pp. 108-110; NA RG 55/2, File 65 Order of the Day of a Meeting of the Colonial Council of St. Thomas-St. John, Feb. 5, 1925.

Crucians to vote for candidates that would push to appoint more natives to government positions.⁵⁴

In early May 1925, after elections to fill seven of the thirteen seats open to popular vote, supporters of the People's Party gained enough seats to challenge the unrestricted power of the governor to appoint members to the Council. At the opening session of the new Council, the People's Party persuaded a bare majority of the legislators to reject one of the two newly appointed members on the grounds that he was a federal employee. Governor Williams quickly retaliated by ordering new elections for the entire Council, only to be embarrassed by the ruling of the U.S. Treasury Department that the appointee, C.V.F. Daniel, was ineligible because he worked as a federal customs agent. Even worse for Williams, the People's Party argued that one reason for the dissolution was to punish the Council for electing Canegata as its first black chairman. The new elections, held in early June, returned nine People's Party candidates to the Council.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Evans, p. 83; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 10-11.

⁵⁵ Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 7 and 11; NA RG 55/2, File 65 Election Results Colonial Council of St. Croix, May 11 & 12, 1923, Digest of Proceedings of Colonial Council of St. Croix, Apr. 20, 1925, and Governor to Colonial Council of St. Croix, June 16, 1925; RG 80/19, File 28759-827 Governor of St. Croix, May 13, 1925 and enclosure, File to Secretary of the Navy, May 13, 1925 and enclosure, File 28759-838 Annual Report of the Governor, June 30, 1925.

Encouraged by these victories, 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.⁵⁶ 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 then later renounced it to become an American citizen. D. Hamilton Jackson, the main spokesman for the native caucus, 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, although born in the Virgin Islands, this appointee was a British citizen because his father had been the British Consul.⁵⁷ The administration made a strong case for the two men by liberally interpreting the Transfer treaty, and by showing that Armstrong had an American passport and had served in the U.S. Navy during the Great War.⁵⁸ By these challenges, the native Council members hoped to generate a serious

⁵⁶ NA RG 55/2, File 58 Dispatching Secretary to Government Secretary, June 19, 1929.

⁵⁷ Evans, pp. 246-247; NA RG 55/2, File 65 Governor to Government Secretary, May 22, 1919, Government Attorney to Government Secretary, May 12, 1925, and Dispatching Secretary to Government Secretary, Sept. 19, 1925; RG 80/19, File 28759-851 Proceedings of the Colonial Council of St. Croix, June 22, 1925.

⁵⁸ NA RG 55/2, File 65 Legal Aide to Governor, June 10, 1925 and Government Secretary to Dispatching Secretary, July 9, 1925.

debate on the citizenship status of Virgin Islanders. This hope faded when administration lawyers simply ruled that the Colonial Council had no authority to question the governor's appointees. At the end of June, when the People's Party protested this ruling to the U.S. Attorney General, Governor Williams again dissolved the Council.⁵⁹

The dissolution of the Colonial Councils inspired a desperate call by the People's Party for the annexation of St. Croix to Puerto Rico. Knowing that the Attorney General would probably back the administration, the native politicians argued that annexation to Puerto Rico was the only way to escape Navy domination and gain U.S. citizenship. Radical orators tried to build public support for annexation, but most Crucians remained wary of becoming too closely tied to the much larger, Spanish-speaking island. Along with Crucian disinterest, opposition from St. Thomas and the Navy soon killed the annexationist movement.⁶⁰ Its failure destroyed the People's Party. In June 1926, when the Attorney General, as expected, confirmed the ruling of the administration lawyers, most Council members signalled their readiness to cooperate with the

⁵⁹ Evans, p. 240; U.S. House, 69th Congress, 1st Session. Hearings before the Committee on Insular Affairs (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1926), Jan. 30, 1925; NA RG 55/2, File 62 Report by Christiansted Police, June 10, 1925.

⁶⁰ Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 33; NA RG 80/19, File 28759-851 Governor to Secretary of the Navy, July 16, 1925.

governor. A month later, a new governor, Captain Martin Trench, reconvened the now more submissive Council.⁶¹

At the end of a decade of Navy rule, the radicals seemed hardly closer to their goals of achieving a civilian government, universal suffrage, and U.S. citizenship. For their efforts, they had been fined, jailed, and deported. The attempt by Rothschild Francis to interest Congress in constitutional changes was rejected by the governor and the Colonial Councils. When the radicals did make inroads into mainstream politics, the governors made it clear that they could administer the islands without the Colonial Councils.

Yet the continued bickering between governors, Councils, and radicals caught the attention of Congress. While they could easily dismiss the ranting of the radicals, the Navy governors could not convince Congress to ignore the complaints of the Councils. Moreover, mass demonstrations by Virgin Islanders living in New York City, and lobbying efforts by the ACLU made American treatment of the new colony a national issue. Despite the quick demise of the McLean bill, Rothschild Francis had revived Congressional interest in the islands.

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Evans, p. 240.

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CHAPTER FIVE
THE END OF NAVY RULE

Once Congress seriously decided to consider political reforms, the Navy began to realize that its days in the Virgin Islands were numbered. The Navy officials could then only use their considerable power to channel political change in a direction that would not threaten their merchant and planter allies. The last Navy governors effectively quieted radical agitation by cooperating with the Colonial Councils in cautiously moving toward reforms. The Navy also persuaded Congress to delay legislation on a new constitution until the islands had made progress in solving their economic problems. By arguing that political reform should follow economic progress, the Navy succeeded in continuing its rule over the islands until the Great Depression revealed the inadequacy of its policies for economic rejuvenation.

After the failure of the McLean bill, Congress heeded the warnings of the governor and Councils that the problems of the colony were primarily economic. In May 1925, the Department of the Treasury sent special commissioners Rufus S. Tucker and Roswell F. Magill to investigate the possibilities of tax reform and establishing a U.S. bank in the islands. Each commissioner issued a

separate report suggesting limited options for increased tax revenues, U.S. investments, and economic development.¹

While conservative islanders welcomed these investigations as a way to distract attention from the clamor for political reform, the commissioners recognized that some economic solutions required political consensus. Rufus Tucker, in particular, faulted the Navy for its insensitivity toward the political aspirations of Virgin Islanders. He recommended that the islanders be granted U.S. citizenship and that the franchise be extended to women.²

Despite the hopes of the conservatives, the Tucker and Magill investigations only postponed Congressional hearings on a new constitution. Throughout 1925, the ACLU searched for sympathetic Congressmen to reintroduce its draft constitution to the appropriate House and Senate committees. Having learned from the mistakes of the McLean bill, Adolph Berle amended the organic act to increase the number of Councilmembers elected from St. Croix, and solicited the opinions of a number of V.I. political leaders and interested Federal officials. In January 1926, with the support of D. Hamilton Jackson and Halvor Berg, Berle persuaded Felix Davila, the Delegate for Puerto Rico, to introduce the constitution to the House Committee on Insular

¹ Evans, pp. 168-169; Dookhan, "The Search for Identity," p. 23; Tucker, *Passim*.

² Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 142-145; Tucker, pp. 49 & 52.

Possessions. Previously, only Berle and Rothschild Francis had testified on the McLean bill. This time Berle arranged for the committee to hear a varied array of opinions. Along with Jackson and Berg, Jean B. Hestres, a member of the St. Thomas Colonial Council spoke in favor the Davila bill, but the Congressmen heard objections from Admiral Sumner Kittelle, the former governor, and Commander Raymond Stone, a functionary of the Navy Department. Even Rufus Tucker appeared as a "disinterested expert." He agreed with the general thrust of the bill, but felt that one council for the two islands would be unwieldy.³

The House Committee responded to the testimony by asking Adolph Berle to join with Rufus Tucker in writing a new bill that incorporated Kittelle's objections to the elimination of appointed members and all franchise restrictions, and Tucker's own rejection of a single legislature. Within a couple of weeks, the two men completed a draft that conformed more to the existing system than the previous bills. The draft restored two separate councils and the appointed members, but granted U.S. citizenship to native islanders and extended the franchise to adult male citizens that were literate in English. In March, after additional testimony, including an emotional appearance by the former district judge of St. Croix, Lucius

³ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 143-144; Evans, pp. 231-233; Dookhan, "The American Civil Liberties Union," pp. 443-444; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 25-26.

Malmin, who blasted Navy rule, the House committee favorably reported the bill to its Senate counterpart.⁴

However, hopes for political reform faded when the Senate Committee on Territories and Insular Affairs met to consider the new constitution. After the favorable House committee report, the planters and merchants lobbied Congress against a change of government. Through letters, telegrams and petitions, they claimed that the people were unprepared for an extension of the franchise and that the removal of Navy personnel would hurt the economy. In April, Berle, Tucker, Berg and two representatives of the American Federation of Labor tried to convince the committee to approve the bill, but the protests from the island elite convinced the Senators that they should take no action without further testimony from the local business community.⁵

In July 1926, Senator Hiram Bingham of Connecticut journeyed to the Virgin Islands to gather the testimony of the ruling class. Like most federal visitors, his views on race and class predisposed Bingham to favor the opinions of the local elite, and he quickly agreed that the masses were

⁴ Evans, pp. 233-236; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 25-26; U.S. House, 69th Congress, 1st Session. Hearings before the Committee on Insular Affairs on H.R. 7183, Passim.

⁵ Evans, pp. 236-238; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 25-26.

not ready for greater political responsibility.⁶ As a result of his conversation with the upper class members of the Colonial Councils, Bingham also recognized the important economic role of the Navy, especially for St. Thomas. But unfortunately for the elite, the Senator concluded that local businessmen would happily continue to take federal money without pursuing any plans for developing economic self-sufficiency.⁷

On his return to the mainland, Senator Bingham prepared a new constitution that would incorporate his concerns. This new constitution differed from the others by making the number of appointed members to each Council dependent on the amount of federal aid spent on the islands. If Congress decided to increase its appropriations, this innovation would allow the number of elected members to fall as low as three out of eleven on St. Thomas and four out of thirteen on St. Croix. Also, unlike the other bills, the Bingham draft did not call for the transfer of the islands from the Navy to the Bureau of Insular Affairs of the War Department. Although it retained the provision for a literacy based

⁶ Bingham is best known as the "discover" of Machu Pichu. Before coming to the Virgin Islands, he had already distinguished himself as an explorer, author, intellectual and statesman. See Alfred M. Bingham, Portrait of an Explorer: Hiram Bingham, Discover of Machu Pichu (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989).

⁷ Evans, pp. 239-241; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 25-27.

suffrage, Bingham's plan actually contemplated increased federal and local upper class control of the colony.⁸

Hoping to put the matter to rest, the Senate Committee on Territories and Insular Possessions scheduled hearings on the Bingham bill. But the new plan satisfied no one. In December 1926 and January 1927, 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 Councils. Adolph Berle, David C. Canegata, D. Hamilton Jackson and Halvor Berg appeared before the Committee, and Rothschild Francis and Ralph de Chabert sent letters of protest. For the Navy, Governor Martin Trench and his government secretary, Captain Cecil Baker, traveled to Washington to caution against removing property restrictions on the franchise. Similarly, two white Crucian planters and Council members, Robert Skeoch and Douglas Armstrong, also came to protest the widened suffrage. Finally, District Judge George Washington Williams and Folmer Andersen, the Danish manager of the Bethlehem plantations, took the most conservative position by speaking against any changes in the

⁸ Evans, pp. 241-242; Dookhan, "The American Civil Liberties Union," pp. 445-446; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 26-27.

political status quo. Attacked from all sides, the Bingham constitution perished in committee.⁹

With the failure to pass a new constitution, both the Senate and House committees decided to resolve only the most simple political problem of Virgin Islanders. On February 25, 1927, President Calvin Coolidge signed a Congressional bill granting U.S. citizenship to Virgin Islanders.¹⁰ Of course, without the widening of the franchise, U.S. citizenship could have little immediate political effect, but it strengthened the movement for political reform by placing black islanders on the same legal footing as those Danish residents who had opted for American citizenship at the time of the transfer. Citizenship also allowed natives to claim Constitutional superiority over foreign residents, whether they be black laborers from the eastern Caribbean or European businessmen. As citizens, Virgin Islanders could demand their rights under the U.S. Constitution to vote and to control their own government. Although the Navy and the franchise restrictions remained, the radicals had won a considerable victory.

Citizenship made traveling to the United States easier, and gave Virgin Islanders on the mainland the same rights to

⁹ Evans, pp. 241-247; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," pp. 26-28; U.S. Senate, 69th Congress, 2nd Session. Hearings before the Committee on Territories and Insular Possessions on S. 3228, S. 4005 and S. 4550, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1927), Dec. 8, 10, 16 & 21, 1926.

¹⁰ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, p. 275.

participate in politics as other Americans. Before 1927, the majority of Virgin Islanders who were not citizens had been subject to the same quota system that applied to other foreign immigrants.¹¹ Now, the freedom to migrate to the United States contributed to the continuing population decline in the colony. Between 1917 and 1930, the population fell from 26,000 to 22,000 as many people sought a better life in New York City.¹² Unfortunately, the wording of the Congressional bill exempted from citizenship those Virgin Islanders who had established residence outside the territory before 1917. This meant that the struggle for citizenship continued in Harlem long after the issue had been settled in the islands. Finally in 1932, another Congressional act endowed citizenship on Virgin Islanders living in the United States, Puerto Rico and the Panama Canal Zone. For those Virgin Islanders living in foreign countries, the new act allowed them to enter the United States and its possessions outside the quota system.¹³

The granting of citizenship dulled radical pressure for political reform. Having achieved this victory, the radicals placed their hopes in Congressional promises to

¹¹ Dookhan, "The American Civil Liberties Union, pp. 434-435.

¹² Dookhan, Virgin Islands, p. 271.

¹³ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, p. 275; Evans, pp. 63-64.

investigate further the problems of the islands. At the same time, the Navy officials acknowledged the demands of the radicals by expressing a desire to cooperate with the Colonial Councils in writing a permanent organic act.¹⁴ If the jailing of Rothschild Francis and the dissolution of the St. Croix Colonial Council had taught the radicals to fear the governor, the passage of the citizenship act revealed to the Navy administration the inevitability of political reform.

Also, to a certain extent, the changing complexion of the legislatures persuaded some radicals that reform could be achieved by working within the political system. In his 1925 report, Rufus Tucker had noted that:

the very low income requirement reduced the number of voters to 762 in St. Thomas and 417 in St. Croix, being about 35 per cent of the males of proper age in St. Thomas and less than 10 per cent in St. Croix. The number of voters in St. Thomas has nearly tripled since 1917. Three-fourths of the voters are colored, and there is no political discrimination on the account of color, as is shown by the fact that all the appointed members in the St. Thomas Council are colored, and likewise most of the elected members. Four of the five appointed members of the St. Croix Council were at one time colored, besides several of the elected members.¹⁵

Because Charlotte Amalie on St. Thomas was the capital of the colony, the expansion of the bureaucracy under the Navy created many clerical jobs that certainly expanded the

¹⁴ Evans, p. 231; NA RG 55/3, File 40 Proceedings of the St. Thomas-St. John Colonial Council, Oct. 11, 1928.

¹⁵ Tucker, pp. 48-49.

electorate, but radical agitation may have also increased voter turnout.¹⁶ Because continental government employees were paid much more than native employees, these new voters may have been especially attentive to candidates who claimed that the Navy blocked native advancement in government.¹⁷

While they enjoyed less success on St. Croix, the temporary victories of the People's Party convinced some radicals that the Colonial Council could produce a new organic act.

Yet, as hinted at by Rufus Tucker, the political climate in each Council remained quite distinct. After Rothschild Francis moved to New York City, the Honorable Lionel Roberts, an estate owner and businessman, took charge of the efforts in the St. Thomas Council to write a new constitution. In 1925, he began the patient process of writing drafts that would be acceptable to Congress, the governors and his fellow Councilmembers.¹⁸ On St. Croix however, even after the Navy governors stated their

¹⁶ Creque, p. 79; Jarvis, Brief History, p. 140.

¹⁷ Evans, pp. 123 & 127-128.

¹⁸ Creque, pp. 98 & 106; Project Introspection, Profiles of Outstanding Virgin Islanders (St. Thomas: Government of the U.S.V.I., 1972), pp. 83-84; NA RG 55/2, File 65 Draft Resolution of the Colonial Council of St. Thomas-St. John, Sept. 17, 1925 and Proceedings of the Colonial Council of St. Thomas-St. John, Oct. 19, 1925; RG 55/3, File 40 Proceedings of the Colonial Council of St. Thomas-St. John, Dec. 23, 1929; RG 126 Records of the Office of the Territories. Entry 1: Central Classified Files, File 9-11-2 (Part 2) Roberts to Assistant to Administrator, Federal Works Agency, May 31, 1944; Bulletin, Aug. 8, 1935; Daily News (St. Thomas), Sep. 13, 1944.

willingness to cooperate with the legislature in achieving political reforms, the upper class members of the Council refused to enact legislation in support of a new constitution. The lack of progress in St. Croix finally caused D. Hamilton Jackson, still the most radical member of the Council, to lose faith in the political system. In September 1929, calling the Council "a farce," he decided not to run for reelection.¹⁹

Reproached for its callousness toward the feelings of Virgin Islanders, the Navy also attempted to improve its relations with the local populace by appointing Captain Waldo Evans as governor of the colony. Although in private he harbored the same racist views expressed by other Navy officials, Governor Evans announced his support for political reform and treated black islanders with more tact and courtesy than previous chief administrators.²⁰ Inaugurated on March 1, 1927, Evans served until March 1931, when Naval rule came to an end. During his first two years in office, the Governor gained the respect of Virgin

¹⁹ NA RG 55/3, File 41 Schofield to Government Secretary, Sep. 26, 1929 and File 46 Governor to Chairman of the Colonial Council of St. Croix, Aug. 8, 1929 and enclosures.

²⁰ Jarvis, p. 143; Dookhan, "The American Civil Liberties Union," pp. 446-447; Rodney Ross, "Black Americans and Haiti, Liberia, The Virgin Islands, and Ethiopia, 1929-1936 (Ph.D dissertation, University of Chicago, 1975), pp. 205-206; NA RG 48 Records of the Department of the Interior, Entry 749: Central Classified Files, File 9-11-2 (Part 1) Governor to Captain Furlong, Office of Naval Operations, Dec. 18, 1930.

Islanders both through his efforts to fight further reductions in the dwindling Congressional appropriations, and by his statements favoring literacy based suffrage.²¹ Then in March 1930, Evans took the unprecedented step of appointing native islanders to the police judgeships of each island.²² Since none of the previous governors had served longer than two years, The Emancipator, now under the management of Lionel Roberts, published an editorial praising Evans, and asking the Navy Department to retain him as governor.²³ A few months later, the Governor thrilled many Virgin Islanders when he removed George Washington Williams from his position as District Judge.²⁴ By his positive response to native demands, Evans almost silenced cries for the removal of Navy rule.

The Navy even went beyond addressing only political problems by arranging for a commission of black educators to tour the Virgin Islands. In 1929, several professors from Hampton Institute in Virginia and Tuskegee Institute in

²¹ Evans, p. 159; Jarvis, pp. 144-145; NA RG 55/3, File 40 Proceedings of the Colonial Council of St. Thomas-St. John, Oct. 11, 1928.

²² NA RG 55/27 Annual Report of the Governor, 1930. By appointing David C. Canegata as police judge in St. Croix, Evans greatly improved his relationship with Crucian political leaders. See Avis, Mar. 18, 1930.

²³ NA RG 38 Records of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Entry 30: Office of Island Governments, File 32 The Emancipator, Mar. 1, 1930.

²⁴ Dookhan, "The American Civil Liberties Union," p. 447.

Alabama spent some time in the islands, and issued a report that condemned much more than the educational system.

Displaying remarkable sensitivity, The Report of the Educational Survey of the Virgin Islands, refrained from chastising the moral standards of the natives, and instead, placed their problems in the context of the economic decline that had begun under the Danes:

As the islands are at present constituted, there is little choice for the laborer. If he adapt himself to the dominant demand he must work on the docks or on the sugar flats. . . . The pressure of the industrial interests of the islands is always to reduce the standards of labor to the cheapest possible. Labor of the highest type is driven to the towns to compete for clerical jobs and places in mercantile life and to the United States, leaving only the old and infirm and those of weaker calibre to work in the islands. . . . In the population itself there is taking place a gradual shifting of level downwards mentally, morally and physically. In the decade of American operation the Government has drawn a barrier up against this progressive deterioration, but the essential movement itself has not been stopped or stemmed.²⁵

To remedy this process of social deterioration, which had been going on since Emancipation, the commissioners advocated educational reform. They argued that extensive study was needed to develop an educational system that would meet the needs of local children.²⁶ This analysis reinforced the criticisms being made by D. Hamilton Jackson, who spent his last year on the Council fighting for local

²⁵ Quoted in Lewis, The Virgin Islands, pp. 60-61.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 61-62.

control of the school board.²⁷ While the commissioners did not directly attack the Navy, they recognized that the present administration lacked a program that could solve the complex problems of the society.

Besides the renewed attention paid to the islands by the Navy, visits by several Congressmen indicated to Virgin Islanders that, at long last, the federal government had taken serious interest in their problems. Indeed, after the controversies generated by the organic act legislation, Congress had become more interested in the colony, but the effectiveness of its annual appropriation concerned the national lawmakers as much as political reform. In September 1928, the passage of a hurricane through the islands, killing seven persons and causing extensive property damage, quickened Congressional interest in the territory. Two months later, Senator Hiram Bingham again visited the islands to assess the damage caused by the storm. Then in March 1929, a delegation of four Congressmen, headed by Burton French from Idaho, came to the islands with the aim of determining a fair level for Congressional appropriations. On their return to Washington, these Congressmen arranged for a more thorough study to be made by the federal Bureau of Efficiency.²⁸

²⁷ NA RG 55/3, File 46 Governor to Chairman of the Colonial Council of St. Croix, Aug. 8, 1929 and enclosures.

²⁸ Evans, p. 159; Jarvis, pp. 147-148; NA RG 55/3, File 11 Congressmen File, Mar. 1929.

Established in 1916, the Bureau of Efficiency studied ways to raise productivity and save money in the federal government. By choosing this agency to investigate conditions in the islands, Congress hoped to find ways to reduce taxpayer expenses. Of course, this concern implied that the Navy wasted money, and set the stage for a conflict between Governor Evans and the Chief of the Bureau of Efficiency, Herbert Brown, who headed the mission to the islands. Feeling that the Navy was as much the object of investigation as anything else, Brown refused to cooperate with the Navy Captain, and Evans soon appealed to his superiors to have the investigator recalled.²⁹

Herbert Brown, and his small team of investigators, arrived in the Virgin Islands just in time to witness the first effects of the Great Depression. After interviews with "cane growers, small farmers, large planters, bankers, sugar mill operators, and merchants,"³⁰ Brown concluded that the economy stood on the edge of disaster. In March 1930, the investigators completed a thorough report (900 pages) that reached the surprising decision that Congressional appropriations should be increased. Brown told Congress

²⁹ Evans, pp. 161-162; John F. Grede, "The New Deal in the Virgin Islands, 1931-1941" (Phd. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1962), p. 69; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-2 (Part 1) Governor to Captain Furlong, Nov. 9, 1930.

³⁰ Grede, p. 68.

that the present, or reduced, level of aid could only lead to an increased population exodus from the islands to the mainland. But if Congress funded a far reaching rehabilitation program then the islands could be weaned from their inadequate sugar and bunkering economy. In a few years, Brown argued, such a program would improve the lives of Virgin Islanders, make the colony self-sufficient, and end the need for federal appropriations.³¹

To achieve this economic miracle, Brown suggested that federal monies be used to improve the harbor of St. Thomas and develop homesteads on St. Croix. In addition, he called for a revised taxation system to increase local revenues, new banking facilities to encourage investment, and infrastructural improvements to promote tourism. Building on the Hampton-Tuskegee report, Brown also recommended that the establishment of agricultural and vocational schools to prepare local children for life at home. Finally, he suggested that the Virgin Islands, along with other American possessions, be placed under one central office.³²

The Brown report contained little that was new, but the economic disaster wrought by the depression made urgent action necessary. Danish governors, radical agitators, federal commissioners, and visiting journalists had all

³¹ Lewis, The Virgin Islands, p. 68; Evans, pp. 159-160.

³² NA RG 51/13.1, File 19.V7 Economic Conditions in the Virgin Islands, Mar. 10, 1930.

suggested various aspects of Brown's program,³³ but only the Director of the Bureau of Efficiency had the necessary Congressional mandate to implement a substantive program. Furthermore, in the summer of 1930, both the Bethlehem and LaGrange sugar companies went bankrupt, throwing some 2700 people out of work, and a decline in shipping made life more difficult for dockworkers.³⁴ To ease the situation, Governor Evans called on the American Red Cross, which soon began distributing food to thousands of people.³⁵ While this measure prevented immediate starvation, it also pointed to the need for a more comprehensive solution. Economic paralysis gave Herbert Brown the lever he needed to pry loose a substantial appropriation from Congress.

After expressing initial surprise that Brown recommended increased federal aid, the relevant Congressional committees agreed that only a thorough rehabilitation program would ultimately relieve government responsibility for the islands. For fiscal year 1931, Brown requested \$238,000 above the scheduled regular appropriation

³³ By the mid 1920s, scholarly journals had begun considering V.I. problems. For example, Thomas H. Dickinson, "The Economic Crisis in the Virgin Islands," Current History, 27:3 (Dec. 1927), pp. 378-381 recommended changes in education and agriculture similar to those made by Herbert Brown.

³⁴ NA RG 55/27 Annual Reports of the Governor 1929 & 1930; RG 55/3, File 11 Bingham to Governor, Dec. 16, 1930 and enclosures.

³⁵ NA RG 55/3, File 11 Bingham to Governor, Dec. 16, 1930 and enclosures, and File 58 Lt. Governor to Governor, Apr. 21, 1931 and enclosures.

of \$280,000. Congress balked at this figure, but consented to \$141,000. Moreover, because the Navy Department expressed little faith in Brown's plan, the House and Senate conference committee asked President Hoover to give the Bureau of Efficiency the authority to administer the rehabilitation program.³⁶

The Navy objected to the program because it required too extensive government involvement in the economy. Even Governor Evans, who fought vigorously against cuts in the annual appropriations, felt that the rehabilitation program would only waste money. Evans especially protested Brown's scheme for the federal government to buy the Bethlehem sugar factory and estates. That Brown thought the government could successfully operate a business surprised Evans:

Surely, the Federal Government is not going into the real estate business. If the Federal Government bought this land, the land would have to lie idle for some long time before anything could be done with it, and that would have the effect of keeping the people out of employment.³⁷

Just as national spokesmen has begun to question laissez faire economics in the United States, Herbert Brown now forced the Navy to defend an economic policy that had become outdated by the exigencies of the Great Depression.

On St. Croix, where the distress was greatest, the Navy recognized the need for minimal government intervention in

³⁶ Evans, pp. 159-161.

³⁷ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-2 (Part 1) Governor to Captain Furlong, Office of Naval Operations, Dec. 18, 1930.

the economy. Instead of a comprehensive plan to transform the economy, the Navy preferred to aid the more financially sound planters in hope of rejuvenating sugar production. In October 1930, Governor Evans asked the Colonial Council to lend the LaGrange Sugar Company \$15,000 to restart operations. Since this concern was 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.³⁸

Unfortunately for the Governor, the Colonial Council objected vehemently to this scheme. Both the planters in the eastern and central parts of the island, and the middle class politicians who preferred a wider employment program wanted to lend \$30,000 to the West Indian Sugar Company, which employed 2,000 workers while LaGrange could offer jobs to only 500 people. Led by David C. Canegata, the Colonial Council also called for an economic-industrial commission to oversee sugar production and explore alternatives to that industry.³⁹

The Council's protests forced the Governor to modify his position slightly. The final bill abandoned the proposal for an economic-industrial commission and

³⁸ NA RG 55/3, File 22 Governor to Dispatching Secretary, Oct. 31, 1930 and enclosures.

³⁹ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-2 (Part 1) Governor to Captain Furlong, Office of Naval Operations, Oct. 26 & 30, 1930 and Governor to Dispatching Secretary, Oct. 31, 1930; RG 55/3, File 58 Sugar Factories, Nov. 26, 1927.

authorized the Governor to loan \$30,000 to unspecified cultivators of sugar. Under this agreement LaGrange received \$22,000 and Bethlehem got \$6,000. This loan soon restored LaGrange to its pre-depression levels of production. Bethlehem, on the other hand, lost many of its estates to various local buyers, and resumed only limited operations.⁴⁰

But despite his victory over the Colonial Council of St. Croix, the actions of the Governor increased popular support for Herbert Brown. The rehabilitation program announced by the Bureau of Efficiency answered radical demands for the creation of homesteads, and forced Governor Evans to warn his superiors that Brown could cause much trouble by misleading the Crucian masses:

Confidentially, Mr. Brown is becoming very pro-colored and he would like, I think, to buy up all the land in St. Croix and turn it over to the colored people, but they would make a mess of it as they are not qualified to handle such affairs independently. The colored man needs supervision and he must be told how, when, and what to do, and he is dependent on the white man for guidance and supervision. This is no reflection on the colored people of the Virgin Islands, but it is merely a condition that has been brought about through generations of the white man's leadership. I think that Mr. Brown is in constant touch with some person or persons down here, and probably D. Hamilton Jackson is one of those with whom he is touch. You can see that I am not in sympathy with Mr. Brown's ideas as I do not believe for a moment

⁴⁰ NA RG 55/3, File 22 Governor to Dispatching Secretary, Oct. 31, 1930, Dispatching Secretary to Governor, Nov. 13 and Dec. 10, 1930 and Commissioner of Industry to Acting Governor, June 7, 1932; RG 55/3, File 58 Government Secretary to Dispatching Secretary, March 9, 1931.

that his proposal would make the people self-supporting and I do not know how many years it will take to get our money back if we ever get it back.⁴¹

Since Virgin Islanders considered Evans to be the most liberal of the Navy governors, his opposition to homesteading revealed the limitations of Navy rule. Once Congress agreed to the rehabilitation program, Brown's suggestion that all colonies be placed under one agency renewed hopes for the withdrawal of the Navy. In January 1931, a large crowd in Christiansted elected D. Hamilton Jackson, David C. Canegata and Joseph Alexander to travel to Washington D.C. to present Congress with a list of demands, including a civil government and a fully elected Council as well as more money to resume sugar production and support the homestead program.⁴² The sudden reappearance of an alternative to Navy rule now promised to reinvigorate agitation for political reform.

Yet, by the time the Crucian delegation arrived in the national capital, Herbert Brown had convinced the President that the Navy could not properly manage the affairs of the islands. Because Congress had not only approved the rehabilitation scheme, but placed Brown in charge of its implementation, the Chief of the Bureau of Efficiency carried considerable political clout. When Captain Evans

⁴¹ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-2 (Part 1) Governor to Captain Furlong, Office of Naval Operations, Dec. 18, 1930.

⁴² Avis, Jan. 31, Feb. 2 & 3, 1931.

complained that it was impossible to have two governors, Brown forced the Navy to consider ending its tenure of the colony.⁴³ Taking Brown's suggestion that the United States move to consolidate all its colonies under one agency, President Hoover agreed to place the Virgins under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior.

In order to avoid a repeat of the conflict with Captain Evans, President Hoover allowed Herbert Brown to choose the next governor. In a short time, Brown recommended Dr. Paul M. Pearson, head of the Swathmore Chataugua Association. With impressive credentials in the field of adult education and a liberal reputation in politics, Pearson seemed to meet the need for a sensitive administrator to confront the problems of the islands. Aware of the necessity of assuaging race relations in the Virgin Islands, Brown obtained recommendations from Tuskegee Institute, the National Urban League, the Inter-Racial Commission, and the National Bar Association. By securing the support of these organizations, Brown recognized the importance of including black Americans in formulating policy toward U.S. possessions inhabited largely by people of African descent. While some people suggested that the islands be given a black governor, most black American leaders seemed satisfied with Pearson. When Virgin Islanders in Harlem seconded these favorable views, Brown could claim to the President

that he had found someone capable of removing the annoying problem of the Virgin Islands from the national scene.⁴⁴

On January 30, 1931, President Hoover announced the transfer of the islands to the Department of the Interior, and the appointment of Pearson as the new governor. The news surprised Virgin Islanders, who had known little of the rift between Brown and Evans. Although their long standing complaints certainly had contributed to the removal of the Navy, Virgin Islanders remained outside the discussions to transfer them to the Interior Department. Nevertheless, most islanders, especially on St. Croix, greeted the news with enthusiasm. Only the St. Thomas merchants feared that the withdrawal of the Navy would bring economic ruin, but the vague wording of the Presidential announcement left them the hope that the Naval base would remain active even after the departure of the government officials.⁴⁵

On March 18, 1931, Governor Pearson inaugurated a new era in the Virgin Islands. Like the Navy administrators, Pearson carried with him certain racist ideas, but unlike his predecessors, he believed that proper education could ready the natives for more responsible roles in society. Some Virgin Islanders were insulted by these views, which resembled the recommendations of the 1924 Woodson

⁴⁴ Ross, pp. 211-214; Bulletin, Feb. 17, 1931.

⁴⁵ Jarvis, Brief History pp. 155-159; Bulletin, Jan. 31, Feb. 2, 10 & 13, 1931; Avis, Feb. 4 & 16, 1931.

commission, but most appreciated the good intentions of the new chief executive. Certainly, many islanders hoped the removal of the Navy would mean a quick implementation of Brown's rehabilitation program. Still, fourteen years of experience with the Navy had taught Virgin Islanders that the beginning of a new era would bring new struggles.

CHAPTER SIX

FAILURE OF THE FIRST CIVILIAN ADMINISTRATION

Paul M. Pearson disappointed Virgin Islanders. The promises of the rehabilitation program materialized only slowly, and Virgin Islanders began to wonder if the Pearson regime was made more of words than action. Even after New Deal work relief programs began to provide work for many islanders, the governor's position as administrator for these programs made him vulnerable to charges of inefficiency, corruption, and favoritism. Certainly, as most merchant members of the Colonial Councils came to depend on federal contracts, Governor Pearson enjoyed enormous power to reward friends and punish enemies. Also, because the Governor served at the President's pleasure, the Democratic victory in 1932 opened the possibility that Franklin D. Roosevelt would repay his supporters with positions in the Virgin Islands. The politics of patronage created alliances between islanders discontented with Pearson and mainland politicians who wanted loyal Democrats to administer the islands.

Moreover, the absence of a well-defined colonial policy led to political turmoil in the Virgin Islands. The rehabilitation program may have given direction to economic policy, but the transfer to the Department of the Interior

carried no further elaboration of political policy. After the dismissal of the Bingham bill, Congress lost interest in V.I. constitutions. Although the Pearson administration presented its own draft to Congress, the national legislators could not be persuaded to act until a firm consensus on a new constitution had developed in the islands. By early 1934, this lack of political direction again made the Virgin Islands a national issue.

A few days after Pearson's inauguration, President Hoover made some remarks about the Virgin Islands that put his new appointee on the defensive. In March 1931, on his way to tour Puerto Rico, Hoover paid a quick visit to St. Thomas to appraise the possibilities for a successful rehabilitation program.¹ After departing the island, the President told the reporters who were travelling with him on the battleship Arizona that the Virgin Islands were "an effective poorhouse" and that "it was unfortunate that we ever acquired these islands."² These remarks stung Virgin Islanders, many of whom continued to believe somewhat naively that the United States had purchased the islands out of concern for the welfare of its inhabitants. A few days later, the New York Times compounded the problem by explaining that Hoover had only consented to development aid

¹ Edward A. O'Neill, Rape of the American Virgins (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), pp. 49-50; Evans, p. 289.

² Quoted in Evans, p. 289.

for Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands to prevent their dark-skinned inhabitants from emigrating to the United States.³ From the beginning of his term, Governor Pearson faced charges by Virgin Islanders that his policies were based more on racism than humanitarianism.

If the remarks by Hoover were not enough to prejudice Virgin Islanders against Pearson, the Governor got himself into further trouble with his earliest actions. With his background in the Chatauqua Association, Pearson believed that social development could not be accomplished without cultural uplift, and he hired an associate, Ralph Dunbar, to organize a local production of the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, "The Pirates of Penzance."⁴ After several months of auditions and rehearsals, the players performed for the amusement of audiences in Charlotte Amalie, Christiansted, and Frederiksted. While appreciative of the talent of the native actors, social commentators criticized Pearson for making light of the serious problems of the community. In editorials and letters, various newspapers attacked Pearson for wasting money and time on operas while most workers remained unemployed.⁵

³ Boyer, p. 148.

⁴ Boyer, p. 149; O'Neill, p. 50; Avis, Sep. 19 and 21, 1931.

⁵ Bulletin, Oct. 8, 1931, Avis, Sep. 18 and Oct. 30, 1931.

By emphasizing cultural improvement, Pearson also angered Herbert D. Brown. Although Pearson stated his approval of the rehabilitation program, Brown accused him of concentrating on trivialities. Within six weeks after Pearson's inauguration, Brown appealed to both the Secretary of the Interior and the President to replace the Governor.⁶ In response, after only three months in office, the Governor issued an annual report for the fiscal year 1931 that listed two dozen numbered accomplishments. The report outlined an impressive array of activities, ranging from the organization of cooperatives to the securing of scholarships for teachers to study in the United States. While Brown and many Virgin Islanders charged that most of the accomplishments were merely plans not yet implemented, neither Secretary Ray Wilbur nor President Hoover acted on Brown's request to remove Pearson.⁷ Despite a later admission that his selection of Pearson "was the one blot in thirty years of his career as a government efficiency expert,"⁸ Brown could not persuade his superiors to reopen a matter so recently closed.

Faced with such a troubled start of his administration, Governor Pearson struggled to develop a good relationship

⁶ Boyer, p. 149; Evans, pp. 291-292.

⁷ Evans, pp. 293-294; Jarvis, p. 61; Annual Report of the Governor of the Virgin Islands 1931 (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, 1931), pp. 1-2.

⁸ Lewis, The Virgin Islands, p. 73.

with the Colonial Councils. Despite his differences with Herbert Brown, Pearson sincerely believed in the rehabilitation program, but the split between the two men deprived Pearson of the moral authority he needed to push the program through the conservative Councils. To guide administration measures through the legislatures, Pearson often attended Council meetings, but the first time he met with the St. Thomas Council members, they insisted on the restoration of the administrative commissions abolished by the Navy before considering his program. Like the Navy governors, Pearson balked at this request, claiming that the commissions contravened the American practice of separating executive and legislative functions. Yet, as several legislators observed, neither the practice of having the Governor sit in session nor the holding of several Council seats by administration employees conformed to American practice.⁹ As always, the rhetoric of Americanization barely concealed the real struggle to control the rehabilitation program. Since federal money would fund the rehabilitation program, the Councils needed to resurrect the commissions to have any voice in the daily operations of the program. Conversely, the Governor needed the cooperation of the Councils if he were to move the islands toward self-sufficiency. Eventually, Pearson reached a compromise with

⁹ Lewis, The Virgin Islands, pp. 74-75; Walters, pp. 129-132; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 1) President AFL Local #17061 et. al. to President Hoover, Nov. 9, 1932.

the St. Thomas Council. In July 1932, the Governor approved a resolution reviving the commissions, but giving them only advisory powers.¹⁰ The Council reciprocated by agreeing to consider tax reform. In December 1933, the St. Thomas legislature passed a five per cent ad valorem tax on most items sold on the island. Yet, this measure could not be passed without accompanying legislation suspending the collection of harbor dues on ships importing coal and fuel oil for bunkering. The Governor and Council hoped that these twin measures would attract more vessels while increasing local revenues. Actually, the ad valorem tax hardly offset the loss in ship dues, but Governor Pearson could report to his superiors that the local politicians were taking more responsibility for island finances.¹¹

The Governor could not even achieve this limited success with the Colonial Council of St. Croix. As early as June 1931, Lieutenant Governor Lawrence Cramer, who attended the Crucial sessions, persuaded the legislators to enact a gasoline tax of four cents a gallon to finance improvements of the highway between Christiansted and Frederiksted, but beyond this, the Council would not budge. As a supporter of

¹⁰ NA RG 126/1. File 9-11-30 (Part 3) Governor to Secretary of the Interior, July 22, 1932.

¹¹ Evans, pp. 151-152, 195 and 199; Annual Report of the Governor, 1934, pp. 4-5; NA RG 55 Office of the Governor and Government Secretary, Entry 4: General Files 1932-1934, and Government Secretary, Entry 4: General Files 1932-1934, File 22-1 Proceedings of an Ordinary Meeting of the Colonial Council for St. Thomas and St. John, June 14, 1934.

the rehabilitation program, Lt. Governor Cramer believed more strongly in land reform than his Danish and U.S. Navy predecessors, but he could not convince the planter-dominated Council to revise the island's antiquated property tax system. Since land planted in sugar and cotton was taxed at seventy cents an acre, other cultivated and pasture land at thirteen and a half cents, and bush properties at one cent, the depression had a devastating effect on government revenues.¹² To encourage estate owners to sell land no longer in sugar production, the administration proposed a real property tax similar to the 1922 measure enacted by the St. Thomas Council, but the planters preferred to hold onto their properties in hope of obtaining higher sugar prices or American investment.¹³

Constant insistence on the need for higher local taxes turned the Colonial Councils against Governor Pearson. While he encouraged the Councils to increase local revenues as part of the rehabilitation program, the politicians complained that the Chief Executive could do a better job of obtaining funds from Congress. The Councilmen also resented the fact that the Governor and the heads of the various

¹² Evans, pp. 140-150; Annual Report of the Governor, 1931, pp. 1-2; Fifteenth Census, Outlying Territories and Possessions, p. 278; NA RG 55/3, File 48 Governor's Report, May 1, 1928; RG 55/27 Annual Report of the Lt. Governor of St. Croix, 1933.

¹³ NA RG 55/27 Annual Report of the Lt. Governor of St. Croix, 1933.

government departments, who received a separate appropriation from Congress, were much more highly paid than the local government employees, who were expected to bear the brunt of any additional taxation.¹⁴ Yet, by relying on Congress to balance the local budget, the Councils conceded much of their power to the Governor. In 1934, when as a cost-saving measure made necessary by the depression, Congress reduced the municipal deficit appropriation to \$197,000 from the 1933 figure of \$220,000 (and the total appropriation from \$398,000 to \$372,000), the Colonial Councils vainly protested orders from the Governor that municipal expenditures be reduced. After the St. Thomas Council refused to enact the proposed 10 to 20 per cent salary reductions, Governor Pearson simply implemented the budget by executive order. This action by the Governor convinced the St. Croix Council to pass the salary cuts.¹⁵ Thus defeated, many councilmen joined the critics who claimed that Pearson did not understand local conditions.¹⁶

Despite the charges of his critics, Pearson made some progress in implementing the rehabilitation program. To counter the immediate effects of the depression, the administration sponsored programs to organize cattle,

¹⁴ Evans, pp. 123, 132-135.

¹⁵ Evans, pp. 164-166; Annual Report of the Governor 1934, p. 5; NA RG 55/27 Annual Report of the Lt. Governor, 1933.

¹⁶ Bulletin, Nov. 15, 1933.

farming, and handicraft cooperatives, and to promote the cultivation of vegetable gardens in school yards. By 1933, although the cattle cooperatives were having difficulties, over 500 acres of vegetables had been planted by the farming cooperatives, the handicraft business had made considerable progress, and most schools had vegetable gardens. At the same time, 135 families had been settled on homestead plots of about six acres each, and the government was negotiating the purchase of dozens of estates on which to settle additional families. With his special concern for education, Governor Pearson took particular pride in establishing an agricultural school on St. Croix for thirty students, and securing scholarships for ten Virgin Islanders to study at black colleges on the mainland. Pearson also boasted that forty per cent of the government jobs vacated by Naval personnel were filled by native islanders. Finally, the Governor made several trips to Washington, D.C. to lobby for emergency relief aid, and to revive Congressional interest in a new constitution for the islands.¹⁷

Unfortunately for the governor, these programs hardly alleviated the economic distress of the colony. The closing of the St. Thomas Naval Station withdrew from circulation

¹⁷ Evans, pp. 293-300; Annual Reports of the Governor 1931-34; NA RG 55/5, File 19-3 Memorandum for the Chairman and members of the Governor's Committee on Educational Policy for St. Croix, Feb. 8, 1938; RG 55/27, Annual Report of the Commissioner of Industry, 1933.

the income of hundreds of sailors and marines, and the decline of international shipping threw many dockworkers onto the relief rolls. High unemployment forced wages for many laborers back to pre-1916 strike levels. Once again, coal carriers received one penny for each basket of coal, and stevedores earned no more than twenty cents an hour.¹⁸ On St. Croix, the La Grange Sugar Company had greatly expanded its operations by purchasing some two dozen estates from the bankrupt Bethlehem factory, and the Central Sugar Factory had reopened under local ownership, but over a thousand cane laborers remained unemployed.¹⁹ Moreover, although La Grange employed 800 workers and Central 150, wages for first-class laborers had regressed to forty cents daily. In March 1931, these low wages forced a strike that lasted three weeks before the two companies agreed to raise the daily wage to fifty-five cents.²⁰ While La Grange and Central agreed to buy cane from hundreds of small farmers, and the administration encouraged vegetable farming, the bankruptcy of Bethlehem left St. Croix in a desperate

¹⁸ NA RG 55/27 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Industry, 1933; Bulletin, May 2, 1935.

¹⁹ Annual Report by the Governor 1932, pp. 13-14; NA RG 55/27 Annual Reports of the Lt. Governor, 1931 and 1932; Avis, Nov. 28, Dec. 12 & 17, 1930, and Jan. 29, 1932.

²⁰ NA RG 55/4, File 55 Lt. Governor to Director, National Bank of the Danish West Indies, Aug. 12, 1932 and enclosure; Avis, Mar. 2, 3, 5, 9, 20, 24, & 25, 1931.

condition.²¹ On both islands, 60 percent of the population depended on government relief and Red Cross charity. From 1931 to 1934, local tax revenues fell below the annual average collected under the Navy, and unemployment hovered around 50 percent of the labor force.²²

Once Franklin D. Roosevelt became President, the local opponents of Governor Pearson clamored to have him replaced by a loyal Democrat. The promises of the New Deal excited Virgin Islanders, and many argued that a Democratic governor could more ably include the colony in federal programs. However, Harold Ickes, the new Secretary of the Interior, expressed support for Pearson, and many other Virgin Islanders denounced the anti-Pearson group for not appreciating the efforts of the chief executive. But even after the arrival of substantial food supplies under the Federal Emergency Relief Act, and the beginning of work relief programs under the National Recovery Administration, agitation against Pearson continued. While the Governor's supporters pointed to the gains made since the departure of the Danes, his critics argued that much more could be done for the islands.

Morris Davis, the founder of the AFL local on St. Croix, emerged as an important leader of the anti-Pearson

²¹ NA RG 55/27 Annual Report of the Lt. Governor, 1932; Avis, Jan. 1932 (passim).

²² Lewis, The Virgin Islands, p. 72; O'Neill, p. 48; Evans, pp. 195-200; Grede, 78.

campaign. Davis, who had been critical of the conservative stance of the St. Croix Labor Union in the later years of the Navy regime, felt that the Union was not pushing forcefully enough for higher wages under the Pearson administration. Davis was in the United States during the first year of Pearson's term, but upon returning to St. Croix, he began to attack the administration and the Labor Union. The administration and its supporters responded to these attacks by asserting that the present economic conditions could not support higher wages; but, in turn, Davis pointed to the comfortable lifestyles of government officials and estate owners. In June 1933, Davis organized the Roosevelt-Garner Democratic Club, which began to campaign against Governor Pearson. That Herbert Brown expressed interest in replacing Pearson buoyed the hopes of the Roosevelt-Garner Club, and gave credence to predictions that the Governor's days in office were numbered.²³

The Roosevelt-Garner Club quickly gained support from various members of the elite on both St. Croix and St. Thomas. Besides their dislike of the constant harping on taxation by the Governor, the anti-Pearson members of the upper class included merchants who did not receive the most lucrative government contracts and planters who wanted

²³ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 150-153; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 3) Governor to Asst. Secretary of the Interior, Sep. 22, 1933 and enclosures; Avis, Jan. 7, July 21 & 22, Aug. 4 & 18, Dec. 13, 1932, Jan. 26, 27, Feb. 6, Nov. 21, 1933, and June 18, 1934.

higher prices for the land that the administration wished to purchase for homesteads. Mixed in with these economic motives were the political ambitions of men who felt they could more ably manage the affairs of the islands than a governor from the mainland. On St. Croix, the Roosevelt Garner Club received important support from Joseph Alexander, a prominent white merchant and member of the Colonial Council. On St. Thomas, Isaac Paiewonsky, a Lithuanian Jew who ran several successful businesses on the island, lent considerable support to Morris Davis. Both men apparently had trouble getting government contracts, but Paiewonsky felt especially aggrieved by the administration's efforts to enter the liquor business as part of the rehabilitation program. With the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment, Paiewonsky hoped to regain his once lucrative export market for rum, but he charged Pearson with unfairly using his position as governor to promote plans for manufacture and sale of the administration's Government House Rum. While men such as Alexander and Paiewonsky had different reasons than Davis for opposing Pearson, they took advantage of growing mass discontent to put considerable pressure on the government.²⁴

²⁴ Ralph M. Paiewonsky, Memories of a Governor: A Man for the People (New York: New York University Press, 1990), pp. 9-14 and 60-65; Ross, p. 251; Dookhan, "The American Civil Liberties Union," p. 452; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-11 Acting Secretary of the Interior to Joseph Alexander, May 24, 1935; RG 55/4, File 22-2 Lieutenant Governor to Governor, March 22, 1934; Avis, June 1, 1934.

When Governor Pearson attempted to dismiss the Roosevelt-Garner Club as a small number of agitators, Morris Davis organized plebiscites on both islands to verify the extent of the dissatisfaction with the administration. In October 1933, the hastily organized Civic Betterment Association, led by Morris Davis, conducted a secret ballot on St. Thomas to determine how many people opposed Pearson as governor. The results showed 3,614 persons against Pearson and only 72 in favor of his retention. A week later, Davis organized a similar ballot on St. Croix, this time finding 4,325 against, and only 93 in favor of the Governor. Although the government quickly dismissed these startling figures as the result of a rigged election, the outcome of the plebiscite threatened to place Pearson under the scrutiny of his superiors in the Department of the Interior.²⁵

Similarly dismayed by the plebiscite, supporters of the administration attempted to muster demonstrations in favor of Governor Pearson. On St. Thomas, efforts to rally support achieved little success, but on St. Croix, appreciation of the programs to revive agriculture spurred many people to denounce the anti-Pearson campaign. While

²⁵ Grede, pp. 121-122; NA RG 55/4, File 39-1 Governor to George Foster Peabody, Oct. 24, 1933; RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 2) Secretary of the Interior to the President, Feb. 16, 1934 and enclosures and File 9-11-2 (Part 3) Governor to Asst. Secretary of the Interior, Sep. 22, 1933 and enclosures; Bulletin, Oct. 19 & 21, and Nov. 2, 1933.

the St. Thomas Council engaged in battle with Pearson over the 1934 budget, which was ultimately implemented by executive decree, supporters of the Governor in the Crucial Council managed to pass a resolution criticizing the plebiscite and expressing confidence in Pearson. The Council approved the resolution 12 to 4, with 4 abstentions, giving Pearson some evidence to present to Washington that he enjoyed popular support.²⁶ Yet the restrictive franchise cast doubt on the validity of the Council resolution. Indeed, the plebiscite, which permitted the participation of all adults, may have scared many Council members who hesitated to admit that Morris Davis was an authentic popular leader, and they acted to reassert their authority as the legitimate voice of the community. Fortunately for the Governor, many middle class and common folk also disagreed with the anti-Pearson campaign. In November 1933, several Crucians organized the Citizens' Progressive Union, which worked with the St. Croix Labor Union and the Small Holders' Cooperative to organize a large Thanksgiving Day parade in honor of the Governor.²⁷ This demonstration heartened Governor Pearson, but the absence of a similar outpouring on St. Thomas indicated that he was in trouble.

²⁶ NA RG 55/4, File 22/2 Lt. Governor to Governor, Jan. 25, 1934; RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 2) Secretary of the Interior to the President, Feb. 16, 1934 and enclosures.

²⁷ NA RG 55/4, File 39-1 Governor to Asst. Secretary of the Interior, Dec. 2, 1933; Avis, Dec. 1, 1933.

The turmoil in the Virgin Islands reflected the lack of a coherent federal policy toward the colony. Lacking the power to manage their own affairs, Virgin Islanders expected federal officials to solve their political problems, only to find that mainland politicians and bureaucrats awaited local consensus before acting. Most of the time, national policy makers expected the governor, as the "man on the spot," to formulate policy and solve problems, but the experience with Navy rule had proved Virgin Islanders quite capable of bringing their problems to the ultimate sources of authority. Moreover, if ignored by government officials, Virgin Islanders enlisted the aid of organizations such as the ACLU, and publicized their problems in the national press. Even when the governor could deny islanders access to the national scene, he had little control over the Harlem community of Virgin Islanders, which made its own demands on the federal government. When the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt added partisan politics to the formulation of policy, solving the problem of the tiny Virgin Islands became even more complicated.

By 1934, the Virgin Islands could no longer be ignored by the federal government. Rising islander criticism of the local administration indicated an ineptitude on Governor Pearson's part that threatened to embarrass the Roosevelt administration. Nevertheless, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes retained his faith in Governor Pearson, who was

seen as a loyal advocate of the goals of the New Deal. At the same time, Ickes recognized the need for a more sophisticated colonial policy, not only for the Virgin Islands, but for all U.S. territories. Ickes conceived a design that would draw on the ideas of both leading private citizens and government officials to build a more effective Colonial policy. For the Virgin Islands, the Secretary invited the leaders of several black and humanitarian aid organizations to share their opinions on policy. In February 1934, this invitation resulted in the formation of the Virgin Islands Advisory Council, consisting of the Secretary of Agriculture, Henry Wallace, Howard University President Mordecai Johnson, NAACP leader Walter White, American Molasses Company President Charles Taussig, Joanna Colcord from the Russell-Sage Foundation, and philanthropists George Foster Peabody and George Stern.²⁸ Five months later, Ickes took an even more important step to coordinate colonial policy by creating the Division of Territories and Island Possessions. Headed by Ernest Gruening, a liberal journalist who had lived in Mexico and the Caribbean, the Division was responsible for federal policy toward Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.²⁹

²⁸ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 173-174; Ross, pp. 248, 275 & 280-282; Grede, p. 14.

²⁹ Ernest Gruening, Many Battles: The Autobiography of Ernest Gruening (New York: Liveright Press, 1973), passim; Evans, pp. 103-104; Grede, pp. 13-14.

These efforts by the Secretary of the Interior to develop a more effective colonial policy could have quieted much of the opposition to Governor Pearson, but partisan politics wrecked the chances for a unified federal policy. Shortly after the 1932 election, both Roosevelt and Ickes began receiving inquiries about available positions in the Virgin Islands. They received requests not only from white aspirants like Herbert Brown, but from black politicians who sought repayment for the growing black support for the Democratic Party. In May 1933, the Washington Afro-American even published a list of 58 available positions and their salaries, including the that of the governorship.³⁰ Still believing Pearson to be the best man for the job, Secretary Ickes brushed aside all requests for the governorship, but acceded to pressure from Senators Pat Harrison and Millard Tydings to appoint loyal white Democrats to lesser posts. Senator Harrison obtained the important position of district judge for fellow Mississippian T. Webber Wilson, and Senator Tydings secured the job of government attorney for a Baltimore constituent, Eli Baer. At first, Pearson indicated that he could work well with Wilson and Baer, but both men soon turned against the Governor. With their ties to Harrison and Tydings, Chairmen of the Finance Committee

and Territories and Insular Affairs Committee, respectively, the two men became Pearson's most formidable opponents.³¹

Convinced that economic revival would quell opposition to Pearson, Secretary Ickes pushed for a more vigorous implementation of the rehabilitation program. In part, this meant including the islands in New Deal food and work relief programs, but the Secretary also approved massive government intervention in the sugar and rum business. Appointed director of the Public Works Administration (PWA), Ickes easily directed considerable federal funds to the islands. At the end of 1933, money, food, and supplies began pouring into the islands, and soon greatly exceeded local revenues. For fiscal year 1934, federal relief expenditures equalled \$657,792, while local taxation raised \$225,562. Besides providing much needed food, the federal efforts provided temporary employment for some four thousand persons, mostly in handicrafts and construction. But while generous, this temporary relief could not solve the major economic problems of the colony. For a more permanent recovery, Ickes pinned his hopes on a \$1,000,000 PWA allotment to create the Virgin Islands Company (VICO).³² Primed by federal money and staffed by government officials, VICO had the capacity to become the largest business enterprise in the islands.

³¹ Ross, p. 287; Grede, pp. 110-114.

³² Evans, pp. 300-304; Ross, pp. 278-280; Annual Report of the Governor 1934, pp. 1-3.

Knowing that private businessmen, both on the islands and the mainland, would criticize extensive government intervention in the economy, the Secretary justified VICO because of the lack of private capital willing to invest in the local economy.³³

Since the plan for VICO contemplated that its major impact would be on the Crucian economy, Secretary Ickes hoped to gain the cooperation of the St. Croix Colonial Council by having that body approve the company's charter, but many Councilmen objected to the probable VICO monopoly of the sugar and rum industries. In March 1934, the Council voted twelve to six against approving the charter.³⁴ Summarizing the opposition to the charter, Chairman Arnold Golden telegraphed Harold Ickes that "the Colonial Council cannot and will not accept responsibility for establishing a monopolistic institution destructive of private initiative [by] eliminating smaller operating industries"³⁵ However, the debates in the Council and the correspondence of government officials revealed that ordinary greed and

³³ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-22 (Part 5) Governor to Director of the Division of Territories, June 5, 1935 and enclosure.

³⁴ Avis, April 3, 1934.

³⁵ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 2) Chairman of the Colonial Council of St. Croix to the Secretary of the Interior, March 28, 1934.

political ambition lay behind the facade of high principles.³⁶ Some Councilmen had already begun negotiations with the administration to sell their land to VICO, and these legislators wanted higher prices for their estates. Others, like Joseph Alexander, had made national connections that promised them increased political power if Governor Pearson were replaced by a deserving Democrat. Indeed, Governor Pearson came closer to the truth in his description of the rejection:

The obstacles to be overcome are not, however, primarily a misunderstanding; it is definitely a class struggle. The plan for the Virgin Islands Company looks to better wages, better living conditions for "the blacks," as the estate owners call them. All our plans look toward improving the conditions of the poorer people, which will increase their power and decrease the power and authority of the estate owners. Members of the Council are largely estate owners, and about half of them have property which the Virgin Islands Company should buy . . . They are disposed to hold up the charter . . . until they get their price.³⁷

More than just a threat to 'private initiative,' VICO menaced a centuries-old way of life, and the planters refused to abandon their estates at too low a price.

Fortunately for VICO, Governor Pearson easily convinced the St. Thomas Council to accept the charter. Approval by the St. Croix Council had been intended only as a courtesy,

³⁶ NA RG 55/4, File 22-2 Lt. Gov. to Governor, 22, 1934; RG 55/27 Annual Report of the Lt. Gov. of St. 1934; Avis, Apr. 9-21 and May 29-31, 1934.

March
Croix,

³⁷ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 2) Governor to Asst. Secretary of the Interior, Mar. 22, 1934.

not a legal necessity, and federal officials knew that rejection by the Council did not represent the popular view of VICO. Concerned that the Council's action might influence Secretary Ickes to withdraw the PWA allotment, the St. Croix Labor Union, the Small Holders' Cooperative Association, and the Citizens' Progressive Union lobbied for the implementation of the plan. Even D. Hamilton Jackson, who had been less active in politics since being appointed Police Judge in September 1931, spoke in favor of VICO at a mass meeting attended by over one thousand people.³⁸ Backed by this popular support, Governor Pearson approached the St. Thomas Council, and found the merchants there eager to profit from the share of VICO funds to be spent on that island. In April 1934, the St. Thomas Council voted thirteen to two to incorporate the Virgin Islands Company with Secretary Ickes, Assistant Secretary Oscar Chapman, Governor Pearson, Judge D.H. Jackson, and Lionel Roberts of the St. Thomas Council, as the Board of Directors. The only votes in opposition came from Conrad Corneiro and Christian Petersen, who wanted a greater number of natives on the Board.³⁹ At last, after three years in office, the Pearson

³⁸ Annual Report by the Governor 1931, p. 30; NA RG 55/4, File 22-2 Lt. Governor to Governor, Mar. 22, 1934; RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 4), Secretary of the Interior to the President, Apr. 26, 1934 and enclosure; Avis, Sep. 18, 1931.

³⁹ NA RG 55/4, File 22-1 Proceedings of an Extraordinary Meeting of the Colonial Council for St. Thomas and St. John, Apr. 9, 1934.

administration had arrived at the beginning of a plan that offered hope for economic rehabilitation.

Victory in the struggle to incorporate VICO came too late to save Governor Pearson. Within a year after the approval of the Company's charter, the Pearson administration had become so embroiled in patronage politics, scandal, and labor strife, that the Senate Committee on Territories and Insular Affairs decided to investigate conditions in the colony. If Pearson had been able to spur an early economic recovery, better times might have averted the social conflicts that troubled his administration. In difficult times, the allocation of federal funds sparked conflict, as accusations of corruption and favoritism became part of everyday conversation. In his study of the Virgin Islands, Gordon Lewis skillfully described the social atmosphere of the territorial capital:

By 1935 the internal situation in St. Thomas had so much degenerated that its ordinarily peaceful social life had become almost completely disrupted. The contemporary descriptions read like the political warfare of the medieval Italian city-states: jobs lost, men expelled from the Tennis Club for political views, personal assaults, a climate of fear that barred people from talking openly with strangers, and worst of all a widespread underground espionage system operated by both government and antigovernment factions. . . . A collapse of general confidence between government and its opponents had clearly taken place.⁴⁰

Outside observers often found a considerable element of pettiness or comedy in the situation, but for Virgin Islanders, political connections determined their livelihood.

In July 1934, Government Attorney Eli Baer, the Baltimore lawyer who had obtained his appointment through the efforts of Senator Tydings, renewed the attacks against Pearson by charging the local Public Works Department with 101 counts of waste and corruption. In response, Secretary Ickes, who was extremely proud of the honesty of his PWA programs, sent two agents from his Division of Investigation to validate these accusations. When the agents found little of substance, Ickes angrily denounced the political motivations behind the charges, and removed Baer from his position. He also dismissed the police chief, Michael Nolan, and the executive assistant to the Governor, Paul Yates, for complicity in the Government Attorney's investigation into the Public Works Department.⁴¹

But charges of political motivation cut both ways. The findings of the Division of Investigation revealed that the Government Attorney had good reason to question the operations of the Public Works Department. While dismissing criminal intent, the Division agents reported that:

It is undoubtedly true that there have been administrative irregularities and that there has been a great deal of laxity in the prosecution of

⁴¹ Grede, pp. 110-114.

the public works program. It could not be otherwise in a department organized to operate on an annual budget of \$50,000 which suddenly is called upon to administer an expenditure of ten times that sum in a fraction of that time.⁴²

Not only did the Public Works Department lack a record-keeping system for materials on hand, but it also made only informal verbal contracts for obtaining supplies and then paid for those supplies "by putting the dealer's employees on the [Department] payroll until they were paid the full purchase price."⁴³ Clearly, such "irregularities" could provide much ammunition to antigovernment forces.

Given the political nature of the investigation of the Public Works Department, the dismissal of Baer, Nolan, and Yates only heightened the crisis in federal policy toward the islands. On his return to the States, Paul Yates traveled to Harlem, where he found ready allies willing to publicize the abuses of the Pearson regime. In November 1934, Casper Holstein used his considerable financial and political resources to convene a mass meeting to denounce the Governor. Along with Yates, Holstein invited Herbert Brown to be a principal speaker at the rally, and the presence of the architect of the rehabilitation program greatly enhanced the anti-Pearson campaign. After hearing Brown and Yates castigate Pearson, the crowd which had

⁴² NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-53 (Part 1) Asst. Solicitor to Asst. Secretary of the Interior, July 25, 1934.

⁴³ Ibid.

gathered at the Frederick Douglass High School approved a resolution praising Franklin D. Roosevelt, but bringing to his attention the ineptitude of his subordinate:

Hundreds of Virgin Islanders at mass meeting in peaceful assembly vow allegiance to your program in all its phases and to your New Deal in particular. We respectfully ask that, in order to get the maximum and lasting benefits to the people of the Virgin Islands, you replace the present executive with a more efficient one.⁴⁴

As in the islands, many Virgin Islanders in Harlem supported Governor Pearson, but they never matched the organizational efforts of the anti-Pearson forces. Ashley Totten, head of the American Virgin Islands Civic and Industrial Association, and now also Secretary-Treasurer of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, led the support for Pearson. Totten had developed a cordial relationship with the Governor, and firmly believed that Virgin Islanders should appreciate the efforts made on their behalf by the U.S. government.⁴⁵ Likewise, Rothschild Francis, still residing in New York City, feared that the anti-Pearson agitation might lead to a return of Navy rule, and he wrote several letters to Secretary Ickes favoring the present

⁴⁴ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, p. 150n; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 1) Report of Mass Meeting Held Under the Auspices of the Virgin Islands Congressional Council and Allied Virgin Islands Societies, Nov. 25, 1934.

⁴⁵ Guirty, pp. 65-72; NA RG 55/4, File 39-1 Governor to Ashley Totten, Dec. 20, 1933 and enclosure.

administration.⁴⁶ Yet, as demonstrated by the November 1934 rally, neither Totten nor Francis could convince the majority of islanders in Harlem that Pearson was the right man to implement New Deal policies.

Even as the Harlem rally publicized the faults of the Pearson regime, the scandal in the V.I. Public Works Department continued to envelop the local administration. Based on the Baer investigation, Police Chief Nolan had arrested two employees of the Public Works Department, Bruce Snowden, a white foreman, and Leonard McIntosh, a black clerk. Snowden pleaded guilty to selling government cement to private individuals, but McIntosh refuted the charge that he had stolen one ton of lumber and 39 bags of cement. When Government Attorney George Robinson, appointed by Pearson to replace Eli Baer, ruled that there was insufficient evidence to prosecute McIntosh, District Judge Webber Wilson decided to try the case himself. In December 1934, following the same logic that George Washington Williams used against Rothschild Francis in 1925, Judge Wilson denied McIntosh a jury trial, and then acting as both judge and prosecutor, fined the clerk \$200. This decision so outraged the Secretary of the Interior that he summoned Wilson to Washington for an explanation; but having already offended

⁴⁶ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, p. 150n; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 2) Francis to Secretary of the Interior; RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 3) Francis to Secretary of the Interior, Feb. 1, 1935.

Senator Tydings by removing Eli Baer, Ickes knew that he would court further trouble by meddling with another patronage appointment. With the local judiciary in revolt, Pearson was clearly losing his ability to govern effectively.⁴⁷

Along with the deteriorating relationship between judicial and executive branches, some members of the administration feared that increased attacks on the Governor by Morris Davis and his Roosevelt-Garner Democratic Club might threaten social stability. The corruption charges against the Pearson administration made Davis quite popular, and hundreds of people attended his fiery lectures in Frederiksted, Christiansted, and Charlotte Amalie. Claiming that Pearson was using federal money to enrich his friends, Davis mobilized support for Baer, Nolan, Yates, and Judge Wilson. In October 1934, a farewell parade for Paul Yates led to a clash with St. Thomian police, injuring several

⁴⁷ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 155-156; Grede, pp. 114-116; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-53 (Part 1) Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Aug. 16, 1934 and Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Oct. 8, 1934; File 9-11-53 (Part 2) Governor to Government Secretary, July 11, 1934 and Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Dec. 21, 1934; File 9-11-53 (Part 3) McIntosh vs. People of the V.I.: Brief for the Defendant-Appellant, Third Circuit Court of Appeals, Oct. Term, 1935. Arguing that the trial violated basic U.S. constitutional principles, the ACLU appealed McIntosh's case to the Third Circuit Court of Appeals, which upheld the decision of Judge Wilson. The ACLU then prepared to appeal to the Supreme Court, but in May 1936, McIntosh received an executive pardon from Acting Governor Morris De Castro. See Dookhan, "American Civil Liberties Union," p. 453; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-53 (Part 3) Governor to Actg. Director, Division of Territories, May 12, 1936 and enclosure.

people. The 'riot,' as V.I. newspapers termed the altercation, not only heightened local tensions, but also focused more national attention on the islands, which Morris Davis encouraged by gathering signatures for petitions to various federal officials. In May 1935, convinced that Governor Pearson was in serious trouble, Davis organized a victory parade for Judge Wilson, on his return from meeting with Secretary Ickes.⁴⁸

Not even the start of operations by the Virgin Islands Company could save Pearson. On November 1, 1934, known to Crucians as 'Liberty Day' in honor of the founding of both the St. Croix Labor Union and the Herald newspaper, the government and the Union organized a celebration to mark the purchase of the Bethlehem and Central Sugar factories by VICO. Besides listening to Governor Pearson and Judge Jackson, hundreds of people heard Ernest Gruening, the Director of the new Division of Territories, extol the

⁴⁸ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, p. 153; Grede, p. 124; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 1) Davis to Asst. Secretary of the Interior, Sep. 8, 1934; File 9-11-2 (Part 3) Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Oct. 17 & 24 and Nov. 1, 1934; File 9-11-2 (Part 4) Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Jan. 10, 1935, Maduro et.al. to Senator Tydings and Congressman McDuffie, Jan. 8, 1935, Report on Speeches by A.C. Pedro and Morris Davis, Feb. 2, 1935, and Report of Meeting Held in the Public Market, Feb. 4, 1935; File 9-11-24 Director of Conciliation, Department of Labor, to Director, Division of Territories, Sep. 18, 1934; File 9-11-53 Canton's Report, Vol. 2: Senator Reynolds to Senator Tydings, June 7, 1935; Bulletin, July 28 and Sept. 4, 1934; Avis, Nov. 21, 1934.

virtues of the present administration.⁴⁹ But despite their stated intention of improving workers' living conditions, wages much beyond the 45 cents a day now being paid to first class workers by the La Grange Sugar Company would ultimately drive the island's only remaining private sugar factory out of business. However, a ruling by the U.S. Comptroller General, exempting VICO from paying local taxes, led the Labor Union to claim that the federal corporation could afford higher wages. Governor Pearson even made a personal appeal to Union leaders to accept a fifty cent first class wage, but the Union stuck by its demands for a minimum of sixty cents. In March 1935, the government finally agreed to a temporary settlement at sixty cents, and Union workers began to prepare the VICO properties for cultivation, but as noted by Lt. Governor Lawrence Cramer, the reluctance to agree to Union demands:

has been to cause labor to suspect that what they considered the "promises" of the Administration to improve wage and working conditions through the agency of the Virgin Islands Company are not to be regarded seriously.⁵⁰

Moreover, the temporary nature of the settlement only continued the mistrust between VICO and its employees. With the agreement to expire at the end of June, the Governor

⁴⁹ Jarvis, Brief History, pp. 179-180; Avis, Nov. 6, 1934.

⁵⁰ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1) Lt. Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Mar. 26, 1935.

would again face the difficult challenge of trying to appease both La Grange and the Union.⁵¹

Not surprisingly, agitation by Morris Davis influenced the decision to pay first class laborers 60 cents. At the beginning of the negotiations, administration officials found that the Union leadership could not accept VICO's initial offer because

outside agitation among their members has caused many recent resignations and has resulted in the majority of their members ceasing to pay the Union dues. The annual convention and election of officers is scheduled for next week and they are expecting the election of a new slate of far less conservative leaders. This, they say, is because outsiders are promising to get them a sixty cents a day wage, whereas they themselves have only been able to get the scale up to forty-five cents⁵²

Then, once the temporary agreement had been signed, Morris Davis began demanding that the first class wage be raised to seventy-five cents on all estates, including those owned by La Grange, which had raised the wage to fifty cents in response to the VICO agreement. In March, he persuaded many laborers on the La Grange and Central Factory estates to strike, but the Labor Union continued production by replacing the strikers with more loyal workers. By easily

⁵¹ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1) Executive Assistant, P.W.A. to Director, Division of Territories, Mar. 1, 1935 and enclosure, Governor to Asst. Secretary of Interior, Mar. 6, 1935, Kleindienst to Director, Division of Territories, Mar. 13, 1935, and Lt. Governor to Director, Division of Territories, March 26, 1935.

⁵² NA RG 55/5, File 18-1 Actg. Lt. Governor to Governor, Dec. 17, 1934.

crushing the strike, the Labor Union ended any attempt by Davis to build a rival labor organization; but VICO acknowledged his power by agreeing to pay the seventy-five cent wage.⁵³

The success of Morris Davis in forcing VICO to raise wages marked the high point of his influence on the Crucian Labor movement. By criticizing the conservatism of the St. Croix Labor Union, Davis almost split that organization, and earned the enmity of D. Hamilton Jackson, who remained the island's most distinguished labor leader, though he no longer held an official Union position. In his lectures against the administration, Davis often attacked Jackson for abandoning the workers now that he had been appointed Police Judge. In response, Jackson labelled Davis an irresponsible agitator who hoped to get an appointment from a Democratic administration. Certainly, personal opportunism affected the political views of the two men, but a more profound difference separated them. Jackson looked backward to the days of Danish and Navy rule, and appreciated the evident concern of the present administration for improving the lives of Virgin Islanders. Davis complained that Pearson

⁵³ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-13 (Part 1) Amendment to Labor Agreement, May 15, 1935 enclosed in Minutes of Meeting with Secretary of Interior concerning VICO operations, Apr. 14, 1938, and General Manager, F.P. #16 to Director, Division of Territories, June 11, 1935; RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1) Lt. Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Mar. 26, 1935, President, VICO to Governor, Apr. 2, 1935 and enclosures, and Lt. Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Apr. 2, 1935; Avis, Mar. 25 and May 16, 1935.

and his staff had failed to fulfill the promises of Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal. In his speeches, Davis argued that each federal program only brought more highly paid officials from the mainland, while the wages of native workers remained at starvation levels. This argument found a sympathetic hearing among many workers, but most demonstrated their respect for Judge Jackson by remaining loyal to the Labor Union.

As his influence waned on St. Croix, Morris Davis gained new support on St. Thomas. Higher unemployment as a consequence of the depression had decimated both the St. Thomas Labor Union and the American Virgin Islands Federation of Labor, leaving the way open for attempts by Davis to establish a new union. By 1934, he had organized a coal carriers' union, but attracted only a few members.⁵⁴ Then in September 1934, he convinced the majority of workers at the hooked rug factory, a New Deal work relief project, to strike for higher wages, but management soon found a sufficient number of unemployed women to replace the strikers. In any case, the factory could not match the quality and price of similar mass produced Japanese rugs, so

⁵⁴ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1) Director of Conciliation, Department of Labor to Director, Division of Territories, Sep. 18, 1934 and enclosures, and Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Mar. 19, 1935 and enclosures.

the administration terminated the project.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Davis continued his organizing work until labor troubles on a P.W.A. engineering project handed him an opportunity to attract a large number of followers.

In May 1935, workers draining the swamp at Lindbergh Bay, named after the famed aviator who landed there in 1927, protested that they were being paid fifteen cents an hour, while workers at a similar project in Puerto Rico received twenty-five cents. After an attempt by Governor Pearson to explain that the Army officers supervising the project were bound by the prevailing wage rates failed to silence the protests, the workers walked off the project and called upon Morris Davis to negotiate a settlement. Between the passionate speeches by Davis and descriptions of Puerto Rican labor militancy by the worker from that island who had informed them of the wage discrepancy, the mood of the workers turned ugly. Some of them threatened the life of the Commissioner of Public Works, Donald Boreham, whom they blamed for refusing the wage increase. According to a report to Ernest Gruening from Governor Pearson:

A crowd gathered at Boreham's office, he was threatened, the police were called to disburse [sic] the crowd. The strikers and their friends armed themselves with clubs and machetes and wandered through the town in small groups. Most

⁵⁵ Daisy Reck, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1939), pp. 217-218; Annual Report of the Governor, 1934, p. 17; NA RG 55/27 Annual Report of the Director of Handicrafts, 1935, and Annual Report of the Commissioner of Industry, 1935.

of the property holders and more responsible people were terror stricken.⁵⁶

After three days of negotiation, Governor Pearson announced a general increase in the P.W.A. wage scale, which allowed the Army engineers to pay their employees twenty cents an hour. The striking laborers accepted the new wage and returned to work, but the Governor took an added precaution by asking a U.S. Coast Guard cutter to anchor in the harbor.⁵⁷

Recognizing the importance of Morris Davis, Governor Pearson invited him to participate in the formation of a labor board to mediate disputes between workers and their employers. Higher government wages had spawned demands for similar increases by many municipal and private sector workers, and the Governor hoped that the labor board, consisting of three government officials, the manager of the West Indian Company, and four labor representatives, could prevent further strikes. Indeed, the labor board quickly resolved strikes by the coal carriers, bakers, and police by getting WICO, the bakery, and the government to raise the wages of their lower paid employees by 25 to 50 percent. Because Morris Davis, who now claimed to lead the majority

⁵⁶ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1), Governor to Director, Division of Territories, May 11, 1935.

⁵⁷ Annual Report of the Governor, 1935, p. 25; NA RG 55/5, File 30 Governor to Government Secretary, June 12, 1935 and enclosure; RG 55/27 Annual Report of the Government Secretary, 1935; RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1) Governor to Director, Division of Territories, May 11, 1935.

of P.W.A. and WICO workers, and Joseph Francis, the president of the Federal Labor Union (the successor to the American V.I. Federation of Labor) represented the only two viable labor organizations on St. Thomas, Pearson allowed them to control the four labor seats on the board. When the two men took a great interest in the success of the Labor Board, the Governor congratulated himself on finding a method to achieve labor peace, but his decision to concede so much power to Davis and Francis displeased officials in Washington.⁵⁸ After hearing of the composition of the labor board, Secretary Ickes wired an angry telegram to Governor Pearson:

Am utterly astonished that you should have thus compromised our entire situation and given what amounts to endorsement of men who have been putting in all their time trying to tear down your own administration. An act such as this simply leaves one helpless and wondering whether it worthwhile to defend an administration that is so blundering in defending itself.⁵⁹

Unfortunately for Governor Pearson, Harold Ickes too had become so involved in the politics of patronage that he saw the appointment of Davis and Francis more as a political victory for his opponents in Congress than as an achievement

⁵⁸ Annual Report of the Governor, 1935, pp. 25-26; NA RG 55/5, File 30 Actg. Governor to Governor, June 15, 1935; RG 55/27 Annual Report of the Government Secretary, 1935; RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1) Governor to Director, Division of Territories, May 11, 1935 and Government Secretary to Director, Division of Territories, May 22, 1935.

⁵⁹ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1) Secretary of the Interior to Governor, May 18, 1935.

in social stability for the islands. Now that the formation of the labor board had begun a possible reconciliation between Pearson and his local opponents, the Governor lost the unwavering support of his superiors.

Meanwhile, a growing demand by St. Thomas merchants for the return of Navy rule caused an additional problem for Pearson. With the onset of the Great Depression and the closure of the naval base, many merchants wondered if their island had not been better served by the Naval officers. As early as February 1933, the St. Thomas Colonial Council passed a resolution demanding the return of the Navy regime, but Secretary Ickes only chided the local politicians for their lack of faith in federal policy.⁶⁰ At first, federal officials dismissed the call for Navy rule as the work of merchants who valued their profits over the benefits promised the working class by the Pearson administration. But the persistence of the demand forced some officials to admit that the position of the merchants was gaining popular support. By 1934, Ella Giffit, a small merchant and founder of the Suffragist League, had mobilized a popular pro-Navy movement by protesting the lack of economic and political

⁶⁰ Walters, pp. 137-138; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 1) Miller to President Roosevelt, Aug. 12, 1933 and enclosures, and Secretary of the Interior to Miller, Aug. 12, 1933.

progress under the Pearson regime.⁶¹ Then in 1935, the St. Thomas Council began anew the debate on the desirability of the Navy's return. By July, most members appeared to favor a resolution urging the return of the Navy, but before a vote could be taken, the Senate Committee on Territories and Insular Possessions began hearings on the situation in the Virgin Islands.⁶²

Chaired by Senator Tydings, the committee hearings were designed to embarrass Secretary Ickes and Governor Pearson. While promising an impartial investigation into the charges of corruption against the colonial administration, the rules of the hearing left no doubt that Tydings, with encouragement from Senator Pat Harrison, intended to punish Ickes for dismissing Eli Baer and challenging Judge Wilson. Yet, not even Harold Ickes could deny that the charges of corruption, the labor strife, and the stationing of a Coast Guard cutter in St. Thomas harbor were sufficient to warrant an investigation. The fact that the New York Times index

⁶¹ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, p. 153n; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 1) Secretary of the Interior to Actg. Governor, Feb. 21, 1933, Colcord to President Roosevelt, Mar. 21, 1933, Files on Ella Giffit, Jose I. Gimenez, and Joseph Reynolds 1933-1934; Bulletin, Mar. 4, 1933.

⁶² Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, p. 156; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-2 (Part 1) Secretary of the Interior to the President, Aug. 15, 1935; RG 55/5, File 58-2 Proceedings of an Extraordinary Meeting of the Colonial Council of St. Thomas and St. John, July 29, 1935; RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 1) Actg. Governor to Director, Division of Territories, July 30, 1935; Bulletin, July 26, 1935. On July 29, even though Pearson had been removed from office, the Council voted 9-1 in favor of Navy rule.

listed 232 entries under "Virgin Islands" for the period 1931-1935, and only 22 for 1926-1930 indicated the extent of the trouble that the colony was causing the Roosevelt administration. Indeed, convinced that Pearson had served Virgin Islanders well, Ickes initially welcomed the investigation; but after Senator Tydings denied him the right to testify or cross-examine witnesses, the Secretary denounced the hearing.⁶³

If the feud between Senator Tydings and Secretary Ickes had turned the hearing into a personal vendetta, a fist fight between Paul Yates and a Pearson supporter made it a political carnival. Yates had been recommended to Governor Pearson by Robert Allen, a Washington, D.C. journalist, who now confronted the former executive assistant in the Senate office building for turning against the Governor. After exchanging harsh words, Allen beat Yates severely, forcing him to postpone his appearance at the hearing. This incident put the hearing on the front page of the major newspapers, and drew a large crowd to hear witness after witness lambaste the Pearson administration.⁶⁴

Front page coverage of the hearings forced President Franklin Roosevelt to intervene. Although the President

⁶³ Lewis, p. 79, O'Neill, p. 55; Grede, pp. 116-118 and 125; For 1936-1942, 61 entries appear under "Virgin Islands."

⁶⁴ Lewis, The Virgin Islands, pp. 79-80; Grede, pp. 125-128; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-53 Canton's Report (Vol. 1), Aug. 13, 1935; Bulletin, July 6, 1935.

sympathized with his Secretary of the Interior's plight, he could not openly defend either Ickes or Pearson without being accused of meddling in the internal affairs of the Senate. However, to save his administration further embarrassment, Roosevelt complied with Tydings' request that Pearson be removed from office. In return, the President asked for the resignation of Judge Webber Wilson. Roosevelt reassigned both men to jobs elsewhere in the federal bureaucracy, and once again, began the search for someone to solve the problems of the Virgin Islands.⁶⁵

But merely replacing one man with another could not solve the problem of the Virgin Islands. In August 1935, after further hearings by the Senate Committee on Territories and Insular Affairs, President Roosevelt appointed Lieutenant Governor Lawrence Cramer to replace Paul Pearson. While some Virgin Islanders applauded the decision to appoint someone already familiar with their difficulties, others protested that Cramer had been too close to Governor Pearson. The new governor then further complicated the situation by dismissing Dr. D.C. Canegata from the post of municipal physician for having opposed Cramer's nomination at the Senate hearing.⁶⁶ At the start of his term, it appeared that Cramer would face the same

⁶⁵ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, p. 65; Grede, pp. 118-119 & 129-130.

⁶⁶ Bulletin, Aug. 7 and Sep. 12, 1935.

political obstacles that had plagued the Pearson administration.

To his credit, the new governor understood that the 'Virgin Islands problem' required a political solution. Unless Virgin Islanders assumed more responsibility for managing their own affairs, the Secretary of the Interior and the President would continually be dragged into local quarrels. Because of the depression, the anti-Pearson campaign had emphasized economic issues, but they often included political reform in their demands. Political powerlessness would lead to political frustration, no matter whom the President chose to govern the islands. President Roosevelt had chosen Cramer because of his familiarity with the economic rehabilitation plan, but realizing that he needed to give political reform high priority, the new governor directed his greatest efforts at obtaining a new constitution for the American colony.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ORGANIC ACT

The Great Depression revealed the inadequacy of the existing political system in the Virgin Islands. Although popular leaders had been demanding political reform since the advent of U.S. rule, the growing dependence of the islands on federal aid finally convinced the American rulers that the Colonial Councils had abdicated their responsibility for managing the local government. The reluctance of the Colonial Councils to raise taxes thwarted federal attempts to move the islands toward financial self-sufficiency, and forced a more active promotion of political reform by the newly inaugurated Governor Cramer. By stressing the need for Colonial Councils more willing to consider tax reforms, Cramer also rekindled the hopes of middle class activists that they could finally break the political power of the planters and merchants. In return for supporting tax reforms middle class politicians gained official support for the wider suffrage that promised to give them control of the legislatures. The need to achieve financial stability linked tax reform to universal suffrage. Together they threatened the dominance of the island elite, and portended a political revolution that would give middle

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policies of the Roosevelt administration, and they urged the President to support constitutional reform. Walter White, Secretary of the NAACP and member of the Virgin Islands Advisory Council, played an especially important role in ensuring that the issue of a new constitution remained on the federal agenda for the islands. In 1933, as the effort to return St. Thomas to Navy rule gained local popular support, Walter White informed President Roosevelt that

the colored citizens of the United States view the proposed plan to return control of the Virgin Islands to the Navy . . . with great alarm. They consider the Virgin Islands of great significance and the attitude of the United States government toward these Islands as a reflection of Administration policy toward the Negro.²

Besides directly contacting the President, the NAACP Secretary counted on the support of the American Civil Liberties Union to organize a public campaign against Naval rule and in favor of a more democratic government for the colony. Under the direction of Roger Baldwin, the ACLU had already expended much energy to gain a new V.I. constitution, and now the leaders of the NAACP and the ACLU contacted numerous magazine and newspaper editors to remind the Roosevelt administration that it had a duty to expand the democratic rights of all U.S. citizens.³ Altogether,

² NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 1) White to President Roosevelt, Mar. 24, 1933.

³ Dookhan, "The American Civil Liberties Union," pp. 449-451; Ross, pp. 255-259.

these efforts persuaded the President to reject the resolutions of the St. Thomas Colonial Council in favor of Navy Rule. At the end of July 1935, when the Council duplicated its 1933 request by voting again for Navy rule, Roosevelt only agreed to establish a Marine Corps air base on the island.⁴ Totaling seven planes with eighty officers and enlisted men, the air base could not completely replace the larger contingent lost with the departure of the Navy government, but income from the new facilities blunted merchant criticism of civilian rule. More importantly, by limiting the military presence on St. Thomas to this airbase, the President made clear his intention to support the political objectives of the rehabilitation program.

The political demands of the anti-Pearson movement also spurred Governor Cramer to give high priority to implementing a new constitution. Because of the economic difficulties facing the colony, anti-government leaders seldom emphasized political reform, but often economic and political concerns could not be separated. Even when political demands were not overtly stated, economic complaints implied a belief in the necessity for more native political power. Still, protests against the Pearson regime sometimes included explicit demands for political reform. In July 1934, when President Roosevelt visited St. Thomas, Ella Giffit audaciously interrupted the welcoming ceremony to

⁴Jarvis, Brief History, p. 228.

hand him a petition asking for the removal of Governor Pearson. While emphasizing the economic ineptitude of the Pearson administration, the petition assumed a distinctive political cast when presented by the president of the Suffragist League.⁵ Two months later, in the midst of the Public Works scandal, the Roosevelt-Garner Democratic Club and the Suffragist League sent the Department of the Interior a typed four page resolution entitled "The People's Complaint Against Governor Pearson." Among the eighteen proposals to improve life in the islands, the resolution listed the need to extend the suffrage.⁶ A year later, the Senators presiding over the hearings on Cramer's appointment heard personally from St. Thomas Council member Lionel Roberts on the desire of Virgin Islanders for a new organic act. After criticizing Cramer for supporting the removal of Judge Webber Wilson, Roberts suggested an outline for the new charter. The Baltimore Afro-American captured the self-consciousness of the island politician in the presence of powerful U.S. senators.

Pulling from his pocket a small piece of brown paper, . . . Roberts prefaced his reading by the remark that the famous Lincoln's Gettysburg

⁵ Paiewonsky, pp. 102-103; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 1) Suffragist League to President Roosevelt, July 7, 1934.

⁶ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 1) Davis to Asst. Secretary of the Interior, Sep. 8, 1934 and enclosure.

address was written on a 'little torn piece of brown paper.'⁷

Roberts asked Congress to enact legislation that would provide the Virgin Islands with universal suffrage, fully elected Councils, and the separation of the judiciary from the executive branch of government.⁸

In his inaugural address, Governor Cramer announced that he would place a high priority on obtaining Congressional approval of a new organic act.⁹ Having written the draft constitution that had been introduced to Congress in 1932, the new governor was quite familiar with the obstacles that prevented its passage. Because Congress had indicated that it would not consider a new constitution until the island politicians had an opportunity to present their views, Cramer encouraged the Colonial Councils of St. Thomas and St. Croix to form a joint committee to draft an organic act. In 1932, the Councils had ignored a similar request by Governor Pearson. Now, the two legislatures responded by each selecting five members to serve on a joint organic act committee.¹⁰ Both Cramer's inaugural address and the call for action on a new constitution by the Senate

⁷ Quoted in The Bulletin, Aug. 8, 1935.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Jarvis, Brief History, p. 228; Ross, p. 313.

¹⁰ Cregue, p. 106.

Committee on Territories and Insular Affairs awakened the Colonial Councils to the danger that they might no longer be able to delay political reform. They had to accept the Governor's request, or remain on the sidelines in the upcoming debate on a new constitution.

In December 1935, the decision by District Judge Albert Levitt to extend franchise rights to women foreshadowed the impending political changes. Upon the petition of three St. Thomas schoolteachers, Judge Levitt ruled that the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution did apply to the Virgin Islands. While affecting only those women who otherwise met the property qualifications, this judgement broadened considerably the size of the electorate for the next election.¹¹

Meanwhile, leaders of the V.I. community in Harlem appealed to the ACLU to reinsert itself in the process of writing the organic act. Not fully trusting either the Governor or the Councils, Casper Holstein turned to Roger Baldwin to produce a document that would give islanders the greatest possible measure of self-government. At first, the director of the ACLU stated a preference for awaiting the completion of the two existing drafts, but on further insistence by Holstein, Baldwin selected Dr. Theodore Schroeder, a lawyer and ACLU member who spent winters on St.

¹¹ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, p. 170; Creque, pp. 100-101; Jarvis, Brief History, p. 228.

Croix, to prepare a constitution. In December 1935, Schroeder completed his first draft, and the ACLU circulated copies among V.I. leaders in Harlem, the Colonial Councils, and local administration figures.¹²

Both Schroeder and the joint committee of the Colonial Councils based their documents on the 1932 Cramer draft. When that draft had been submitted to the Department of the Interior, Secretary Ray Wilbur had eliminated the provision for a nonvoting delegate to Congress as a waste of money. Although the ACLU had criticized the original Cramer draft for giving the governor too much power, and the Colonial Councils had complained about being ignored by the administration, the Secretary's action demonstrated that the present governor had crafted the best constitution Virgin Islanders could expect. Now, the ACLU and the Colonial Councils restored the provision for a delegate to Congress, and hoped for approval from Congress.¹³

All three drafts envisioned the same basic structure for the new government. They extended suffrage to all adult U.S. citizens who were literate in English, and eliminated the power of the governor to appoint members to the Councils. As a cost saving measure, this broader electorate

¹² Dookhan, "American Civil Liberties Union," pp. 453-454; Ross, pp. 316-317; Walters, pp. 150-151.

¹³ Evans, pp. 254-255; Dookhan, "The American Civil Liberties Union," pp. 449-450 & 454; Ross, pp. 243-244 & 320; Walters, pp. 144-152.

would choose a reduced number of legislators, though the total number varied from 16 to 22 depending on the draft. To strengthen the power of the legislatures, the bills replaced the absolute veto power of the governor with a suspensive veto, which allowed a two-thirds vote in the appropriate Council to override an executive veto. The drafts also attempted to promote inter-island unity by creating a Legislative Assembly of the Virgin Islands consisting of the full membership of both councils, which would meet at least once annually to discuss bills proposed by the governor.¹⁴

At the beginning of 1936, the joint committee of the Colonial Councils completed its draft, and Governor Cramer forwarded copies to Ernest Gruening, who, as head of the newly created Division of Territories, was given the responsibility of presenting a bill to Congress. Fearing that an independent local legislature would squander federal appropriations, Gruening rejected every major provision of the Council draft that conflicted with the amended Cramer constitution. Like Secretary Wilbur, Gruening decided that the islands did not need a delegate to Congress, and he balked at the provisions giving the Councils greater control over government appointees. He cited as a waste of money the provisions giving the St. Croix Council twelve members

¹⁴ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, p. 181; Creque, p. 106; Dookhan, "The American Civil Liberties Union," pp. 454-455; Ross, pp. 319-320.

and the St. Thomas Council ten members, while the Cramer draft limited membership to nine and seven, respectively. Gruening also disapproved of the attempt by the joint committee to revive the old power of the legislative commissions in the form of a municipal committee for each Council that could allocate administrative expenditures. Instead, he sided with the status quo by favoring the provision in the Cramer draft giving the municipal committees only advisory functions.¹⁵

Finally, Gruening objected to the provision in the Council draft which postponed implementation of universal suffrage until January 1, 1938 as an attempt to delay progressive tax legislation. While the joint committee was framing its draft, the House of Representatives had begun consideration of a bill authorizing V.I. legislatures to replace the numerous existing Danish tax laws with a single real property tax. Because the 1917 Congressional act establishing a temporary government for the colony forbade the local councils to repeal existing taxes, the Division of Territories needed new Congressional legislation to overhaul the tax system, and Gruening hoped that such legislation could be soon presented to the Colonial Councils. Expecting

¹⁵ Evans, pp. 54-55; Creque, p. 106; Dookhan, "The American Civil Liberties Union," pp. 454-455; Ross, pp. 319-323; Fifteenth Census, Outlying Territories and Possessions, 1930, p. 259; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 1) Hearings before the Senate Committee on Territories and Insular Affairs on Organic Act for the Virgin Islands, Mar. 31, 1936.

more cooperation from popularly elected Councils in erecting a new tax structure, the Division director urged implementation of universal suffrage in time for the 1936 elections. After finding so many faults in the Council draft, Gruening fashioned a bill that closely resembled the amended Cramer draft.¹⁶

In March, the Senate Committee on Territories and Insular Affairs agreed to hear testimony on the Department of Interior and the Colonial Council drafts. This left the ACLU to decide which draft to support. Somewhat surprisingly, despite the similarities between the Council and ACLU drafts, Roger Baldwin decided to support the Constitution proposed by the Department of the Interior. After conferring with Governor Cramer, the director of the ACLU realized neither the Department of the Interior nor Congress would accept a V.I. delegate to Congress or greater Council oversight of the executive branch of the local government. Given these objections, ACLU support for the Colonial Council draft could only deadlock the Senate hearings and prevent, once again, the passage of a V.I. constitution. Since the Interior constitution granted

¹⁶ Evans, pp. 54-55; Ross, p. 319; Grede, p. 188; Annual Report of the Governor 1936, p. 3; Avis, Nov. 4, 1936; Daily News, Nov. 4, 1936.

universal suffrage, the ACLU's main objective, Roger Baldwin agreed to lobby for that draft.¹⁷

At the hearings, most witnesses testified in favor of the Interior draft, and a delegation from the Colonial Councils had only a limited influence on the final version of the Senate bill. Besides favorable testimony for the Interior draft from Governor Cramer and various Department officials, Virgin Islanders in Harlem indicated their support for the passage of any Organic Act, regardless of its particularities. The arrest of Casper Holstein for gambling in December 1935 prevented that long-time fighter for political reform from participating in the debate, but the Senate Committee received messages of general support from Ashley Totten's Virgin Island Civic and Industrial Association, and the newly formed Federation of Virgin Island Societies. The Committee refused a request from Walter White to testify on behalf of the NAACP and the Virgin Islands Advisory Council, but the Council's Joanna Colcord submitted written testimony supporting the Interior constitution. With all this testimony in favor of the Department of Interior draft, the Council delegates salvaged only their provision postponing universal suffrage until 1938. Arguing that local politicians needed time to prepare

¹⁷ Dookhan, "The American Civil Liberties Union," pp. 454-455; Grede, p. 188; Annual Report of the Governor 1936, p. 3.

their constituents to exercise their new rights, the Senate Committee agreed to incorporate the postponement into the Organic Act. At the end of April, the Senators approved a bill that was nearly identical to the Interior draft.¹⁸

Once approved by the Senate Committee on Territories and Insular Affairs, the new constitution passed rapidly through the full Senate and the House of Representatives. On June 22, 1936, President Roosevelt signed the bill establishing the Organic Act of the Virgin Islands. While a few merchant and planter politicians grumbled that the Act gave too much power to the governor, popular leaders rejoiced over the achievement of the long sought goal of universal suffrage.¹⁹ One month after signing the Organic Act legislation, President Roosevelt indicated the possible extent of change by appointing a native black Crucian, James A. Bough, to be district attorney, a new position which replaced the former post of government attorney. Then, in the following year, the President sought to appease black Democrats by appointing a black American, William H. Hastie,

¹⁸ Creque, p. 106; Geraldo Guirty, pp. 31-32 & 48; Dookhan, "The American Civil Liberties Union," pp. 454-455; Ross, pp. 317-323; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 2) Burnett to Secretary of the Interior, Mar. 28, 1936, Governor to Director, Division of Territories, April 3, 1936 and enclosure, and Hearings before the Senate Committee on Territories and Insular Affairs, Organic Act for the Virgin Islands, Mar. 31 and Apr. 1, 1936.

¹⁹ Hill, Chapter 7; Creque, pp. 107-108.

as District Judge of the Virgin Islands.²⁰ If the result of universal suffrage matched these Presidential actions, important political positions in the colony would cease to be the exclusive preserve of white men.

With the passage of the Organic Act, both the Governor and popular forces in the Virgin Islands could claim victory. Despite the invitation to the Colonial Councils to formulate their own version of the constitution, Governor Cramer succeeded in getting his draft through Congress almost fully intact. Given the final version of the Organic Act, local politicians could rightfully charge that neither Governor Cramer nor Director Gruening paid serious attention to the efforts of the Colonial Councils. At the same time, popular leaders such as Rothschild Francis, D. Hamilton Jackson, and Morris Davis could claim that they had finally forced the administration to attend the wishes of the people. In their view, 1936 culminated the efforts begun by Rothschild Francis in 1924.

Certainly, the final document pleased Governor Cramer. By successfully warding off the attempt by the Colonial Councils to revive the legislative commissions, the governor retained control of federal expenditures and administrative appointments. In an effort to emphasize the steps toward greater self-government, the Act renamed the legislatures

Municipal Councils, but they still could not enact major legislation without the support of the governor and the federal bureaucracy. While the governor lost his power of absolute veto, he could appeal to the President or Congress to block any legislation that the Council passed over the governor's veto. Similarly, the lack of a delegate to Congress limited Council access to the federal government, whereas the governor could call on the Interior Department to influence national legislation affecting the islands.

For their part, popular leaders envisioned a political system that would enact legislation beneficial to the masses. That they would need the cooperation of an appointed governor seemed much less important than the opportunity to break the political power of the planter and merchant elite. Furthermore, their faith in the New Deal led popular leaders to believe that any governor appointed by Franklin Roosevelt would cooperate in passing such social welfare legislation as laws providing for minimum wages, maximum working hours, worker compensation for sickness, and pensions. Already, both civilian governors had expressed their desire for a progressive taxation that could crack the economic stranglehold of the Crucian planters. While no one expected overnight success, the Organic Act promised ordinary Virgin Islanders unprecedented political power.

The losers in the Organic Act struggle were the planters and merchants. Attacked by the governor for their

lack of fiscal responsibility, and by popular leaders for denying political rights to the masses, the local elite prepared to relinquish control of the Colonial Councils. Of course, nothing in the Act directly threatened the economic power of the planters and merchants, but they would find it more difficult to use political means to protect their economic interests. Yet, their economic weakness contributed to their political demise. The depression and increased federal expenditures in the islands battered elite control over jobs and government revenues. The struggle over the incorporation of the Virgin Islands Company demonstrated the special weakness of the Crucian planters, but, though not as hard hit, merchants on both islands became more dependent on federal contracts, which the Governor controlled. Indeed, only the federal commitment to the existence of private enterprise prevented the collapse of many businesses, and even with this commitment, many members of the upper class could only maintain their standard of living by accepting positions in the government bureaucracy.

Because of its provision for universal suffrage, the passage of the Organic Act marked the beginning of a new era in the Virgin Islands. However, the expected changes would take several years to become reality. Only after 1938, when the first election based on universal suffrage resulted in a lower than expected voter response, did popular leaders

begin to learn the value of voter education, political parties, and electoral platforms. Lacking the necessary political skills and connections, the new middle class candidates often failed to dislodge their merchant and planter opponents from the new Municipal Councils. Not until they learned the rules of the new politics could popular leaders fulfill the promise of the Organic Act.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FEDERAL AID PROGRAMS

The economic programs of the New Deal greatly influenced the differing definitions of Americanization in the Virgin Islands. Viewing the New Deal programs as a broadening of the rehabilitation plan conceived by Herbert Brown, the civilian administrators defined Americanization as a policy seeking to achieve both self-sufficiency and a higher standard of living for Virgin Islanders. Yet, the continuing weakness of the V.I. economy impeded the attainment of either goal. Instead, as federal projects became the largest employers in the islands, government officials had to decide whether to use federal funds to protect private enterprise or to raise wages for workers. In this context, Americanization meant more than the improvement of infrastructure and the creation of jobs; it became a struggle to determine who would most benefit from the expenditure of federal funds.

Believing that the islanders should be grateful for whatever federal assistance they received, many government officials could not understand Virgin Islanders' demands that they were due federal aid as a right of U.S. citizenship. While expressing great admiration for President Roosevelt and the New Deal, Virgin Islanders

blamed the local administration for denying them the full benefits of federal programs. In response, administration officials often accused the natives of being too lazy to pull themselves out of poverty. This mistrust between white continentals and black islanders led to an increasingly tense racial situation. To his credit, Governor Lawrence Cramer displayed enough sensitivity to the problems of Virgin Islanders to avoid the sort of popular protests that ousted Governor Pearson. On the contrary, white residents who feared that Cramer sympathized too much with black islanders eventually forced him to resign. The vast federal expenditures, over which Cramer presided, certainly prevented the collapse of the V.I. economy, but could not solve the basic class conflicts separating the few owners of land and commercial enterprises from the masses of wage workers and tenant farmers.

Everyone agreed that the Virgin Islands needed a massive infusion of federal funds. With the decline of shipping and the bankruptcy of the sugar industry, only food shipments from the American Red Cross and the initial Congressional appropriations for the rehabilitation plan staved off widespread starvation. Then in 1933, the inclusion of the Virgin Islands in the Congressional acts creating the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) and the Public Works Administration (PWA) allowed the local

government to initiate a more comprehensive relief program. Clearly, local revenues could not provide sufficient relief for the thousands of hungry islanders. From 1933 to 1936, the lifetime of FERA, the colonial governments raised an annual average of \$245,470 in tax revenues. Due to the insufficiency of this amount to meet government expenditures, Congress appropriated an annual average of \$365,000 to pay the salaries of the governor and his staff, and to cover the local deficit. Against these figures FERA and PWA expended annually \$181,000 and \$87,000, respectively, in direct and work relief projects. Beginning in 1936, with the replacement of FERA by the Works Projects Administration (WPA), federal relief increased even further. Between 1936 and 1940, WPA averaged \$436,340 each year on work relief projects in the Virgin Islands, while PWA maintained its pre-1936 expenditures. Together, these three agencies distributed food, employed laborers to build or improve roads and public buildings, helped organize cooperatives for farmers and artisans, and sponsored nursery schools and adult education classes.¹ During its existence, nearly half of the families on the islands depended on FERA food allotments to supplement their diet, and each year some

¹ Grede, pp. 107-108; Annual Reports of the Governor 1933-1936; NA RG 55/27 Reports of the Government Secretary and Commissioner of Finance, 1934, Report of the Commissioner of Finance, 1936, Report of the Governor, 1939, and Report of the Commissioner of Finance, 1940; RG 55/5, File 19-1 Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Oct. 2, 1936; Daily News, July 2, 1936 and July 20, 1939.

4,000 persons, out of a total labor force of 12,000 people, received temporary employment on FERA, PWA, or WPA projects.²

While necessary to prevent total collapse, the relief programs could not rescue the V.I. economy. Food allotments did nothing to stimulate the economy, and the work relief projects usually offered regular employment to only some 1,000 persons.³ Even as relief funds poured into the islands, administration officials warned Virgin Islanders that Congress expected them to take steps to make the colony more self-sufficient. Indeed, Congress backed this warning by reducing the direct federal appropriations to the local government. Between 1933 and 1940, Congressional payments to cover the shortage in local tax revenues fell from \$412,000 to \$230,000.⁴ To help rejuvenate the economy, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, acting as Director of the PWA, approved a \$1 million grant to create the Virgin Islands Company (VICO), but the administration also expected island politicians to make a greater effort to balance the

² Annual Report of the Governor 1934, p. 3; Fifteenth Census, Outlying Territories and Possessions, pp. 275-276; NA RG 55/5, File 18-1, Governor to Director, Federal Emergency Conservation Work, Aug. 15, 1934; RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 1) Governor to Asst. Secretary of the Interior, Aug. 21, 1934; Bulletin, Oct. 18, 1933.

³ NA RG 55/27 Report of the Superintendent of Public Welfare, St. Thomas-St. John, 1939; Bulletin, Oct. 18, 1933.

⁴ NA RG 55/5, File 58-2A Actg. Governor to Chairman of the Colonial Council of St. Thomas and St. John, June 14, 1935; RG 55/27 Report of the Commissioner of Finance, 1940.

local budget. Yet, the refusal of the St. Croix Colonial Council to incorporate VICO exemplified the reluctance of the local elite to approve any legislation that would threaten their own interests.

Of course, the local politicians realized the need to raise greater revenues, but they criticized the federal government for expecting their poverty-stricken communities to bear an unfair share of the burden of government expenditures. At the beginning of 1934, when federal relief projects had mitigated the worst of the islands' economic suffering, the Chairman of the St. Thomas Colonial Council, Valdemar Christensen, reminded his colleagues that their island still faced a grave future:

It is indeed a question what is going to happen to us when the balmy days we are now enjoying come to an end . . . the day when we will be able to qualify as an American Winter Play Ground is far off and in the mean-while we have to live.⁵

Citing Congressional approval of Brown's rehabilitation plan, the Council members argued that the governor should not ask them to raise taxes until the federal programs, which included a design to boost tourism, had been given a chance to succeed. Resistance to taxation was especially strong in the St. Thomas Council, whose members felt that their vote to incorporate VICO was part of a larger bargain with the federal government. By 1938, as the reduction of

⁵ NA RG 55/4, File 22-1 Address by Chairman of the Colonial Council of St. Thomas and St. John, Jan. 1, 1934.

the Congressional deficiency appropriation made financing government services increasingly difficult, the Council blamed the federal government for the territory's economic problems:

Congress gave several millions to Virgin Islands Rehabilitation with a definite understanding. As Rehabilitation Agencies produced Revenue, Congressional aid was to be decreased. . . . Congress is slashing the Deficiency Appropriation. The Federal Rehabilitation Agencies are not living up to their obligations.⁶

Still, the reductions in the Congressional appropriations had their desired effect. Between 1933 and 1940, the combined tax revenues of the local governments increased from \$194,000 to \$408,860.⁷

In May 1936, the passage of a Congressional Act authorizing the Colonial Councils to implement a real property tax greatly strengthened the power of the governor to demand tax reform. While urging the Councils to replace existing taxes on land and personal goods with a single real property tax of 1 1/4 percent, the legislation also empowered the President to enact the new tax if the Councils refused. To nudge the Councils along, Governor Cramer argued that the Act promoted tax fairness by obliging VICO to pay local taxes. Appreciating the revenue value of VICO

⁶ NA RG 55/5, File 58-2d, Municipal Committee to the Advisory Committee, Mar. 28, 1938.

⁷ NA RG 55/27 Report of the Commissioner of Finance, 1940; RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 1) Governor to Actg. Governor, June 8, 1939.

and understanding that they had little choice, the members of the St. Croix Council passed a measure that met the Congressional guidelines, but the St. Thomas Council attempted to bypass the intent of Congress by enacting a one percent real property tax. When Governor Cramer angrily vetoed this legislation, the Council, under the provisions of the new Organic Act, overrode the veto, thereby forcing President Roosevelt to institute a 1 1/4 property tax.⁸ The new tax accounted for a large part of the increase in local revenues after 1936. On St. Croix, where payments from VICO made the new tax the single largest source of government revenue, total tax collection jumped from \$127,170 in 1936 to \$178,000 in 1937, when the new law came into effect. On St. Thomas, where the real property tax was second in importance to the tax on income, government revenues also increased markedly. In 1938, the first full year for collecting the new tax, revenues reached \$213,980 as compared to \$179,640 a year earlier.⁹

⁸ Annual Report of the Governor 1936, p. 3; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-2 (Part 1) Asst. Secretary of the Interior to Governor, Oct. 17, 1936; RG 55/5, File 31 Governor to Government Secretary, Aug. 26, 1936; RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 5) Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Aug. 18, 1936 and enclosures, Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Oct. 9, 1936; File 9-11-30 (Part 7) Actg. Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Mar. 12, 1937 and enclosures; Bulletin, Oct. 29-Nov. 8, 1935; Daily News, Sep. 24 and Oct. 9, 1936.

⁹ NA RG 55/27 Report of the Administrator for St. Croix, 1937 and Report of the Commissioner of Finance, 1940.

While Governor Cramer continued to prod the Councils toward raising more revenue by reminding them that the Virgin Islands paid much less taxes per capita than similar communities on the mainland, the chief executive realized that local taxpayers had exhausted their ability to close the government deficit.¹⁰ As late as 1940 only 206 residents paid income taxes,¹¹ and to widen the scope of this tax might only hurt the people the rehabilitation plan hoped to benefit. Similarly, a further rise in the real property tax would also discourage agricultural laborers and tenant farmers from purchasing the homesteads that federal planners envisioned as the basis of a rejuvenated economy. Without a massive infusion of federal aid, the American colony would remain the "effective poorhouse" described by President Hoover.

On St. Croix, the federal rehabilitation plan centered on the Virgin Islands Company. Although its directors hoped that VICO would eventually become a profitable enterprise, the company depended heavily on federal funds to begin operations. Besides the original \$1 million PWA grant to

¹⁰ In response to complaints that they were being overtaxed, Governor Cramer informed local politicians that the Virgin Islands paid less than \$10 per capita in government revenue, whereas people in the United States spent about \$100 per capita in municipal, county, city, and federal taxes. See NA RG 55/5, File 30 Memorandum for the Governor from the Government Secretary, June 15, 1937 and the Daily News, May 20, 1939.

¹¹ NA RG 55/27 Report of the Commissioner of Finance, 1940.

purchase and modernize the Bethlehem and Central sugar factories, VICO borrowed another \$1.5 million to purchase and prepare 4,900 acres of land for sugar cane cultivation.¹² By the mid-1930s, these investments enabled VICO to produce nearly half the sugar cane grown on St. Croix, and to manufacture 75 percent of the island's sugar.¹³ While this work provided jobs for up to 1,000 mill hands and field laborers, VICO failed to stimulate enough sugar production to justify reopening the Bethlehem sugar factory.¹⁴ Except for 1937, when unusually heavy rains nearly doubled cane production per acre, landowners hesitated to plant sugar cane. Because of VICO, total acreage planted in cane rose from 4,500 in 1933 to 6,500 in

¹² Robert G. Woolbert, "Rehabilitation in the Virgin Islands." Foreign Affairs, 17:4 (July 1939), p. 803; Grede, pp. 154-155; Ross, pp. 278-280; Annual Report of the Governor 1934, p. 71; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 2) "A Word Picture of St. Croix's Economic History and Present Status," Jan. 1943; File 9-11-38 "Bartram Brothers Estates," 1935-1937.

¹³ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-13 (Part 4) President, VICO to Treasurer, Apr. 12, 1939 and enclosure; RG 55/27 Report of the Administrator for St. Croix, 1939; RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 2) Vice-President, VICO to Director, Division of Territories, Feb. 6, 1943.

¹⁴ Boyd Brown, Report on St. Croix Economic Conditions: Relationship of the Virgin Islands Company, Federal Homesteads and Independent Small Growers to Economic Rehabilitation (Christiansted: VICO, 1939), p. 14; Isaac Dookhan, "The Virgin Islands Company and Corporation: The Plan for Economic Rehabilitation in the Virgin Islands," The Journal of Caribbean History, 4 (May 1972), pp. 68-69; Annual Report of the Governor 1944, p. 1; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-13 (Part 3) Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Feb. 16, 1938; RG 126/1, File 9-11-38 President, VICO to Chairman, Bd. of Directors VICO, June 13, 1935.

1940, but never reached the 9,000 acres common in the 1920s. Low sugar prices, higher wages, and continual drought kept estate owners and small farmers out of the sugar business. This aversion to growing sugar ruined the chances for VICO to make a profit. The rains of 1937 rewarded VICO with a small profit of \$5,000, but otherwise the company lost money. Between 1935 and 1940, average annual losses reached \$29,500.¹⁵ Only the lack of employment alternatives for the Crucian population prevented VICO from closing.

The most vigorous homesteading program ever seen on St. Croix accompanied the attempted revitalization of the sugar industry by VICO. Federal officials dreamed of creating a new social structure on St. Croix based on peasant agriculture and, backed by federal resources, they outlined a plan more extensive than anything attempted by the Danes, the St. Croix Labor Union, or the Colonial Councils. In 1932 and 1933, a Homestead Commission, consisting of federal and local officials, purchased 2,150 acres of land for allocation to 337 poor rural families. Most of these families had been tenant farmers who had been paying an annual rent of \$8 to \$12 an acre to farm their small plots, which made "it impossible . . . to gain enough, in the years when there is a sufficiency of rainfall, to take care of the

¹⁵ Dookhan, "The Virgin Islands Company," pp. 62-63; NA RG 55/27 Report of the Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station (St. Croix), 1940; RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 2) Vice President, VICO to Director, Division of Territories, Feb. 6, 1943.

years of very small or insufficient rainfall."¹⁶ Now, the Commission gave these farmers the opportunity to purchase land by signing a twenty year mortgage with payments less than half their former rent.¹⁷ Despite hopes that the homesteaders would help diversify Crucian agriculture, they continued to rely on sugar cane for cash income. In an attempt to find alternative export crops, Governor Pearson had sponsored projects to grow vegetables, primarily tomatoes, for the winter market in the United States, but after several unsuccessful years, the government abandoned the program. The homesteaders continued to raise traditional provision crops, and even supplied some of the needs of local markets, but they met their financial obligations by growing sugar cane. During the 1930s, the federal homesteaders, whose plots averaged six and a half acres, supplied some 20 percent of the cane grown by either

¹⁶ NA RG 55/5, File 3-1 Actg. Governor to Governor, Mar. 11, 1939 and enclosure.

¹⁷ Brown, Appendix C; Dookhan, "The Virgin Islands Company," p. 57; Annual Report of the Governor 1933, p. 5; Annual Report of the Governor 1932, p. 14; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-13 (Part 1) President, VICO to Secretary of the Interior, Mar. 27, 1935, and File 9-11-16 (Part 2) Memorandum for Secretary of the Interior from Governor, May 11, 1939 and enclosure; RG 55/27 Reports of the Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station (St. Croix), 1933 and 1941, and Report on Homesteading, 1936; Avis, Sep. 21, 1922.

VICO's Central mill or the privately-owned La Grange factory.¹⁸

Unfortunately for its planners, the homestead program failed to transform many agricultural wage workers into peasants. After some initial success, the program floundered against the island's economic realities. In 1936, the Homestead Commission reported that 268 of the original homesteaders remained on their plots, that 95 percent of these had kept up with their mortgage payments, and that net income averaged 50 percent more than they would have earned as wage laborers. Yet by 1941, only 154 of the original homesteaders held onto their land, and the government could only entice 78 new farmers to replace the 183 who defaulted on their mortgages.¹⁹ The Commissioners partly blamed the failure of the program on the irregularity of federal support. The Commission purchased tractors and constructed houses for rent or sale to the homesteaders, but after the initial allotments in 1932 and 1933, Congress provided no further aid until 1936, after which it totally discontinued aid. In addition, the Commission criticized

¹⁸ Brown, p. 11; Woolbert, p. 803; Annual Report of the Governor 1932, p. 1; Annual Report of the Governor 1935, p. 21; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-16 (Part 2) Memorandum for Secretary of the Interior from Governor, May 11, 1939 and enclosure; RG 55/27 Reports of the Director of Agricultural Experiment Station (St. Croix), 1933 and 1938.

¹⁹ NA RG 55/27 Report on Virgin Islands Homesteading, 1936, and Report of the Director of Agricultural Experiment Station (St. Croix), 1941.

the eligibility requirement that homestead applicants be U.S. citizens, thereby excluding hundreds of people from the eastern Caribbean who had resided in St. Croix for many years.²⁰

Yet, the lack of federal support for homesteads did less damage to small farming than falling sugar prices, rising wages and the increasing availability of work on government construction projects. Since the money paid small farmers by the two sugar factories was based on the price of raw sugar on the New York market, a general decline in this price during the 1930s discouraged many laborers from attempting to purchase a homestead. At the same time, the wage increases gained by estate workers in 1935, coupled with a consequent decision by Governor Pearson to raise wages 25 percent on PWA projects, made wage labor attractive to many Crucians. Then after 1936, the new construction projects inaugurated by the WPA provided higher incomes than small farming. At the end of the decade, WPA and PWA projects still employed half the Crucian work force.²¹

²⁰ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-16 (Part 2) Memorandum for Secretary of the Interior from Governor, May 11, 1939 and enclosure; RG 55/27 Report on Virgin Islands Homesteading, 1936; RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 2) "A Word Picture of St. Croix's Economic History and Present Status," Jan. 1943.

²¹ Dookhan, Virgin Islands, p. 285; Brown, pp. 3-4; NA RG 55/27 Report of the Government Secretary, 1940; RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 2) Vice President, VICO to Director, Division of Territories, Feb. 6, 1943 and File 9-11-38 President, VICO to Chairman, Bd. of Directors, VICO, June 13, 1935.

While falling short of official expectations, the federal homestead program contributed to the demise of plantation agriculture on St. Croix. To escape the economic difficulties of the sugar business, most estate owners turned their land to pasture, or rented plots to laborers. By increasing the amount of land open to peasant farming, the homestead program widened the choices available to prospective small farmers, and pressured landowners to lower rents and even sell some land to small farmers. In addition, the federal program inspired the St. Croix Colonial Council to initiate a municipal program, which supervised nearly 80 homesteads. Largely due to the influence of the federal homestead program, the number of farms less than 10 acres nearly doubled. Between 1930 and 1940, the number of people renting, buying, or already owning, small farms increased from about 680 to slightly over 1,000. Also, the withdrawal of the big estates from the sugar business placed a large share of cane production in the hands of small farmers. By the end of the decade, 45 percent of the island's cane was grown by small farmers, 39 percent by VICO field laborers, 9 percent by La Grange factory workers, and the remainder by a handful of private plantations. The owners of the large estates retained

control over much of the land, but the efforts of the small farmers prevented the collapse of the sugar industry.²²

Yet, as indicated by the rising default rates in the federal homestead project, small farmers confronted difficult obstacles. Every small farmer augmented cane production by raising food crops and livestock, and complemented farm work with day labor jobs. Variations in agricultural prices, government support, rainfall, and wages determined where small farmers put their energy, and very few seemed permanently committed to farm work, much less tending sugar cane. Indeed, neither market forces nor the federal government could entice younger Crucians to risk farming. In 1930, the average age of small farmers was 52 years, a figure only slightly lowered by the homestead program. With a lifetime of agricultural experience, older men and women enhanced the viability of small farming, but the absence of younger people augured ill for the future.²³

²² Dookhan, Virgin Islands, p. 285; Brown, pp. 11-12; Woolbert, p. 803; Annual Report of the Governor 1934, pp. 18-19; Annual Report of the Governor 1939, p. 15; Annual Report of the Governor 1940, pp. 5-15; NA RG 55/27 Reports of the Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station (St. Croix), 1933 and 1940; RG 126/1, File 9-11-22 (Separate File) "Production and Liquidation of Colonial Cane in St. Croix," May 1940.

²³ Brown, pp. 18-21; Grede, p. 37; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-16 (Part 2) Memorandum for Secretary of the Interior from Governor, May 11, 1939 and enclosure; RG 55/27 Report of the Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station (St. Croix), 1940; RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 1) Manager, Livestock Project to Director, Division of Territories, Jan. 15, 1941.

Beleaguered by the problems facing both the small farmers and the Virgin Islands Company, the local administration turned to Congress for help in saving the sugar industry. In part, local officials blamed Congress for damaging the industry by unfairly applying the Sugar Act of 1937 to the territory. This Act authorized the collection of a sugar processing tax and the redistribution of that tax to cane growers in Florida, Louisiana, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico, but provided only for the collection of the processing tax in the Virgin Islands. Protesting that the Virgin Islands was "the only area under the American flag"²⁴ that did not receive benefit payments, Governor Cramer and his staff lobbied Congress for equitable treatment.²⁵

Besides seeking redress of unfair legislation, the Governor asked Congress to repeal the \$6.00 export duty on each ton of Crucian sugar, and to return to the municipalities of St. Thomas and St. Croix the internal revenue taxes collected on products shipped from the islands to the mainland. Cramer argued that the continuance of the export duty would bankrupt La Grange and VICO, but since the duty was an important source of revenue for the Crucian government, he proposed the return of the internal revenue

²⁴ Annual Report of the Governor 1938, p. 5.

²⁵ Annual Report of the Governor 1938, pp. 3-5; Annual Report of the Governor 1939, pp. 3-4; Brown, pp. 2 & 21-24; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-13 (Part 3) Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Feb. 16, 1938.

taxes to replace the lost income. Moreover, the Governor forecast that the return of the internal revenue taxes, largely derived from rum shipments, would be more lucrative than the export duty. With the export of rum increasing, Cramer believed that the return of the internal revenue taxes would eliminate the need for federal deficit payments to both St. Croix and St. Thomas.²⁶

To encourage Congress to act on the internal revenue taxes, the export duty and the Sugar Act benefit payments, the Governor enlisted the aid of the Department of the Interior and the island legislatures. At the end of 1937, Governor Cramer asked his superiors to draft legislation addressing the three issues. But Ruth Hampton, the Acting Director of the Division of Territories, doubted that rum sales would provide sufficient revenue to support the Governor's program.²⁷ Early the following year, Cramer decided to pressure the Department by encouraging the newly created Municipal Councils to pass resolutions favoring the return of the internal revenue taxes. The Councils not only complied readily, but the Crucian Council also voted to send

²⁶ Woolbert, p. 804; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-5 (Part 2) Memorandum for Secretary of the Interior from Actg. Director, Division of Territories, Dec. 7, 1937 and enclosure; File 9-11-13 (Part 3) Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Feb. 16, 1938; RG 55/5, File 31 Governor to Director, Russell Sage Foundation, Mar. 5, 1938.

²⁷ Annual Report of the Governor 1938, p. 3; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-5 (Part 2) Memorandum for the Secretary of the Interior from the Actg. Director, Division of Territories, Dec. 7, 1937 and enclosure.

two of its members to Washington, D.C. to petition Congress on the issue.²⁸ Upon the request of the Governor and the St. Thomas Council, the Crucians agreed to postpone sending their delegation until a single commission representing both islands could be arranged. This proved unnecessary when the Council resolutions persuaded Secretary Harold Ickes to support the Governor. In September 1938, the Department of the Interior agreed to present Congress with draft legislation to return the internal revenue taxes to the local treasuries, extend the Sugar Act benefit payment to the colony, and repeal the \$6.00 per ton export duty on Crucian sugar.²⁹

Unfortunately for the Governor's plan, many Congressmen believed that the Virgin Islands should receive no additional federal aid. In March 1939, [Congressman Collins] introduced the Interior bill to the House Ways and Means Committee, but his colleagues hesitated to provide more money to the islands. In an attempt to influence Congress, the new Legislative Assembly of the Virgin Islands petitioned the national legislators for the return of the internal revenue and sugar processing taxes, and the St.

²⁸ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 6) Governor to Secretary of the Interior, June 4, 1938 and enclosures; File 9-11-30 (Part 8) Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Feb. 16, 1938 and enclosures.

²⁹ Brown, pp. 24-25; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-2 (Part 2) Memorandum for Governor from Secretary of the Interior, Sep. 22, 1938 and enclosures.

Thomas Council agreed to join their Crucian counterpart in sending a joint delegation to Washington, D.C. From February to August 1939, four Council delegates, Frederick Dorsch and Joseph Alexander from St. Croix, and Lionel Roberts and Ralph Paiewonsky from St. Thomas, lobbied members of the Committee, but failed to secure passage of the legislation.³⁰

In a separate lobbying effort, the Governor achieved only slightly better success in getting the Farm Security Administration to take responsibility for the V.I. homesteading program. Established in 1937, the FSA became the strongest effort by New Deal planners to assist the nation's poorest farmers and agricultural laborers, and Governor Cramer pushed Interior and Agriculture Department officials to include the Virgin Islands in the program. In November 1938, the FSA responded to the Governor's pleas by opening an office in St. Croix. By June 1939, this office had loaned \$14,700 to 122 federal, municipal, and independent homesteaders. While applauding these steps, the Governor also proposed that the FSA take complete charge of

³⁰ Paiewonsky, pp. 118-119; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 1) Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Dec. 22, 1938 and enclosures; File 9-11-30 (Part 8) Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Feb. 20, 1939 and enclosure; Daily News, Jan. 23, Mar. 10, July 13, Aug. 8, 15, & 29, 1939. At the end of 1941, Cramer's successor supported the decision of the St. Croix Council to abolish the export duty and then persuaded Congress to include the V.I. in the benefits payments program of the Sugar Act of 1937. See Annual Report of the Governor 1942, p. 3; and NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-39 (Part 1) Actg. Governor to Governor, Nov. 13, 1941.

the federal homesteading project.³¹ During their stay in Washington, D.C., the Council delegates backed the Governor by asking the federal politicians to widen the scope of FSA activities, but the Congressmen greeted this request with the same lack of enthusiasm they showed for returning taxes to the islands. By 1940, the FSA had extended loans to 336 small farmers, but the federal government still refused to allow the agency to administer the homestead program.³²

Governor Cramer hoped to overcome the effects of this Congressional reluctance to aid the Virgin Islands by gaining federal approval for his plan to involve the government in the rum business, the one profitable source of income for the Virgin Island economy. After 1917, V.I. rum manufacturers had expected to find an ample market in the United States, but Prohibition smashed these hopes. With Prohibition's end, several local capitalists moved quickly to revive the rum industry. By 1936, the combined exports of the St. Croix Sugar Cane Industries, the Diamond Rum Company, and Santa Cruz Distillers reached 200,000 gallons, much greater than the average 60,470 gallons exported from St. Croix during the last ten years of Danish rule. On St.

³¹ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-2 (Part 2) Memorandum for Governor from Secretary of the Interior, Sep. 22, 1938 and enclosures; RG 55/27 Report of the Administrator for St. Croix, 1939.

³² Annual Report of the Governor 1940, p. 22; NA RG 55/27 Report of the Administrator for St. Croix, 1040; Daily News, July 8 and Aug. 29, 1939.

Thomas, the Paiewonsky family, owners of A.H. Riise Distillers Corporation, enjoyed even greater success after perfecting a technique that used salt water in the distilling process. By the end of the decade, A.H. Riise annual exports surpassed half a million gallons. The potential of rum manufacturing captured the interest of the rehabilitation sponsors, and the Governor proposed that the Virgin Islands Company be allowed to manufacture for sale in the United States.³³

Ironically, some of the same Congressmen who criticized Cramer for seeking federal charity, objected to his plan. Although the Governor claimed that government success in the rum industry could eliminate the need for federal deficit appropriations if Congress returned the internal revenue taxes to the islands, many Congressmen demurred from appearing to sanction government promotion of what they considered a vicious habit. While certainly reflecting the moral concerns of their constituents, Congressional critics of rum manufacturing by VICO reinforced general objections

³³ Paiewonsky, pp. 60-63; Smith, p. 3; Dookhan, "Volsteadism," pp. 8-9; Annual Report of the Governor 1935, p. 20; Annual Report of the Governor 1936, pp. 2 and 8; Annual Report of the Governor 1946, p. 3; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-13 (Part 5) General Manager, St. Croix Sugar Cane Industries, Inc., to Secretary of the Interior, April 12, 1940; File 9-11-15 (Part 2) Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Dec. 1, 1936 and enclosure; RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1) Memorandum for Actg. Director, Division of Territories from Administrative Officer, June 10, 1940 and enclosure, and File 9-11-24 (Part 2) Vice President, VICO to Director, Division of Territories, Feb. 6, 1943.

to government involvement in private enterprise. Private sugar and rum manufacturers had warned Congress about the monopolistic, even socialistic, intentions of VICO, and now they used the rum issue as a manifestation of the evil result of government interference in business.³⁴

In response to this criticism, Cramer noted the general weakness of private industry in the colony, and he urged Department of Interior officials to ignore those people who berated the government for selling rum.³⁵ Acknowledging the importance of rum, Ernest Gruening, the Director of the Division of Territories, sided with Cramer. Rather than fearing the critics, Gruening believed that the Department should welcome their denunciations. Even as VICO prepared the first shipment to the United States, he attempted to convince Secretary Ickes that an association with the government would be good for the rum business:

Governor Cramer has proposed another name which seems to both of us to have great merit. It is "Government House." . . . I feel very strongly that the name should as far as possible capitalize on the unique asset which our Virgin Islands rum has,

³⁴ Paiewonsky, pp. 63-65; Grede, pp. 7-8 & 169; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-13 (Part 3) Memorandum for Secretary of the Interior from Director, Division of Territories, Jan. 12, 1937; File 9-11-13 (Part 5) General Manager, Sugar Cane Industries to Secretary of the Interior, April 12, 1940; RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 2) Chairman of the Colonial Council of St. Croix to the Secretary of the Interior, Mar. 28, 1934; File 9-11-22 (Part 5) Governor to Director, Division of Territories, June 5, 1935 and enclosure.

³⁵ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-13 (Part 3) Memorandum for the Secretary of the Interior from Director, Division of Territories, Jan. 12, 1937.

namely, its manufacture by the government. . . . Personally, I do not share the view that the idea of the word "government" is objectionable if the argument against it is based on the idea that we shall be attacked for being in the rum business. . . . A newspaper attack, or even an attack on the floor of Congress, would in my judgement merely be good advertising for the rum. After all, the purpose of our manufacturing this is humanitarian and constructive--for the social and economic betterment of what Mr. Hoover denominated "an effective poorhouse." No one yet has proposed a better way of rehabilitating the Virgin Islands. . . . In all colonial possessions there is a "Government House." It connotes dignity, good taste, good quality.³⁶

Secretary Ickes endorsed the suggested name, and after approval by the President, Government House Rum went on sale in the United States.³⁷ Given robust rum sales and the admonition that "No one yet has proposed a better way of rehabilitating the Virgin Islands," Congress could not easily scuttle the production of Government House Rum. By 1938, rum exports accounted for 30 percent of VICO's income, and almost matched the combined output of the private Crucian distilleries.³⁸

If rum provided the best present source of income for rehabilitation, federal officials hoped that tourism would become the future basis of a sound economy. Natural beauty,

³⁶ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-13 (Part 3) Memorandum for the Secretary of the Interior from Director, Division of Territories, Jan. 12, 1937.

³⁷ Gruening, p. 186.

³⁸ Brown, pp. 12-14; Dookhan, "The Virgin Islands Company," pp. 62-63; Grede, pp. 159-162; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 2) Vice President, VICO to Director, Division of Territories, Feb. 6, 1942.

fine climate, and the feeling of travelling to an exotic place while remaining under the protection of the U.S. government made the Virgin Islands ideal as a winter tourist resort. St. Thomas in particular, with its regular steamship connections to the mainland, attracted the attention of federal planners, and Herbert Brown's rehabilitation plan anticipated building a hotel on the outskirts of Charlotte Amalie. During his term in office, Governor Paul Pearson had elaborated a broad strategy to attract visitors, which achieved considerable success under Governor Cramer. For the most part, Virgin Islanders welcomed the schemes to develop tourism, and the St. Thomas merchants complemented the government program with their own efforts.

As the centerpiece of its tourism program, the government constructed the Bluebeard's Castle Hotel on St. Thomas. Financed by PWA funds, the new hotel was built around an old Danish fort overlooking Charlotte Amalie. Opened on Christmas Day 1934, its twenty-six rooms greatly expanded the accommodations available to overnight visitors, who had largely depended on the much smaller Grand Hotel located in town.³⁹

To make Americans aware of the Virgin Islands, Governor Pearson contacted several tourist and steamship agencies in

³⁹ Jarvis, pp. 181-182; Grede, p. 95; Annual Report of the Governor 1935, p. 7.

New York City. In 1933, the Governor even travelled to New York, where he developed a strong relationship with Ralph Dellevie, President of National Tours. Noting that some fifty cruise ships visited the Caribbean each winter, Pearson convinced Dellevie to work toward getting more of these vessels to stop at St. Thomas. To give Dellevie the authority he needed to impress the cruise ship lines, Pearson persuaded Secretary Ickes to appoint the travel agent Tourist Commissioner of the Virgin Islands, and Dellevie soon announced a plan that would make the U.S. colony a rival of the winter resorts in Bermuda.⁴⁰ Together, Pearson and Dellevie succeeded in getting many cruise lines to take an interest in the islands. Between 1933 and 1939, the number of cruise ships stopping each year at St. Thomas jumped from two to twenty-four.⁴¹

Governor Cramer expanded on the success of his predecessor by gaining the cooperation of the Division of Territories and Island Possessions in guiding more tourists to the Virgin Islands. In March 1938, Ernest Gruening

⁴⁰ NA RG 55/5, File 2-1 Governor to Asst. Commissioner of Industry, Aug. 4, 1934, Governor to Houston, Dec. 6, 1934 and enclosure, and Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Mar. 13, 1935; File 2-2 Governor to Cummings, Feb. 12, 1935 and enclosure; and New York Herald Tribune, June 15, 1935, enclosed in Secretary to the Governor to Chairman of the Municipal Committee, Dec. 23, 1938.

⁴¹ Annual Report of the Governor 1935, p. 17; Annual Report of the Governor 1939, p. 8; NA RG 55/5, File 2-1 General Manager, WICO to Government Secretary, Nov. 27, 1936; File 2-2 Governor to Cummings, Feb. 12, 1935.

appealed to Secretary Ickes to encourage more cruise ships to visit Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Noting that most cruise ships were foreign-owned, Gruening argued that their own national interests partly determined their itineraries, and since most of their passengers were from the United States, the federal government could use its influence to steer more vessels toward San Juan and Charlotte Amalie.⁴² Using the same logic, the Director also urged government and private travel agencies to patronize the U.S. colonies. In February 1939, for example, both Gruening and Cramer attended a conference for travel agents organized by the National Park Service, where the two men reminded their audience that tourist money spent in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands would remain in the U.S. economy.⁴³

Along with the need for promotional work on the mainland, Governor Cramer solicited federal support to make the Virgin Islands more attractive to tourists. Reporting that many tourists found nothing in St. Thomas but filthy streets and boredom,⁴⁴ he appealed for federal money to

⁴² NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-12 (Part 2) Memorandum for Secretary of the Interior from the Governor, Apr. 7, 1938 and enclosures.

⁴³ NA RG 55/5, File 2-2A Chief, U.S. Travel Bureau to Governor, Feb. 13, 1939 and enclosure.

⁴⁴ NA RG 55/5, File 2-1 Governor to Asst. Commissioner of Industry, Aug. 4, 1934 and enclosure; Governor to Asst. Director, Division of Territories, Jan. 23, 1936 and enclosures.

improve the infrastructure and for federal approval of a plan to entice more retail stores to the island. To justify the need for New Deal rehabilitation funds, the Governor argued that federal aid would not only raise the standard of living for natives, but would also make the colony more comfortable for tourists.

The greatest problems that stand in the way of the successful and permanent development of the Virgin Islands as a tourist and winter resident center are those of sanitation, including sewage, drainage, water supply and street surfacing, and the lack of adequate roads.⁴⁵

To make St. Thomas more interesting for tourists, Governor Cramer suggested that the Department of the Interior attract foreign merchants to Charlotte Amalie. Noting that federal laws allowed the easy entry of foreign goods into the Virgin Islands, Cramer hoped that foreign retailers could establish a profitable business selling luxury items to American tourists.⁴⁶

Encouraged by the government's efforts, the merchants of St. Thomas formed their own organizations to sustain the development of tourism. In 1936, a group of merchants led by Hjalmar Bang, the general manager of the West Indian Company, founded the Virgin Islands Tourist Company, which purchased 800 acres of land on the island of St. John for an

⁴⁵ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1), Memorandum for the Secretary of the Interior from Governor, Jan. 21, 1937.

⁴⁶ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-12 (Part 2) Memorandum for the Secretary of the Interior from Governor, Apr. 7, 1938 and enclosures.

exclusive tourist resort. Then, over the course of the following year, this new company obtained leases to operate both the Grand Hotel and the Bluebeard's Castle Hotel, bringing virtually the entire tourist industry under the control of WICO and its local associates.⁴⁷ Concurrent with the establishment of the V.I. Tourist Company, various merchants backed the efforts of a local newspaper to produce the Virgin Islands Magazine, a publication designed to advertise the beauty of the islands.⁴⁸ Then in 1939, the leading merchants convinced Governor Cramer to join them in forming "The Virgin Islands Board of Business and Tourist Development."⁴⁹

Besides providing a new array of service jobs, tourism spawned a small handicraft industry on St. Thomas. In 1931, starting with a loan of \$4,000 from the Colonial Council and supported thereafter by PWA funds, the Pearson administration organized a cooperative that furnished materials and instruction to St. Thomians interested in

⁴⁷ Jarvis, Brief History, p. 229; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-12 (Part 2) Memorandum for Secretary of the Interior from Director, Division of Territories, Dec. 14, 1938; RG 55/5, File 2-2 Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Sep. 18, 1936 and President, V.I. Tourist Co. to Asst. Government Secretary, Feb. 3, 1937; Daily News, Sep. 12, 1936 and Jan. 18, 1937.

⁴⁸ Virgin Islands Magazine, Vols. I-XII (St. Thomas Art Shop, 1937-1962); NA RG 55/5, File 2-1 General Manager, WICO to Actg. Chairman, St. Thomas Harbor Board, June 20, 1939.

⁴⁹ NA RG 55/5, File 2-2 Secretary to the Governor to Chairman of the Municipal Committee, Dec. 23, 1938 and enclosures; Daily News, Feb. 21, 1939.

fashioning baskets, hats, and ornaments from straw, shells, cloth, and wood. Initial interest among St. Thomian women was great, but because the only income received by workers was a share in the profits, the cooperative could not offer a substantial livelihood until after an increase in tourism. For a few years, sales barely justified its existence, but after 1935 the expansion of tourism allowed the cooperative to pay off its debts, establish a presence on St. Croix, and expand its structure by incorporating recently organized cooperatives of cabinet makers and small farmers. In 1936, to coordinate better the production and sales of the handicraft workers, cabinet makers and small farmers, the government established the Virgin Islands Cooperatives Association, which distributed \$13,540 in profits to 637 workers that year. By 1939, when 656 workers shared \$22,630, the V.I. Cooperatives had achieved economic self-sufficiency.⁵⁰

Although heralding a brighter future, tourism alone could not solve the present economic problems of St. Thomas. Even though the number of ship arrivals increased during the 1930s, continuing mechanization on the West Indian Company

⁵⁰ Grede, p. 94; Annual Report of the Governor 1931, p. 1; Annual Report of the Governor 1938, p. 15; Annual Report of the Governor 1939, pp. 16-17; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-24 (Part 2), Actg. Secretary of the Interior to Administrator, Wage & Hour Division, Department of Labor, May 18, 1940; RG 55/27 Report of the Administrator for St. Croix, 1938, Report of the Commissioner of Finance, 1940, and Report of the General Manager of the Virgin Islands Cooperatives Association, 1943.

docks reduced the work available to coal carriers and stevedores. Indeed, only the pleas of the workers, community leaders, and the Colonial Council prevented WICO from completely eliminating manual coal bunkering. The handicraft industry offered an alternative to many coal carriers, but even in the better years, annual earnings from the cooperative averaged only \$34, even worse than the \$50 earned by the more diligent coal carriers. At the end of the decade, as on St. Croix, about half the laborers on St. Thomas depended on work relief projects for their wages.⁵¹

To provide an alternate means of livelihood to St. Thomas, the federal government also sponsored a small homestead project on that island. While most St. Thomians had neither the inclination nor the skills to try farming, a few families had long cultivated the hillsides of the island, and the government hoped to encourage increased food production. In 1933, the Pearson administration settled sixty families on 300 acres of flat land purchased by the government at Lindbergh Bay. By 1935, these homesteaders

⁵¹ Ethel L. Best, The Economic Problems of the Women of the Virgin Islands of the United States, Bulletin of the Women's Bureau, #142 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1936), pp. 6-9; WICO St. Thomas Virgin Islands: The Leading Port for Bunkering in the West Indies (London: Sir Joseph Causton & Sons, Ltd., 1939); Annual Report of the Governor 1938, p. 3; Annual Report of the Governor 1939, p. 8; NA RG 55/4, File 22-1 Proceedings of an Ordinary Meeting of the Colonial Council of St. Thomas and St. John, June 14, 1934; RG 55/27 Report of the Superintendent of the Dept. of Public Welfare, St. Thomas-St. John, 1936, and Report of the Government Secretary, 1940; Daily News, Oct. 18, 1938.

had cultivated 123 acres of vegetables and fruits, along with sugar cane for the Paiewonsky rum distillery, suggesting to some people that more government support could make small farming a viable option for many St. Thomians. Nevertheless, by the end of the decade, the number of homestead families had declined to fifty-three, and the program seemed destined to meet the same fate as the effort in St. Croix.⁵²

Altogether, the federal aid programs of the New Deal achieved few of their goals in the Virgin Islands. Certainly FERA, PWA, and WPA had rescued the islanders from the mass starvation that threatened in 1930, but the standard of living for most people had barely risen above the levels of the previous decade. Measured in terms of self-sufficiency, tourism and rum promised hope for the future, but VICO's attempt to salvage the sugar industry had mired the company in debt. Worst of all, both federal officials and islanders worried that a reduction in Congressional appropriations would bring a reversion to the same situation that prevailed before the advent of the New Deal. A local newspaper editorial succinctly described the dilemma facing the colony:

⁵² Annual Report of the Governor 1933, p. 5; Annual Report of the Governor 1935, p. 22; Annual Report of the Governor 1939, p. 15; NA RG 55/27 Report of the Agricultural Extension Agent, 1933, and Report of the Agricultural Experiment Station (St. Thomas), 1935; Daily News, Mar. 10, 1939.

Many hundreds of men [and women] are at work on the different projects sponsored by the Federal government but practically none of them on productive industry. It is good for business today that the money they earn circulates briefly from them to the cash drawers and out again for consumer goods but when the made work is all finished the rich will be richer and the poor just as poor--relatively poorer.⁵³

But for a people devastated by the Great Depression, this criticism meant little. Most Virgin Islanders applauded the New Deal. Appreciation for the programs that provided jobs and food was widespread, and no communities of similar size in the continental United States surpassed the Virgin Islands in its support for President Roosevelt. In a letter typical of many received by Government House, the Department of the Interior, or the White House, a Crucian laborer expressed his views to Director Gruening:

every laborer have been fully satisfied what the Department of Interia [sic] has done for them, and they are always rejoicing, praising and thanking our President also the noble officials of the Department of the Interia... We love our President, we love our flag. We love the American nation, thats why we hail for the flag, the Virgin Islands Company is our life line, to which thousand [sic] of people seek employment from ⁵⁴

The New Deal had an immediate, positive impact on the lives of many people, and earned the United States the lasting loyalty of most Virgin Islanders.

⁵³ Daily News, Sep. 3, 1936. See also Lewis, The Virgin Islands, p. 82.

⁵⁴ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1) Stephens to Dear Director, May 12, 1938.

Along with the general praise for the New Deal, many Virgin Islanders also accused the local administration of marring the good intentions of the federal aid programs by practicing favoritism and racial discrimination. Believing that federal funds should be used to correct social inequalities, these critics alleged that local officials were using the New Deal programs to perpetuate a social structure that denied a decent living to the majority of islanders. Complaints about the programs varied widely, but altogether they revealed a greater willingness to demand social justice from the government. For example, in a letter complaining about conditions at a Civilian Conservation Corps camp, several "Natives of St. Thomas" challenged the authority of the white American supervisor to enforce discipline:

the boys [at the CCC camp] have to work like hee. [sic] for what is given to them and their parents they work all the Government roads. they have to go very far distances. they uses hoe, pickasses, hoepick, and cutlasses, they goes so far to work, . . . the truck have to take their food to them. yarm [sic] and meat every day for their food. and when the boys grumble, they rings the mischief for them, their was a certain boy, a St. Thomian, spoke about the food. and he was discharged from the Camp for speaking the truth, and he is'nt the first that was discharged for the truth. I'm sure President Rosevelt [sic] dont know what's going on. The St. Johnians boys and parents may be coward to speak. but the St. Thomians are not cowards. for they know that the Americans, believes in Truth. Honesty, and Loyalty, it

should be looked after, . . . for we think its a sin and shame.⁵⁵

Believing that local officials often thwarted the intent of the New Deal, Virgin Islanders realized they would have to struggle for their rights as U.S. citizens. Besides complaining about working conditions, they protested the preferential treatment given white continentals and natives, and they demanded that the government end the practice of keeping wages at levels acceptable to private employees. In sum, these demands represented nothing less than an appeal to the federal government to use its enormous power to redistribute economic rewards in favor of ordinary Virgin Islanders. At times, native workers even had to strike to force federal officials to consider the wishes of Virgin Islanders in fashioning rehabilitation policy.

To the extent that they resisted appeals to create a more egalitarian society, federal officials fueled increased racial tension in the Virgin Islands. Despite some progress in opening many lower positions to black natives, almost all the top offices in the administration and VICO remained the domain of white continentals, a situation exacerbated by the removal of such prominent black leaders as D.C. Canegata from his post as municipal physician, and Lionel Roberts and

⁵⁵ NA RG 55/5, File 18-2a Natives of St. Thomas to Finance Officer, Jan. 21, 1938, enclosed in Asst. Director, National Park Service to Supervisor, CCC St. Thomas, Mar. 9, 1938.

D. Hamilton Jackson from the directorate of VICO.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the continuance of different pay schedules for continentals and natives, a Danish practice only slightly modified by the Navy, reinforced de facto segregation in government service. The Navy had justified the different pay schedules, which often allowed a continental to earn several times the salary of a native for the same work, on the grounds that Americans had to maintain their standard of living. But when Pearson and Cramer appointed several white, and near white, natives to important administrative posts at continental salaries, Virgin Islanders questioned the rationale of the system.⁵⁷

Segregation at work mirrored segregation in private, as Americans remained aloof from local social affairs. Such revelations as the announcement that only white guests were welcome at the new Bluebeard's Castle Hotel caused many natives to wonder if "[federal] money is for the sole

⁵⁶ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-3 (Part 2) Memorandum for Administrative Assistant, Department of the Interior from Governor, Apr. 6, 1936 and enclosures, and File 9-11-13 (Part 3) Secretary, VICO to Jackson, Mar. 5, 1937; RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 2) Memorandum for Secretary of the Interior from President, VICO, Jan. 14, 1935 and enclosure; File 9-11-23 (Part 3) Memorandum for Secretary of the Interior from Administrative Assistant, Jan. 21, 1937 and enclosures; Bulletin, Sep. 12, 1935.

⁵⁷ Project Introspection, pp. 18-19 & 58-59; NA RG 55/5, File 18-1 Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Nov. 21, 1934, Senior Field Foreman to Assoc. Forrester, ECW Camp St. Croix, July 31, 1935, and Actg. Lt. Governor to Government Secretary, Aug. 1, 1935; File 18-2 Actg. Government Secretary to Governor, Jan. 11, 1935, and Administrative Assistant, Department of Interior to Governor, Feb. 12, 1935.

rehabilitation of Continentals who may care to come to these islands and not at all for Virgin Islanders."⁵⁸ Indeed, the New Deal programs brought to the islands a coterie of continental functionaries who strived to create their own separate social circle. Deploing the attempts by Governors Pearson and Cramer to meet native demands, these Americans viewed economic and political reforms as moving the islands toward mob rule. For example, in a book written to describe his experiences as an assistant to Governor Cramer, Hamilton Cochran expressed a view typical of these people when he compared the romantic past of the islands with their present unrest. Against the backdrop of ruined estate houses, which he described as "impressive relics of bygone grandeur," he juxtaposed unhappy "West Indian negroes [who] . . . seem to be consumed with a gnawing desire to approach, equal, or surpass the white man."⁵⁹ Blaming economic handouts and democratic ideas for spoiling the blacks, these continentals joined with many members of the local elite in resisting the deterioration of traditional racial standards.

⁵⁸ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 2) Roberts to Secretary of the Interior, Jan. 3, 1935 enclosed in Memorandum for the Secretary from President, VICO, Jan. 14, 1935. Also see Knud-Hansen, From Denmark to the Virgin Islands (Philadelphia: Dorrance & Co., 1947), p. 123; NA RG 55/5, File 30 Commissioner of Public Welfare to Actg. Governor, Aug. 14, 1935.

⁵⁹ Hamilton Cochran, These Are the Virgin Islands (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1937), pp. 54 & 147.

The racial tensions produced by the struggle over the distribution of federal aid went beyond native resentment of their white superiors. On St. Thomas, government programs created friction between black residents and the small community of white farmers and fishermen established by migrants from the French island of St. Barthelmy in the mid-nineteenth century. Until the 1930s, the latter remained isolated from, and largely ignored by, the larger community, but then their considerable artisanal and farming skills made the French prized participants in the rehabilitation programs. However, black St. Thomians complained that the French villagers received preferential treatment because of their white skin, and that French women refused to sit beside black workers at the cooperative. Certainly, contact with American officials heightened already existing feelings of racial superiority among the French settlers, which added to the pervasive sense of racial injustice on the island.⁶⁰

On St. Croix, the revival of Puerto Rican immigration also contributed to increased racial tension. During the 1920s, federal officials and planters had managed to attract only a few hundred Puerto Ricans to the island, but

⁶⁰ Jarvis, pp. 201-203; Albert Campbell, "St. Thomas Negroes - A Study of Personality and Culture," Psychological Monographs, 55:5 (1943), pp. 29-30; Lubin Pickwood, "Social Survey of the French Settlements at Carenage and the Northside," (St. Thomas Public Library, 1934), Typewritten; NA RG 55/5, File 30 Claiborne to Government Secretary, Aug. 23, 1935; RG 55/27 Report of the Director of the Cooperatives of the Virgin Islands, 1935.

rehabilitation wages renewed interest among canefield laborers in the larger American colony. Coming mostly from the Puerto Rican island of Vieques, where the Depression had destroyed the sugar industry, these migrants increased the Puerto Rican population on St. Croix from 700 in 1930 to 2,200 in 1940, about 18 percent of the total island population.⁶¹

Already plagued by unemployment problems, the V.I. government did not welcome these new arrivals. Because Puerto Ricans were U.S. citizens, they could not be excluded under normal immigration laws, so government officials fashioned legislation denying entry to sick or indigent persons. Claiming Vieques to be a breeding ground for such diseases as malaria, hookworm, schistosomiasis and tuberculosis, officials hoped to prevent the immigration of many Puerto Ricans either afflicted with these diseases or unable to show means of support in the Virgin Islands. Unfortunately for the expectations of government officials, the new law, enacted by both Colonial Councils in 1936,

⁶¹ Senior, pp. 2-4; U.S., Department of Commerce, Sixteenth Census of the United States 1940 Virgin Islands of the United States (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1940), p. 5; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-21 (Part 1) Memorandum for the Secretary of the Interior from Governor, July 17, 1934, File 9-11-21 (Part 5) Actg. Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Sep. 1, 1942 and enclosures. Figures for the number of Puerto Ricans living on St. Croix are taken from Senior. The 1940 U.S. Census of the Virgin Islands only totals the number of people born in "Other U.S. Territories and Possessions" living in the Virgin Islands as a whole. According to the Census, this total grew from 3.5% of the population in 1930 to 8.3% in 1940.

prevented less than 10 percent of Puerto Rican migrants from entering St. Croix. While Puerto Rican immigration declined from a high of 350 in fiscal year 1938 to just over 100 in fiscal year 1940, officials were unsure to what extent the decline was due to the new law or to general economic factors. Contrary to the intentions of its planners, the federal rehabilitation program for St. Croix had to make room for Puerto Rican laborers.⁶²

While government officials expressed dismay over the entry of Puerto Ricans, both government and private employers admired the work ethic of the new arrivals. According to a 1938 government survey, employers estimated that one Puerto Rican laborer did the work of three Virgin Islanders. Indeed, driven by aspirations common to most immigrants, Puerto Ricans displayed a determination to achieve economic independence. By 1940, while Puerto Ricans represented only 11 percent of the field laborers on St. Croix, they constituted 29 percent of federal and municipal homesteaders, and 14 percent of all small farmers.⁶³

⁶² NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-21 (Parts 1-5) covers the attempts by officials in the V.I. government and Dept. of Interior to exclude Puerto Ricans from St. Croix. See also NA RG 55/5, File 31 Governor to Government Secretary, Sep. 12, 1934 and RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 6) Ordinance to control the entry into St. Croix of persons afflicted with dangerous communicable diseases, 1936, and File 9-11-30 (Part 7) Actg. Governor to Secretary of Interior, Mar. 12, 1937 and enclosures.

⁶³ Senior, p. 21; NA RG 55/5, File 58-1 Administrator for St. Croix to Governor, Nov. 28, 1936 and enclosure; RG 126/1, File 9-11-22 (Separate File) Norris Nichols,

These efforts to secure economic independence created the image of a Puerto Rican stereotype who arrived on St. Croix penniless and, in a few years, became a prosperous small farmer or merchant. By 1940, half of the 150 small businesses on St. Croix were owned by Puerto Ricans, prompting many people to contrast the industrious Puerto Rican with the lazy Crucian. Yet, other observers pointed out that Puerto Rican women and children did not work in the field, and the Puerto Ricans who established small businesses came to St. Croix already possessing a considerable amount of capital. But even if ultimately false, employers used the image of the successful Puerto Rican to prod native workers, and some Crucians admitted that "the Puerto Ricans have taught us how to work."⁶⁴

While expressing begrudging respect for the hard work of the Puerto Ricans, Crucians nevertheless resented them as economic competitors with a foreign language and customs. In the 1920s, Crucians had welcomed the Puerto Ricans because they exerted upward pressure on wages, but with the higher wages and unemployment of the 1930s, the immigrants threatened the livelihood of many natives. The eagerness of

"Production and Liquidation of Colono Cane in St. Croix," May 1940 and File 9-11-24 (Part 1) Actg. Governor to Governor, Dec. 6, 1938 and enclosures.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Senior, p. 29; also see Senior, pp. 18-22; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-22 (Separate File) Nichols, "Production and Liquidation of Colono Cane in St. Croix," May 1940; Daily News, Jan. 5, 1939.

Puerto Ricans to form themselves into gangs for task work especially angered Crucian laborers. Reluctance to accept task work had been a worker tradition since the great strike of 1916, but now the Puerto Ricans could disrupt worker solidarity by forcing gangs to compete against each other. Faced with the influx of a younger, all-male labor force, Crucian workers accused the Puerto Ricans of trying to take over the island. Altercations between competing groups became common, and some people feared the outbreak of a larger, racial conflict.⁶⁵

However, racial animosity toward Puerto Rican laborers on St. Croix on French villagers on St. Thomas reflected the belief by black Virgin Islanders that they were being unfairly treated by local officials of the federal government. Whereas these officials promised local businessmen that government wage policies would conform with existing standards, many workers demanded that the federal projects pay them a "living wage."⁶⁶ These workers complained that preferential treatment for private employers, Puerto Rican laborers, and French villagers

⁶⁵ Senior, (passim), NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-21 (Part 1) Memorandum for the Secretary of the Interior from Governor, July 17, 1934; Daily News, Aug. 3, 1936, Mar. 24, 1937 and Jan. 5, 1939.

⁶⁶ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-13 (Part 3) Committee of Management, St. Croix Labor Union to Secretary of the Interior, Jan. 24, 1938 enclosed in Memorandum for the Secretary from President, VICO, Feb. 4, 1938.

denied Virgin Islanders the rights promised them by the New Deal.

In this context, questions of wages and living conditions became part of the struggle to define Americanization. While federal officials gave highest priority to promoting self-sufficiency, Virgin Island workers interpreted Americanization as a right to a certain standard of living. As U.S. citizens, native workers not only believed they were entitled to full participation in New Deal programs, but also contested the power of local officials to control federal resources. In the case of work relief, laborers understood that federal expenditures were based on a need to relieve distress, and they resisted attempts by the local administration to link expenditures with usual norms of productivity.

Workers' belief that they were due federal aid provoked numerous complaints by government officials. Unable to get workers under his supervision to work as hard as he liked, the Superintendent of the St. Thomas Department of Public Welfare lamented:

It is an unfortunate fact that unskilled laborers hired on a relief basis are unconcerned about the amount and quality of work they turn out, having the idea that the money is there to be spent for their benefit whether they work or not.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ NA RG 55/27 Report of the Superintendent of the Public Works Department, St. Thomas-St. John, 1936.

At times, workers even went so far as to claim part ownership of federal property. Justifying the need for extensive fencing, the President of VICO reported to Dr. Gruening that theft had become a common problem:

As you know, the people live on sugar cane during the crop season, and they believe that what belongs to the United States Government belongs to them. The watchmen are very much of the same opinion.⁶⁸

Evidently, for at least some workers, Americanization implied a more equitable distribution of wealth than that conceived by federal officials.

In response to the workers' challenge, some federal officials threatened to terminate the relief programs. Arguing that "hunger is good sauce," the Field Supervisor of the CCC camp on St. Thomas believed that the curtailment of some federal programs would improve the behavior of workers.⁶⁹ Even Governor Cramer, who often demonstrated his sympathy for poor Virgin Islanders, became so frustrated with unhappy workers at the Bluebeard's Castle Hotel that he "resolved that if there is serious labor trouble in Virgin Islands to close down the projects even if the money has to go back to Washington."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-13 General Manager F.P. #16 to Director, Division of Territories, June 11, 1935.

⁶⁹ NA RG 55/5, File 18-2 Field Supervisor, ECW Camp V-1 to Governor, Mar. 14, 1937 enclosed in Superintendent of Public Welfare to Governor, July 28, 1937.

⁷⁰ NA RG 55/5, File 30 Government Secretary to Moron, Feb. 7, 1936.

Yet, the commitment of local officials to the rehabilitation program gave Virgin Islanders the political space they needed to demand higher wages and better working conditions. Precisely because federal programs were to create the conditions for self-sufficiency, government officials could not terminate federal aid without admitting defeat for the rehabilitation plan. Moreover, many government officials, including both Governors Pearson and Cramer, genuinely believed in the need to raise the standard of living of working people, and they worked diligently to obtain Congressional aid for the islands. Governor Cramer even claimed to be the best spokesman for the workers' interest, and he challenged the authority of the native labor leaders. The ensuing battle between the Governor and the local leaders for control of the labor movement gave workers the opportunity to gain many of their demands. On St. Thomas, Morris Davis continued to organize workers to fight for higher wages. By the beginning of 1937, he had ended his association with the Labor Board and renewed his efforts to build a strong union on the island. In May 1937, he persuaded the workers building a new post office to form the Consolidated Workers Union. Claiming that the 96 cents minimum daily wage was insufficient, the Union struck against the private company contracted by the government, and in a short time, succeeded in raising the minimum wage to \$1.45. To avert the possibility of wider support for the

Union, Governor Cramer raised the minimum wage on all WPA projects to \$1.20, which successfully thwarted an attempt by Davis to call a general island-wide strike. Only by reacting quickly to the challenge raised by Davis could the government claim to have reasserted its authority over the workers.⁷¹

On St. Croix wage demands by cane field workers exposed differences in labor policy between Governor Cramer and Boyd Brown, the President of VICO, which nearly jeopardized the rehabilitation program. In November 1937, VICO and the St. Croix Labor Union agreed to a new contract, slightly raising wages above the rates established in 1935, but the membership of the Union rejected the agreement, calling instead for a wage scale based on a daily first class harvest wage of one dollar. While Boyd Brown accused Morris Davis, who had arrived in St. Croix in October, and other "outside agitators" for fomenting trouble, Governor Cramer attributed the unrest to the Congressional debate over President Roosevelt's Wages and Hours bill. Cramer advocated granting the increase to show support for the

⁷¹ NA RG 55/5, File 30 Government Secretary to Moron, Feb. 7, 1936 and File 58-2 Governor to Chairman of the Colonial Council, Dec. 14, 1935; RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1) Governor to Asst. Director, Division of Territories, Dec. 14, 1935 and enclosure; File 9-11-24 (Part 2) Government Secretary to Actg. Administrator, WPA, Oct. 6, 1937, Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Oct. 20, 1937 and Nov. 18, 1937; Daily News, May 29, 1937.

President, but Brown contended that constant capitulation to labor demands would bankrupt VICO.⁷²

In early February 1938, the Labor Union took advantage of the rift between Cramer and Brown to call a strike on the VICO estates, which soon gained the new wage demanded by its members. Because of the shift to homesteading and the general decline of the sugar industry, only some 400 workers actually participated in the strike, not enough to halt VICO operations, but a sufficient number to embarrass the administration. Moreover, the strike evoked sympathy from many former sugar workers now employed on work relief projects, who indicated they would strike if their former comrades were not treated fairly.⁷³ To help settle the

⁷² Brown, Appendix A; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-13 (Part 1) Minutes of Meeting with Secretary of the Interior concerning VICO operations, Apr. 14, 1938 and enclosures. File 9-11-13 (Part 3) Memorandum for the Secretary of the Interior from President, VICO, Feb. 4, 1938 and enclosures, Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Feb. 16, 1938, President, VICO to Secretary of the Interior, Mar. 2, 1938 and enclosure, and Apr. 2, 1938; RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1) Asst. Treasurer, VICO to Office of Chief Clerk, Department of Commerce, Dec. 6, 1937 and Jan. 14, 1938, both enclosed in Chief, Sugar Section AAA to Director, Division of Territories, Feb. 1938, and Memorandum for Secretary of the Interior from Governor, Feb. 15, 1937; File 9-11-24 (Part 2) Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Oct. 20, 1937 and Nov. 18, 1937.

⁷³ The actions of laborers in the Public Works Department bewildered the Superintendent:

The labor situation remains about the same as in past years, the only noticeable difference in the attitude of labor in general, being one that might better be interpreted by a psychologist rather than the writer. During a considerable length of time that was consumed by the wage scale conference between labor and local business, this Department suffered what

strike, the VICO President appealed to D. Hamilton Jackson, still serving as Police Judge, and James Bernard, a Labor Department arbitrator stationed in Puerto Rico. At the end of February, Brown and Jackson convinced the Union to return to work while Bernard investigated the legitimacy of worker demands. In a decision that shocked Brown, the arbitrator sided with the workers. On March 21, VICO and the Labor Union signed a new contract basing day and task wages on the \$1.00 first class standard.⁷⁴

the writer terms a "slow down strike." While remaining loyal to the Department in every respect except that of hard work, labor as a whole definitely and visibly slowed down as far as output production was concerned and neither driving nor pleading could change it. No one complained nor failed to respond to orders yet everything went on with that peculiar unspoken attitude of "what's the use."

Immediately upon the satisfactory settlement to all by the conference, production picked up to normal and continued so to the end of the fiscal year. Although this department and its employees were not part of, nor had any part in the negotiations, the effect described above was very definitely felt, nevertheless.

NA RG 55/27 Report of the Superintendent of Public Works, St. Croix, 1938.

⁷⁴ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-13 (Part 1) Minutes of Meeting with Secretary of Interior concerning VICO operations, Apr. 14, 1938 and enclosures; File 9-11-13 (Part 3) Memorandums for the Secretary of Interior from President, VICO, Feb. 4 & 12, 1938, Memorandum for Secretary of Interior from Director, Division of Territories, Mar. 2, 1938, President, VICO to Secretary of Interior, Mar. 2, 1938 and enclosures, and Apr. 2, 1938; RG 55/27 Report of the Administrator for St. Croix, 1938; RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1) President, VICO to Director, Division of Territories, Feb. 28, 1938, Governor to Sec. of Interior, Mar. 5, 1938, and Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Mar. 5, 1938.

While workers based their demands partly on a sense that they were victims of racial injustice, the very success of the strikes on St. Croix and St. Thomas convinced many white residents that the black natives no longer knew their proper place in society. For both continentals and the native white elite, concessions to the strikers confirmed the loss of social discipline. Besides the labor strife, the white community pointed to rising juvenile delinquency as evidence of the mistaken liberal policies of the administration. While some faulted the schools, the police, and the courts for failing to inculcate proper values in the youth, others criticized the government for coddling those agitators who "preach[ed] disrespect from public platform for people and things which for generations we were taught to esteem."⁷⁵ Whatever the reasons for increased juvenile delinquency, white residents denounced the social permissiveness they claimed was leading to a complete breakdown of law and order.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Daily News, Sep. 25, 1940.

⁷⁶ Murphy, pp. 113-124; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-36 (Part 1) Memorandum for the Director of Investigations, Department of Interior from Special Agent Kelly, Oct. 10, 1940, and Commissioner of Finance to Asst. Secretary of Interior, Nov. 19, 1940; RG 55/5, File 58-1 Administrator for St. Croix to Governor, Aug. 21, 1939 and enclosures, and Actg. Governor to Chairman of the Municipal Committee, Municipal Council of St. Thomas and St. John, Jan. 27, 1937 and enclosures; RG 55/27 Report of the Police Judge for St. Croix, 1936, and Report of the Director of Police, St. Thomas, 1941; Avis, Sep. 17, 1936; Daily News, Jan. 26, 1939, Sep. 19, 25, & 28, 1940.

Blaming Governor Cramer for the current state of race relations, uneasy white residents appealed to the Secretary of the Interior to remove him from office. Because Secretary Ickes had questioned Cramer's handling of the 1938 sugar strike, the appellants found him responsive to their demands. In September 1940, when Jacques Schiffer, a continental member of the St. Thomas Municipal Council, travelled to Washington D.C. to warn the Secretary of an impending race war in the colony, Ickes quickly dispatched a special investigator to the islands. A month later, the investigator reinforced the charges against the Governor by reporting that the local police were incompetent and that many continentals carried firearms for their own protection. Ickes used the report as the basis for asking President Roosevelt to terminate the Governor's tenure.⁷⁷

Angered by the investigations, Cramer recruited an impressive array of his supporters to intervene on his behalf. On the mainland, NAACP leader Walter White defended Cramer's liberal policies, and psychologist Angus Campbell, the author of a recently concluded study of St. Thomians, ridiculed the notion that black islanders hated whites. From the islands, Government Secretary Robert Lovett

⁷⁷ Grede, pp. 229-232; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-13 (Part 3) Secretary of the Interior to Governor, Mar. 9, 1938; File 9-11-36 (Part 1) Memorandum for the Director of Investigations, Department of Interior, Oct. 10, 1940 and President Roosevelt to Secretary, NAACP, Nov. 30, 1940; Daily News, Sep. 20, 1940.

journeyed to the nation's capitol to tell Secretary Ickes that Schiffer was a lawyer for the West Indian Company which, as owner of the power plant on St. Thomas, opposed the Governor's plan to have the Rural Electrification Administration provide electricity for the Virgin Islands. At the same time, Commissioner of Finance Morris de Castro wrote Department headquarters that an FBI agent working on St. Thomas had discounted the findings of the special investigator.⁷⁸

Although this testimony thoroughly discredited Schiffer, Secretary Ickes continued to press for the removal of the Governor. Citing Cramer's reaction to the special investigation, rather than its findings, Ickes persuaded the President to ask for Cramer's resignation.⁷⁹ While insubordination may have been the formal reason for his dismissal, the resignation of Governor Cramer revealed two unstated assumptions of New Deal policy toward the Virgin Islands: (1) that progress by black Virgin Islanders should be dictated by a pace set by white Americans, and (2) that the well-being of the white community was the ultimate responsibility of the colonial government. By backing the

⁷⁸ Grede, pp. 230-231; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-36 (Part 1) Commissioner of Finance to Asst. Secretary of the Interior, Nov. 23, 1940, Secretary of Interior to Secretary, NAACP, Dec. 19, 1940; RG 126/1, File 9-11-50 (Part 2) Government Secretary to Secretary of the Interior, Sep. 16, 1940.

⁷⁹ Grede, pp. 232-233; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-36 (Part 1) President Roosevelt to Secretary, NAACP, Nov. 30, 1940, and Secretary of the Interior to Secretary, NAACP, Dec. 19, 1940.

strikers in 1938, Cramer had embarrassed his white colleagues, who felt the workers were making hasty demands; and by scoffing at Schiffer, the Governor had demonstrated a disregard for the welfare of whites. In both instances, Cramer had committed the sin of undermining white authority in the islands.

By the end of the decade, the New Deal economic programs had brought many changes to the Virgin Islands, but had achieved few of its goals. The relief projects had reduced unemployment, but had scarcely raised the standard of living for most people. Even more worrisome to federal officials, New Deal funds had only made the insular economy more dependent on the federal government. Although the population grew from 22,000 to 24,900 over the course of the decade, most of the increase was due to Puerto Rican immigration. Young Virgin Islanders continued to emigrate to New York City and other places on the mainland.⁸⁰

In an attempt to reverse the fortunes of the rehabilitation program, the administration promoted agricultural and vocational education. Believing that the schools should teach skills that met local needs, education officials encouraged the cultivation of school gardens, and

⁸⁰ Lewis, The Virgin Islands, p. 83, Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 164 & 170-171, Senior, pp. 1-4.

introduced more vocational courses into the curriculum.⁸¹ Because of the importance of agriculture to its economy, St. Croix received special attention. In 1932, the government established on that island an agricultural and vocational boarding school for nearly three dozen boys and, later that decade, required all male students at the newly opened high school to take some courses at the boarding school.⁸²

Unfortunately for the rehabilitation planners, many Virgin Islanders resented the emphasis on agricultural and vocational education. Critics of government policy claimed that the administration intended to keep poor Virgin Islanders as "second-class citizens," while preserving the more prestigious jobs for continental Americans and a few, more fortunate natives. Again, because of the importance of agricultural education policy on that island, St. Croix became the center of educational controversy. Whereas administration officials envisioned a society based on a sturdy peasantry, many Crucians hoped to become doctors, teachers, and civil servants. They denounced the

⁸¹ Annual Report of the Governor 1932, p. 3; NA RG 55/5, File 19-1, Dr. Mann to Actg. Governor, May 10, 1940 and File 19-1a Press Release, May 16, 1939; Daily News, July 17, 1939.

⁸² NA RG 55/5, File 19-1a Press Release, May 16, 1939, File 19-3 Memorandum for Committee on Educational Policy from Director, Agricultural Experimental Station and Vocational School (St. Croix), Feb. 8, 1938; RG 55/27 Report by Director of Vocational School (St. Croix), 1938 and Report of the Administrator for St. Croix, 1939.

administration for monopolizing the formation of educational policy and demanded more local control of the schools.⁸³

Pressured by these criticisms, Governor Cramer agreed to the formation of the Committee on Educational Policy for St. Croix. In November 1937, he appointed four continentals and three natives to fashion a suitable curriculum for the new high school in Christiansted. Although the Governor stressed the need for 'industrial training,' the Committee decided not to require students to take agricultural and vocational classes. Surprisingly, Frederick Dorsch, a continental who had previously served as Superintendent of Education, sided with the view that the high school should primarily prepare students to enter college.⁸⁴

The disagreement over educational policy represented nothing less than two conflicting views of Americanization. Without skilled farmers and artisans, federal officials realized that the islands would never achieve self-

⁸³ Turnbull, pp. 42-45, 51 & 138; NA RG 55/5, File 19-1 Dr. Mann to Actg. Governor, May 10, 1940 and File 19-3 Superintendent of Education, St. Croix to Actg. Governor, Apr. 25, 1936 and Superintendent to Governor, Nov. 15, 1940; RG 55/27 Report of the Director of the Vocational School (St. Croix), 1939; Daily News, July 17, 1939.

⁸⁴ NA RG 55/5, File 19-1 Governor to Superintendent of Education, St. Croix, Dec. 3, 1937 and Government Secretary to Superintendent of Education, St. Thomas, Sep. 19, 1939 and enclosures, File 19-3 Superintendent of Education, St. Croix to Actg. Governor, Apr. 25, 1936 and enclosures, and Superintendent to Governor, Nov. 15, 1940. The members of the Committee were Superintendent of Education Raymond Thompson, Frederick Dorsch, Samuel Carlisle, Norris Nichols, D.C. Canegata, James A. Bough, and D. Hamilton Jackson.

sufficiency. On the other hand, Virgin Islanders saw education as a way to gain equality with their continental administrators. When admonished by federal officials for wanting an impractical education, Virgin Islanders only had to point out that few white persons worked with their hands. Yet, given the economic and political constraints of the present society, an academic education could only prepare young islanders for emigration. While many Virgin Islanders, most notably D. Hamilton Jackson, admitted the need for agricultural and vocational training, they refused to comply with a policy that kept them subservient to white Americans. The vote by the Committee on Educational Policy to establish an academic curriculum meant that secondary education would prepare Virgin Islanders to compete with continentals for administrative control of the colony. In contrast with the view held by federal officials, Americanization would provide an escape from the soil.

CHAPTER NINE
THE PROGRESSIVE GUIDE

The Progressive Guide revolutionized politics in the Virgin Islands. Of course, the Organic Act established the legal basis for universal suffrage, but the VIPG educated and organized the people to participate in mass politics. Organized in 1937 and based primarily on St. Thomas, most members were young men who had at least some secondary education. Many of them had even lived in the United States. Believing that government should be responsible for meeting the basic needs of the populace, they urged the newly franchised voters to elect men who would enact legislation to improve working conditions, health care, education, and housing. During the 1940s, popular support for this agenda enabled the Progressive Guide to wrest control of the St. Thomas Municipal Council from the merchant elite, and to establish a presence in the St. Croix legislature. On St. Thomas, total control of the Municipal Council allowed the VIPG to push Americanization to its most radical extent. Excited by the social legislation enacted by Guide members, many more people became interested in electoral politics, forever ending the days when political campaigns concerned solely the elite and the small middle class.

The educational advances of the 1930s played an important role in improving the political sophistication of the populace. Both Governors Pearson and Cramer took an active interest in improving the school system, and the opening of high schools on St. Thomas and St. Croix, as well as growing attendance figures and a falling illiteracy rate, reflected their commitment to education. Although not as dramatic as under the Navy, when the total number of children in school jumped from 3,770 to 4,240, the two civilian governors succeeded in raising school attendance by another 250 pupils. Similarly, while the illiteracy rate fell from 25 to 16 percent between 1917 and 1930, it dropped to 13.5 percent by 1940.¹ But whereas the Navy concentrated on elementary education, the civilian administrators opened more opportunities for Virgin Islanders to obtain a secondary education. In 1931, St. Thomas graduated its first class of high school seniors, followed a few years later by St. Croix.² Governor Pearson also inaugurated an adult education program, that soon enrolled some 1500 persons, but unfortunately, after a couple of years, these

¹ Grede, p. 104; Murphy, p. 139; Naughton, p. 191; Turnbull, pp. 171-172 & 205; Sixteenth Census 1940 Virgin Islands, p. 10; Annual Report of the Governor 1931, p. 21; Daily News, July 18, 1939.

² Annual Report of the Governor 1931, p. 22; Annual Report of the Governor 1940, p. 35.

classes faltered for lack of funds.³ However, Pearson succeeded in persuading several black universities on the mainland to provide scholarships to Virgin Island students, and Governor Cramer convinced both Municipal Councils to establish a college scholarship fund for deserving high school graduates. By 1938, twenty-four of the thirty-five Virgin Islanders attending colleges in the United States and Puerto Rico were receiving scholarship aid, and Governor Cramer could boast that twenty college trained natives had returned to teach school.⁴

The founding of the V.I. Progressive Guide reflected these educational gains. Not only did most Guide members have a high school, or even a college, education, they also appealed to a population which was becoming increasingly conscious of its civic rights and responsibilities. In addition, some of the organizers of the Guide, most importantly Omar Brown and Roy Gordon, had supplemented their formal education by living in the United States for several years. This experience exposed them to the techniques of politics on the mainland, and helped boost their confidence to challenge the elite for control of the

³ Grede, p. 135; NA RG 55/5, File 19-1 Charles Reid, "The Educational Program in the Virgin Islands," July 1934 and Actg. Governor to Superintendent of Education, St. Thomas, July 19, 1941 and enclosure.

⁴ Annual Report of the Governor 1940, p. 35; NA RG 55/5, File 19-2 1938 and 1939; RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 7) Governor to Secretary of the Interior, July 20, 1937 and Actg. Governor to Secretary of the Interior, May 1, 1939.

Municipal Councils. Believing they could rely on a more sophisticated public, Guide members eagerly anticipated the advent of universal suffrage in 1938.⁵

To heighten interest in the upcoming election, the Progressive Guide initiated an extensive educational campaign on issues facing the public. To reach people, Guide members not only relied on the traditional mass meeting, but also began publishing a weekly bulletin, also called The Virgin Islands Progressive Guide. Calling itself a civic organization, and not a political party, the VIPG often refrained from using these forums to promote particular candidates, but instead tried to educate people on issues ranging from general civics to garbage collection. The Guide also frequently invited government officials, Council members, and other prominent citizens to speak at its public meetings, thereby giving ordinary people a better chance to understand how their society functioned.⁶

Still, as election day approached, the Guide began to define those issues which would set their candidates apart from the traditional politicians. Arguing that as U.S. citizens, Virgin Islanders deserved a higher standard of living, Guide members called for legislation setting minimum

⁵ Hill, pp. 92-93; Earle B. Ottley, Trials and Triumphs: The Long Road to a Middle Class Society in the U.S. Virgin Islands (St. Thomas: By the Author, 1982), pp. 38-50.

⁶ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 183-184; Hill, pp. 92-95; Daily News, Aug. 12, 1939; Progressive Guide (St. Thomas), Mar. 22, 1941.

wages and maximum working hours, and that would provide compensation to injured workers. Since this legislation was patterned after New Deal social reforms that were not applied to the Virgin Islands, the Guide claimed that its candidates for office would further Americanize the islands. At the same time, Guide members believed that the islands should be more self-sufficient, and they advocated greater government aid to small farmers.⁷

But while the Guide probably raised the political consciousness of many persons, the organization failed to mount a very effective election campaign. Founded by St. Thomians, the Guide confined its campaigning to that island, but there they supported a full slate of candidates, called the "Square Deal Ticket," which they hoped could gain control of the legislature. However, in response to the challenge from the Progressive Guide, the incumbent politicians formed "The People's Party," and attacked the inexperience of the Guide candidates. As a result, only three candidates supported by the Guide, Osmond Kean, Weymouth Rhymer, and Omar Brown, won seats in the new council.⁸

In part, the Progressive Guide could blame their failure to gain control of the Council on the somewhat

⁷ Hill, pp. 92-96; Murphy, p. 163.

⁸ Hill, p. 94; Daily News, Sep. 3, Oct. 3, 26, and Nov. 9, 1938.

disappointing turnout at the polls. Out of a total of perhaps some 4,000 eligible voters, only 1,170 people cast ballots. While this number represented a gain of a few hundred voters over pre-Organic Act elections, it hardly fulfilled the promise of universal suffrage. Despite the educational efforts of the Guide, many people remained unconvinced that voting could make a difference in their lives.⁹

Some people simply blamed apathy and the lack of experience in democracy for the low turnout. For example, one writer visiting from New York described how people on St. John reacted to their newly granted rights:

There, one of the young civic leaders from St. Thomas was expounding to the isolated natives the principles of a democratic form of government which had, only recently, extended to them to privileges of suffrage. . . .

"Why you don't register your names?" the speaker shouted at the upturned faces of his audience. . . . "You know what vote mean? That mean you say who you send to St. Thomas to sit on the council! That mean democracy!"

That part of the audience which had been uninformed of the merits of democracy, and remiss about registering, shuffled about shamefacedly. Down in the dark islands of the Caribbean, life turns slowly and only after much pondering into new channels. It would take awhile for these people of St. John to realize and utilize their newly acquired powers.

Filtering through the palms, a shaft of sun played across the dark, serious face of the speaker as he drove home a final challenge. "What you think those men up in Congress at Washin'ton gonna say about you? They're gonna say, 'Those

⁹ Paiewonsky, p. 109; Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 3; Sixteenth Census, Virgin Islands, p. 11; Bulletin, Oct. 7, 1932; Daily News, Nov. 9, 1938.

peepul [sic] in the Virgin Islands they is crazy! They ask for this and they ask for that and when we give them self-government, what they do? -- they don't even take up an' register their names so they can vote."

This, apparently, was a sure-fire argument. The audience response was instantaneous. "Das Right! Das right what dat mon say. He right."¹⁰

According to this interpretation, only ignorance kept people away from the polls, but they would eventually vote to show their appreciation for American rule.

Yet, while democracy has to be learned, in a society where a few persons controlled the economy, many potential voters feared they could lose their jobs if suspected of voting for the wrong candidate. Again referring to St. John, one native journalist, a more astute observer than the New York writer, claimed that:

the Creques and Lockharts and one or two other large estate owners had tight control over the handful who voted. It was said that to guard against a double-cross, voters who depended on that group for their jobs were told bluntly that their candidate's defeat would mean that every man, without exception, would lose his job.¹¹

When also applied to St. Thomas and St. Croix, this view revealed a more complete picture of the struggle facing the Progressive Guide. In this context, the reference to "Washin'ton" by the "young civic leader" was an allusion to the federal jobs that allowed some workers to escape the dominion of the estate owners. Now, the Progressive Guide

¹⁰ Reck, pp. 178-179.

¹¹ Ottley, p. 55.

had to convince voters that the new politicians could deliver their promises before workers would risk their jobs.

Yet, the 1938 election campaign taught the VIPG the lessons it needed to gain control of the St. Thomas Municipal Council two years later. While continuing their educational forums, Guide members honed their oratorical skills in speeches denouncing the present Council for its uncaring attitude toward common islanders. In the Council, despite a quarrel that caused Weymouth Rhymer to leave the organization, the Guide politicians distinguished themselves by fashioning legislation that received popular acclaim. Outside the Council, membership in the organization grew to some 350 persons,¹² as ambitious St. Thomians realized that working with the Guide could lead to a higher standard of living.

Shortly after taking their seats on the Council, Osmond Kean and Omar Brown gained greater public respect for the Progressive Guide by skillfully attacking the West Indian Company for charging unfairly high rates for electric power and light. Since 1914, when it installed the island's first generators, the large shipping company had been supplying St. Thomas all its electricity, but the two Councilmen argued that the increasing usage of power and light over the years should have allowed WICO to lower its rates. When

WICO responded by saying that it had twice lowered rates and could afford no further reductions because of the need to replace old machinery, Kean and Brown called for a government investigation of the company. In support of their Councilmen, the Progressive Guide published several editorials advocating government ownership of the Danish enterprise. Using the Tennessee Valley Authority as an example, the editorials argued that the municipality had the right to prevent the export of profits to a foreign country. By the end of 1939, the Guide had so turned public sentiment against WICO, that Governor Cramer decided to invite Osmond Kean to join the Commissioner of Finance, Morris de Castro, in an investigation of the company.¹³

The report issued by the two men condemned WICO and led to government regulation of electric rates. In June 1940, after a thorough investigation, Kean and De Castro found that the profits WICO had made on its power station had risen from nine to twenty-five percent of income between 1930 and 1938, and concluded that the company should reduce its basic charge from 15 to 10 cents per kilowatt hour for power. In response to these findings, the Governor suggested that the Municipal Council create a public utilities commission to regulate electric rates. Knowing that many persons in the United States would object to

¹³ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, p. 185; Daily News, Mar. 30 and July 8, 1940; Progressive Guide, Mar. 18, Aug. 26, Sep. 23 and Dec. 2, 1939.

government appropriation of a profitable private enterprise, Cramer argued that his suggestion would be a workable way to ensure that the public received fair service. Facing considerable pressure from the Governor and an aroused public, the Council agreed to establish a commission, which soon ordered WICO to reduce its rates. The Virgin Islands Progressive Guide had won its first major legislative victory.¹⁴

Along with the victory over WICO, the decision of Ralph Paiewonsky and Valdemar Hill to run on the Square Deal ticket greatly improved the Guide's chances in the 1940 election. Paiewonsky, a member of the family that owned the lucrative A.H. Riise Distillers Corporation, had won his first seat on the Council in 1938 as a member of the "People's Party," but then decided he felt more comfortable with the views expressed by the Progressive Guide. Educated at New York University, Paiewonsky advocated policies too liberal to be accepted by the average St. Thomian merchant, but as a member of a prominent family, he demonstrated that the business community could accommodate itself to the social reforms supported by the Progressive Guide. Realizing the value of having a wealthy, white businessman

¹⁴ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-2 (Part 2) Memorandum for Actg. Secretary of the Interior from Governor, Sep. 9, 1938 and enclosure; RG 55/5, File 31 Governor to Federal Trade Commission, Sep. 4, 1940; RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 9) Actg. Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Aug. 22, 1940; Daily News, July 8 and Oct. 18, 1940; Progressive Guide, Aug. 26, 1939.

on their side, the Progressive Guide warmly welcomed Paiewonsky into their ranks.¹⁵ In contrast to Paiewonsky, Valdemar Hill was one of the founders of the Guide. He had stayed out of the 1938 race because, under federal and local law, he could not hold elected office while employed as a clerk for the Civilian Conservation Corps. More than anyone else, Hill exemplified the ambitious, young black islanders who took advantage of the educational advances under the first civilian administrations. Hill graduated from Charlotte Amalie High School, travelled and studied in the United States, and, after returning home, took university courses by correspondence. From its inception, Hill became a leading strategist of the Progressive Guide and, once he decided to stand for election, his determined self-confidence won the support of many voters.¹⁶

This time, the election results exceeded the expectations of the Progressive Guide. Impressed by the victory over WICO, the voters gave every seat in the Council to the Square Deal ticket. Badly ruptured by Paiewonsky's defection, the People's Party had dissolved before the election, forcing opponents of the Guide into a hastily formed People's Civic League, which carried on an anemic

¹⁵ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, p. 185; Paiewonsky, pp. 48-54 & 105-112; Ottley, p. 51.

¹⁶ Ottley, pp. 9 & 42; Cregue, pp. 112-113; Project Introspection, p. 73; NA RG 55/5, File 18-2 Hill to Supervisor, CCC Camp St. Thomas, Mar. 1, 1939.

election campaign. Altogether the Progressive Guide candidates polled nearly four times as many votes as their opponents.¹⁷

Yet, despite the overwhelming victory, only 1200 people voted. While a higher figure than in the last election, the Progressive Guide had still failed to bring many people into the electoral process.¹⁸ Either from apathy, ignorance, or fear of employer retribution, these persons remained unconvinced of the benefits of universal suffrage. For the most part, the Progressive Guide had won the election by changing the minds of people who had voted previously. The organization still faced the task of enacting its program of social reforms and, then persuading the vast majority of St. Thomians to vote in defence of such legislation.

Indeed, over the next two years, the St. Thomas Council enacted several pieces of legislation that changed the way citizens viewed their local government. Ranging from the regulation of wages to the acquisition of beach property for public use, the laws passed by the Guide politicians raised expectations that the Council should take an active interest in solving everyday problems. Unlike the days before universal suffrage, when merchant politicians shunned social programs as an increased tax burden, the new Council helped

¹⁷ Paiewonsky, pp. 106-107.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Provide jobs, housing, and education for ordinary people. In November 1940, even before the new members took their seats, the council approved a program to compensate workers who had been killed or injured on the job. Known as the Kean's Workmen's Compensation Act, the legislation had been promoted unsuccessfully by Osmond Kean until it became an issue in the 1940 election. By assuring workers that an injury would not immediately drive their families into penury, the Compensation Act received great public approbation and was a demonstration of the kind of legislation that would be passed by a Council dominated by the Progressive Guide.¹⁹ Over the next two years, the new Council created special schools for adults and juvenile delinquents, passed legislation to encourage agriculture, acquired an accessible beach for public bathing, and set minimum wages and maximum working hours for many employees. Altogether, these numerous pieces of legislation marked a radical departure from the formerly slow pace of activity in the island council.²⁰

¹⁹ Jarvis, The Virgin Islands and their People (Philadelphia: Dorrance & Co., 1944), pp. 148-150; Grede, p. 204; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 9) Actg. Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Jan. 22, 1941 and enclosure; Daily News, Oct. 24 & 31 and Nov. 8, 1940; Progressive Guide, Nov. 4, 1939.

²⁰ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 185-186; Hill, pp. 96-97; NA. RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 10) Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Nov. 12, 1942 and enclosures; File 9-11-30 (Separate File 1941 & 1942) Enactments Transmitted to Congress--St. Thomas Municipal Council.

Soundly defeated at the polls, the St. Thomas merchants accepted all the Progressive Guide legislation, except the law regulating wages and working hours. Proposed by Valdemar Hill, this law threatened to undermine efforts by the largest V.I. businesses to exempt the colony from the federal 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act. This Act, which applied to enterprises engaged in interstate commerce, obligated the local shipping firms and sugar factories to pay a daily minimum wage of \$2.40 to their workers. In February 1941, after sustained lobbying by WICO on St. Thomas and VICO on St. Croix, Congress agreed to allow the Department of Labor to establish special wage rates for the Virgin Islands. However by September, when the Council approved Hill's Wage and Hour Act, the Labor Department had not yet set new rates, and the St. Thomian elite began to pressure the Governor to veto the legislation.²¹

Modelled after the Fair Labor Standards Act, Hill's Wage and Hour Act decreed substantially higher wages for many St. Thomian workers. By 1941, due to the preparations for another possible war with Germany, many islanders had

²¹ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-2 (Part 2) Hunt to First Asst. Secretary of the Interior, Nov. 16, 1940 and File 9-11-33 (Part 1) Memorandum for the Secretary of the Interior from Governor, Dec. 12, 1938 and enclosures; RG 55/5, File 58-2 Proceedings of an Extraordinary Meeting of the Municipal Council of St. Thomas-St. John, Jan. 16, 1941; RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1) Wages & Hours Law and File 9-11-30 (Separate File 1942) "Ordinance to Prescribe Minimum Wage and Maximum Hour Standards," 1941; Progressive Guide, Oct. 11 and 25, 1941.

found work constructing a submarine base and an airport, but their wages were set only slightly higher than the rate paid on the WPA relief projects. Claiming that policy required them to pay the prevailing local wage, the two companies with the defense project contracts set their daily minimum wage at \$1.36, whereas the WPA paid \$1.20. In response, Hill argued that neither wage accounted for a rapidly rising cost of living, and his bill set the minimum wage at \$1.60, with provisions for further increases in subsequent years. Furthermore, because the defense contractors refused to pay overtime wages, the Wage and Hour Act mandated time and a half pay for work over eight hours a day and 48 hours a week.²²

Fortunately for the St. Thomas merchants, the man who replaced Governor Cramer was less sympathetic to the aspirations of the common islanders. Unlike Cramer, who was a member of the coterie that believed in the New Deal rehabilitation of the islands, Charles Harwood received the position as a favor to a New York Democratic boss. Moreover, by the time Harwood arrived in the islands in February 1941, war preparations had become the highest

²² Hill, pp. 96-97; NA RG 55/5, File 18/2 Memorandum for the Actg. Representative of Advisory Council CCC, June 15, 1939 and File 58-2 Proceedings of an Extraordinary Meeting of the Municipal Council of St. Thomas-St. John, Jan. 16, 1941; RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1) "Ordinance to Prescribe Minimum Wage and Maximum Hour Standards;" Oct. 17, 1941, Actg. Governor to Governor, Nov. 29, 1941 and File 9-11-24 (Part 2) Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Dec. 13, 1940.

priority of the insular government.²³ Knowing that the new Governor was quite conscious of the high cost of preparing the colony for war, the merchants tried to convince him that the local economy could not support higher labor costs. When the military superintendent of the defense projects seconded the merchants' opinion, Governor Harwood refused to sign the bill.²⁴

Faced with the intransigence of the Governor, the Progressive Guide organized a march on Government House. On October 9, 1941, some 300 workers, carrying placards beseeching Harwood to remember "The Principles of President Franklin D. Roosevelt," and that "In a Democracy the Majority Rule," climbed the hill to the Governor's residence. Once there, Valdemar Hill presented a petition signed by 600 persons to the Governor, who responded with a short speech indicating he might reconsider his opposition to the legislation. A week later, after persuading the Council to appease the merchants with some modifications to the bill, Governor Harwood signed the Wages and Hours Act.

²³ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 191-192; Lewis, The Virgin Islands, pp. 92-93; Grede, p. 13.

²⁴ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1) Actg. Governor to Actg. Director, Division of Territories, Mar. 27, 1941, Governor to Deputy Administrator, Wage & Hour Division, Department of Labor, Mar. 27, 1941, Memorandum for Governor from Division of Labor Standards, Department of Labor, Aug. 22, 1941, and Actg. Governor to Governor, Nov. 29, 1941; Progressive Guide, Oct. 11, 1941.

Not since the great strike of 1916 had St. Thomian workers had so much to celebrate.²⁵

Although centered on St. Thomas, the Progressive Guide attempted to build a branch organization on St. Croix. Because of its lower educational levels, and the logistical difficulties of campaigning in rural areas, St. Croix presented greater problems than her sister island for building a political organization. Nonetheless, within a few years membership in the St. Croix chapter equalled that on St. Thomas, and Guide members had obtained a few seats on the Crucian Council.²⁶ Yet, the St. Croix Progressive Guide failed to wrest control of the legislature from that island's elite, and could never enact a comprehensive program of social legislation. Nevertheless, by attempting to bind together both islands under one political

²⁵ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, p. 185; Hill, pp. 97-99; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1) Actg. Governor to Governor, Nov. 26, 1941; Progressive Guide, Oct. 4-18, 1941. Yet, because federal law superseded local law, Hill's Wages and Hours Act could not automatically raise wages on the defense projects. Not until March 1942 did the Governor and Council succeed in getting Congress to raise the minimum wage to meet local standards on these projects. See NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1) Governor to Deputy Administrator, Wage & Hour Division, Department of Labor, Memorandum for Director, Division of Territories from Chief Counsel, Dec. 6, 1941, and Aide to Asst. Secretary of the Navy to Governor, Dec. 9, 1941 and enclosure, and File 9-11-39 Governor to Actg. Governor, Dec. 2, 1941; Progressive Guide, Nov. 8, 1941, March 7 and 18, 1942.

²⁶ Avis, Nov. 4, 1942; Progressive Guide, Jan. 24 and Nov. 5, 1942, and Apr. 13, 1943.

organization, the Progressive Guide helped to overcome some of the jealousies that had long separated St. Thomians and Crucians.

The absence of an effective political organization on St. Croix inspired the St. Thomas Progressive Guide to extend its activities to that island. After an initial excitement over the extended suffrage, the inability of popular leaders to challenge the political status quo left the Crucian masses apathetic toward elections. Because St. Croix had a lower standard of living than St. Thomas, the elimination of property restrictions on the franchise gave the right to vote to a greater number of people. Although the language requirement prohibited most Puerto Ricans from voting, the extension of the suffrage increased the number of eligible voters from some 600 to nearly 4,000 people.²⁷ For the 1938 elections, excitement over newly-won rights and several spirited races brought nearly 2,000 people to the polls, but two years later, the lack of effective political organizing lowered that number to twelve hundred.²⁸ With few exceptions, the same men remained in the Council, and many people began to lose faith in the benefits of universal suffrage.

²⁷ Dookhan, "Search for Identity," p. 3; Sixteenth Census, Virgin Islands, pp. 11; Avis, Nov. 4, 1936.

²⁸ NA RG 55/27 Report of the Government Secretary, 1941; Daily News, Sep. 21 and Oct. 3, 1938; Avis, Sep. 8 and Nov. 10, 1938, and Nov. 6, 1940.

In October 1941, the Virgin Islands Progressive Guide announced the formation of its chapter on St. Croix, and prepared to contest the 1942 elections. The charter membership of the chapter included two new members of the Municipal Council, Eric Carroll and Emile Abramsen, who headed the efforts to get Crucians to join the Guide. Proclaiming that the time had come for young, energetic men and women to lead St. Croix, the Guide leaders drew large crowds to their organizational meetings. Within a few months, the St. Croix Guide had clearly established itself as a considerable political force on the island.²⁹

Unfortunately for the Guide, its zealous attacks on the existing Council provoked a damaging rift with D. Hamilton Jackson, still the island's most popular figure. In 1940, a disagreement with the administration had caused Jackson to resign his Judgeship and contest a seat in the Council, which he won easily.³⁰ Then in the following year, he supported a successful effort to suspend Carroll and Abramsen from the Council for using abusive language against their fellow legislators. The resulting ill feelings between the

²⁹ NA RG 55/5, File 58-1, Memorandum for the Governor from Government Secretary, Dec. 18, 1941; RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 1) Actg. Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Nov. 14, 1941 and enclosure; Avis, Nov. 10, 1938, Oct. 8, 18, & 22, and Nov. 6, 1940, Oct. 15 & 16, 1942; Progressive Guide, Nov. 1 and Dec. 6, 1941.

³⁰ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-39 (Part 1) Executive Assistant to the Governor, Nov. 19, 1941; Avis, Oct. 18 and Nov. 6, 1940; Daily News, July 1 and Sep. 30, 1940.

Guide and Jackson escalated when the Crucian leader narrowly won election to become Chairman of the Virgin Islands Legislative Assembly. While the Assembly consisted of the members of both Councils, the St. Thomas politicians argued that each legislative body had the right to determine its own membership; but Jackson ruled that the suspended Councilmen were ineligible to sit in the Assembly. A month of bickering passed before Carrol and Abramsen agreed to apologize for their statements and were reinstated as members of their Council and the Assembly. Although relations between the Guide and Jackson subsequently improved, this early rupture prevented the possible inclusion of the respected leader into the ranks of the organization.³¹

Still, the Progressive Guide recognized the stature of the former labor leader and judge by supporting his candidacy in the 1942 elections. Despite progress in building its organization, the Guide could not field a full slate of nine candidates, and only entered four of its members in the election. Instead, the Guide sanctioned

³¹ Municipal Council of St. Thomas and St. John, Proceedings of the Fifth Municipal Council (St. Thomas: Municipal Council, 1946), June 5, 1946; NA RG 55/5, File 58-1 Administrator for St. Croix to Actg. Governor, Dec. 16, 1941; RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 1) Actg. Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Nov. 14, 1941 and enclosure, File 9-11-30 (Part 2) Actg. Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Nov. 19, 1941; File 9-11-39 (Part 1) Executive Assistant to Governor, Nov. 19, 1941; Progressive Guide, Nov. 15, 1941 and Oct. 22, 1942.

Jackson's bid to retain his seat as Member-at-Large, and declined to place candidates in races they had no chance of winning. Thus, when Jackson and three of its members won election, the Guide could claim victory in the campaign.³²

Yet, such a victory did not give the Guide Councilmen the control they needed to fashion a legislative program similar to the one enacted by their brethren on St. Thomas. In May 1942, Emile Abramsen attempted to emulate the St. Thomas Guide by sponsoring a bill almost identical to Hill's Wages and Hours Act, but the legislation was attacked by most of his colleagues as being too expensive for the ailing Crucian economy. Certainly, because wages on St. Croix were lower than on St. Thomas, Abramsen's proposal that the daily minimum wage be raised to \$1.60 seemed drastic.³³ Unlike St. Thomas, the WPA and defense projects on St. Croix paid a minimum wage of \$1.04, while some sugar cane workers still received as little as sixty-four cents a day. However, the entry of the United States into the Second World War had caused a considerable increase in the cost of living in the islands, and legislative action could have eased the very real suffering of the poorest workers. Yet, even after the 1942 elections, the Guide members in the Council could not

³² Avis, Oct. 15 & 17, and Nov. 4, 1942; Daily News, Nov. 5, 1942; Progressive Guide, Oct. 22 and Nov. 5, 1942.

³³ NA RG 55/5, File 58-1 Municipal Council Bill #84, 2nd Session, 1942, and Actg. Governor to Chairman of the Municipal of St. Croix, Aug. 10, 1942 and enclosures; Avis, Oct. 16, 1942; Progressive Guide, May 20, 1942.

muster the strength to achieve at least a compromise wage and hour resolution.³⁴

Only by working with its St. Thomas counterpart did the St. Croix Guide achieve some legislative success. In November 1941, shortly after being reinstated in the St. Croix Council and the V.I. Legislative Assembly, Eric Carrol introduced a resolution to the Assembly petitioning the federal government to equalize wage rates between St. Croix and St. Thomas on the WPA and defense projects. With the backing of the St. Thomian Guide members, the resolution passed the Assembly, and then received the approval of Government Secretary Robert Lovett, acting as Governor in Harwood's absence. Although the measure was never acted upon by the federal government, Lovett's approval demonstrated that inter-island cooperation could benefit working class Virgin Islanders.³⁵

³⁴ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-13 (Part 1) President, VICO to Secretary of the Interior, Mar. 23, 1938 enclosed in Minutes of Meeting with Secretary of the Interior concerning VICO operations, April 14, 1938; RG 55/27 Report of the Administrator for St. Croix, 1942; RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1) President, VICO to Asst. Director, Division of Territories, Sep. 12, 1939, Actg. Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Mar. 19, 1942 and enclosures, File 9-11-24 (Part 2) Actg. Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Mar. 7, 1942 and enclosures, and File 9-11-50 (Part 2) Commissioner of Labor Statistics, Department of Labor to Director, Division of Territories, Oct. 28, 1946 and enclosure; Avis, Oct. 4, 1940.

³⁵ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1) Acting Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Mar. 19, 1942 and enclosures, and File 9-11-24 (Part 2) Acting Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Mar. 7, 1942 and enclosures.

Ironically, this cooperation between the two chapters of the organization may have hindered the growth of the V.I. Progressive Guide on St. Croix. Wary of the large crowds drawn to Progressive Guide lectures, other Crucian politicians warned voters not to be manipulated by men who would place the interests of St. Thomas ahead of St. Croix.³⁶ Inter-island jealousy had a long history that had spawned a distrust between Virgin Islanders that the Guide had just began to overcome. By stressing the need for equal wages, the Crucian leaders of the Guide assuaged some of the prejudice against St. Thomians, but they could not gain enough seats in the Crucian Council to legislate significant social reform.

After 1942, the Virgin Islands Progressive Guide began to lose influence on both St. Thomas and St. Croix. While its demise on the latter, where the Guide never won more than the three seats it gained in the 1942 election, was quite rapid, the St. Thomas chapter, which again swept the Council in the 1942 poll, only slowly lost its predominance in local politics.³⁷ By the end of the Second World War, the St. Croix Guide hardly existed, and internal dissension

³⁶ NA RG 55/5, File 58-1 Memorandum to the Governor from the Government Secretary, Dec. 18, 1941; Progressive Guide, Dec. 6, 1941 and Apr. 17, 1943.

³⁷ Daily News, Nov. 4, 1942, June 24, Nov. 6, 8, & 13, 1944 and Mar. 17, 1945; Progressive Guide, July 2, 1945.

racked the St. Thomas organization. Yet, despite its short lifespan, the Progressive Guide left an indelible imprint on the V.I. political scene.

In part, its own success sped the Progressive Guide's breakup. Established in response to the granting of universal suffrage, the Guide never developed any long term goals besides ensuring that government play a more active role in the lives of ordinary people. The St. Thomas Guide, in particular, performed admirably in educating citizens about their rights as voters, and then enacting legislation that enhanced the quality of life of the poorest islanders, but failed to develop plans for the further social development of the island. Certainly, the Guide passed legislation favoring a resident Commissioner in Washington, D.C., land reform, and full employment;³⁸ but none of these goals could be accomplished without engaging in serious struggle with the colonial bureaucracy on one hand, and the local elite on the other.

Yet the very Organic Act that allowed the Progressive Guide to gain control of the St. Thomas Council also prevented any major restructuring of V.I. society. The Act placed ultimate political power in the federal government

³⁸ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 1) Chairman of the Legislative Assembly to President Roosevelt, Oct. 16, 1942 and enclosures, and Memorandum for the Secretary of the Interior from Actg. Director, Division of Territories, Jan. 19, 1944 and enclosures; Daily News, Dec. 11, 1945; Progressive Guide, June 3 and Dec. 16, 1943 and Mar. 22, 1947.

and its appointed representative, the Governor, and divorced local political from economic power, ensuring that the municipal governments could not interfere, except to levy taxes, with private property. These limitations on the power of legislature meant that politicians had to cooperate with the Governor and the economic elite. Often, this cooperation tempted even the most ardent Guide members to abandon political advocacy for more lucrative posts in private employment or the executive branch of the government. For example, on the difficulties encountered by the St. Croix branch, the Progressive Guide heeded the influence of the Crucian elite:

[The VIPG] has taken root in St. Croix, and the business element that has for centuries oppressed the laboring and poor classes object to this. In an effort to crush the organization and bring the people to their knees in economic slavery, a subtle program of propaganda commingled with special attractions have been going on.³⁹

The Progressive Guide might denounce the elite and the administration in editorials and speeches, but the owners of the land and businesses as well as the top government officials, had the power not only to influence voters, but also to sow discord between the political leaders.

That Councilmen received no salary for their services exacerbated the tendency for them to accept favors from the administration and the elite. Traditionally, the Councils had been the preserve of upper class men who were not

dependent on salaried employment, but as more middle class politicians gained seats in the legislatures, some began to suggest that they could not serve the public full-time without proper compensation. Yet, even though the Organic Act stated that each Council should determine the compensation paid its members, both Councils adhered to the argument that salaries would be too costly, and they provided only per diem payments of a few dollars.⁴⁰ However, shortly after the Progressive Guide won control of the St. Thomas Council, several legislators proposed that Councilmen be paid an annual salary of \$2,400. In April 1941, the Council approved the proposal, but the Governor vetoed the measure as too expensive. Significantly, the only Councilman to oppose the resolution was Ralph Palewonsky, the wealthy rum merchant. Unable to overcome public perception that salaries would waste taxpayers' money, the Council abandoned efforts to increase compensation for its members, but many politicians continued to complain that they had to choose between public service and private gain. For example, in 1945, St. Thomas lost its most able legislator when Valdemar Hill resigned from the

⁴⁰ Ottley, p. 59; NA RG 55/5, File 58-2b Memorandum for Governor from Commissioner of Finance, Jan. 9, 1942 and enclosures.

Council to become the island's Tax Assessor and Water Commissioner.⁴¹

In a larger sense, its very success in making the islands more American doomed the Progressive Guide. While their belief in Americanization provided the basis for passing social legislation modelled on the New Deal, it prevented Guide politicians from effectively challenging the economic power of the wealthy businessmen and large landowners. Thus the suggestion by the Guide that the municipal government acquire WICO's power plant was easily shunted aside by the Governor into the effort to establish the Public Utilities Commission, and other attempts to develop land for farms and housing were defeated by the necessity to pay proper compensation to property owners. The commitment to Americanization also weakened the political independence of the Progressive Guide, as many members tried to develop ties to the national Democratic or Republican Parties. Indeed, Roy Gordon's decision to join the Republican Party greatly contributed to his estrangement from his colleagues, most of whom became Democrats.⁴²

⁴¹ Ottley, pp. 42-43 and 58-59; Creque, pp. 113-114; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 1) Actg. Governor to Governor, Apr. 28, 1941, President, V.I. National Bank to Secretary of the Interior, Apr. 28, 1941 and enclosure, Governor to Commissioner of Finance, Apr. 29, 1941, and Director, Division of Territories to President, V.I. National Bank, May 3, 1941; Daily News, Nov. 23 & 24 and Dec. 4, 1945.

⁴² Daily News, Apr. 27, May 27 and Oct. 6, 1944.

At the same time, the Progressive Guide defined a unique Virgin Island vision of Americanization. In 1944, on his return from a visit to Washington, D.C., Roy Gordon boasted "that in the Virgin Islands there is more Democracy for the Negro than in the Nation's Capitol."⁴³ Certainly, the political victories of the Progressive Guide ensured that black Virgin Islanders would not have to suffer the daily indignities common in most places on the mainland. While accepting the basic social structure of the islands, the Progressive Guide had begun a process that would place political power in the hands of black Virgin Islanders.

⁴³ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-50 (Part 3) Address by Roy Gordon at Emancipation Garden, St. Thomas, Aug. 28, 1944.

CHAPTER TEN
THE IMPACT OF WORLD WAR II

The Second World War affirmed Virgin Islander loyalty to the United States. Virgin Islanders responded eagerly to the call to serve the nation. They quickly organized local Home Guard units and Civil Defense committees, and by the end of the war, nearly a thousand islanders served in the U.S. military. Thousands more worked on the military construction projects spawned by the rediscovery of the strategic value of the territory. Altogether, Virgin Islanders felt they were direct participants in the great war against fascism. Moreover, they boasted of their citizenship in the single, most powerful nation in the world.

Indeed, Virgin Islanders used their status as U.S. citizens to push for further political and economic progress in the colony. Believing that the war against fascism abroad required the elimination of racism at home, Virgin Islanders demanded a higher standard of living and more political authority to manage their own affairs. In demands ranging from political representation in Congress to higher wages in the islands, Virgin Islanders constantly reminded federal officials of their U.S. citizenship. Yet, because many white Americans refused to accept them as equals, black

Virgin Islanders often found themselves in conflict with representatives of the U.S. government. By asserting their patriotism, Virgin Islanders hoped to convince the federal government to meet their demands.

The renewed importance of the territory gave the islanders an important forum on which to air their grievances. In strategic terms, the vindicated the purchase of the Virgin Islands. Even before the United States entered the hostilities, American officials decided to establish several military bases in the colony. In 1939, citing the need to protect the Panama Canal, the U.S. Navy began work to upgrade the existing Marine Corps airfield on St. Thomas, and to construct a submarine base on that island. A year later, the Army received authorization to establish an airbase on St. Croix from which to patrol the Caribbean Sea. Also, an agreement between the United States and Great Britain made the West Indian Company docks a focal point in the shipment of bauxite from British Guiana to the United States and Canada, and necessitated the stationing of hundreds of soldiers in the islands to protect them from enemy attacks.¹

¹ Lewis, The Virgin Islands, pp. 93-94; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-10 (Part 2) Passim 1939-1940; File 9-11-13 (Part 1) Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Apr. 17, 1942 and Chairman of the Board, VICO to Administrator, War Shipping Administration, June 19, 1942; RG 55/5, File 58-2c House of Representatives, 76th Congress, 1st Session, Document No. 65: Report on Need of Additional Naval Bases..., Dec. 27, 1938; RG 55/27 Report of the Government Secretary, 1940 and Report of the Administrator for St. Croix, 1941; Daily News, Oct. 13 &

The preparations for war brought sudden changes to daily life in the Virgin Islands. For many people, the flurry of defense activities offered steady employment at wages higher than those paid in either private industry or on the work relief projects. During 1940 and 1941, some two thousand persons worked on the airfield and submarine base on St. Thomas, and another thousand found employment constructing defense facilities on St. Croix.² For a short time at least, unemployment disappeared in the Virgin Islands. Moreover, although the defense contractors set their wages according to existing Works Projects Administration schedules, laborers could earn more on the defense projects, because the work relief program limited employment to thirty-two hours per week. Defense work became especially important on St. Croix, where the \$1.04 daily minimum equalled the first class harvest wage paid sugar workers.³

14, 1942.

² NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-33 (Part 1) Secretary of the Interior to U.S. Attorney General, Feb. 28, 1941; RG 55/27 Report of the Administrator for St. Croix, 1941; RG 126/1, File 9-11-67 (Part 1) Memorandum for Director, Division of Territories from Governor, Mar. 25, 1943.

³ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-13 (Part 4) Memorandum for Under Secretary of the Interior from Director, Division of Territories, July 29, 1942; RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1) President, VICO to Asst. Director, Division of Territories, Sep. 12, 1939 and enclosure, File 9-11-24 (Part 2) Memorandum for Director, Division of Territories from Superintendent of Public Welfare, St. Thomas, Dec. 7, 1940, Actg. Governor to

The great demand for labor soon attracted many workers from the nearby British islands. Largely drawn to St. Thomas because that island offered higher wages, more jobs, and was closer to the British Leewards than St. Croix, over one thousand of these people illegally entered the American colony in search of work on the defense projects. Alarmed by the strain put on the local infrastructure by such a sudden influx of people, V.I. officials attempted to arrange a formal immigration agreement with British colonial authorities. However, the continued labor shortage defeated every effort to erect a regulated work program. At best, V.I. officials registered alien workers so as to deport them upon completion of their work. In the meantime, the need to prepare the islands for war took precedence over providing adequate housing or social services for these temporary immigrants.⁴

Director, Division of Territories, Mar. 7, 1942 and enclosures, Vice President, VICO to Director, Division of Territories, Feb. 6, 1943, and Administrator for St. Croix to Actg. Governor, Aug. 17, 1942 enclosed in Actg. Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Aug. 21, 1942.

⁴ Lewis, The Virgin Islands, p. 94; Robert Morss Lovett, All Our Years (New York: The Viking Press, 1948), pp. 287-288; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-10 (Part 2) Solicitor to Secretary of the Interior, June 2, 1941, File 9-11-33 (Part 1) Secretary of the Interior to U.S. Attorney General, Feb. 28, 1941, First Asst. Secretary of the Interior to Director, F.B.I., May 17, 1941, and Actg. Secretary of the Interior to U.S. Attorney General, May 29, 1941; RG 55/27 Report of the Government Secretary, 1941; RG 126/1, File 9-11-21 (Part 5) Actg. Governor to Director, Division of Territories, May 2 & 9, and June 4, 1941.

Besides attracting workers from neighboring islands, the defense projects also drew many natives away from the Crucian cane fields. Along with a prolonged drought that had begun in 1938, the prospect of steady wage work at the Army airbase convinced many small farmers to stop growing sugar cane. Between 1939 and 1942, the number of small farmers dropped from some 1,000 to 650 persons, and the amount of cane delivered to the island's sugar factories slid from 49,400 to 26,000 tons. More than anything else, defense construction marked the end of the rehabilitation plans to save the Crucian sugar industry by developing homesteads. In 1940, the island's one remaining private sugar factory, La Grange, gave up any hope of ever making a profit and ceased operations, leaving only VICO's Central factory to process all the cane grown on St. Croix.⁵

Defense construction similarly affected food crops and livestock. During the 1930s, largely due to the efforts of the rehabilitation planners, the value of fruits and vegetables grown locally had risen from just \$7,700 to over \$35,000, and government officials observed that the colony had become nearly self-sufficient in such staples as

⁵ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-13 (Part 6) Memorandum for Undersecretary of the Interior from Director, Division of Territories, July 29, 1942 and enclosure; RG 55/27 Reports of the Administrator for St. Croix 1940 and 1941, and Report of the Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station (St. Croix), 1943; RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 2) Vice President, VICO to Director, Division of Territories, Feb. 6, 1943 and "A Word Picture of St. Croix's Economic History...", Jan. 1943.

bananas, papayas, turnips, and pumpkins. In addition, while production of other foods lagged far behind demand, local farmers greatly increased the amount of yams, poultry, and eggs available to consumers.⁶ Nevertheless, by mid-1941, local officials complained that too many farmers had abandoned their land to work on the defense projects.

Given the task of preparing the islands for war, Governor Charles Harwood placed high priority on restoring agricultural production. Continued sugar production was necessary to help supply a U.S. market cut off from sources in Europe and Asia, while food production would be critical if the colony itself became isolated from the mainland. To counter the drift away from the countryside, the Governor pleaded for financial and technical assistance from the federal government, worked with the Municipal Councils to open more land to small farmers, and pushed the Virgin Islands Company to modernize its operations. Altogether, these efforts brought food production back to pre-war levels, and encouraged the belief that the Virgin Islands could be self-sufficient in the production of many foodstuffs.⁷

⁶ NA RG 55/5, File 3-1 Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Feb. 25, 1941 and enclosures, File 3-2 Government Secretary to Kisluk, June 4, 1941, and File 30 Actg. Governor to Administrator for St. Croix, Jan. 20, 1938; Progressive Guide, Mar. 11. 1939.

⁷ Lewis, The Virgin Islands, p. 100; NA RG 48/749, File 1-188 Secretary of the Interior to President Roosevelt, July 8, 1941; RG 55/5, File 3-1 Governor to Director,

As a result of numerous trips to Washington, D.C., the Governor obtained a substantial increase in the federal aid available to local farmers. In 1940, he persuaded the National Youth Administration to revive vocational education in the islands. Soon nearly 300 young persons received an opportunity to study subjects ranging from nursing to sewing, for girls, and from masonry to typing, for boys. While not limited to agriculture, the program offered agricultural classes on St. Croix that Harwood hoped would contribute to the rejuvenation of Crucian farming.⁸ Early the following year, in another attempt to aid Crucian agriculture, the Governor obtained a loan from the Rural Electrification Administration to extend electrical lines into the rural areas of St. Croix. By extending electric power and light to several hundred small farmers, the program helped counter the temptation to move into the urban

Division. of Territories, Feb. 25, 1941 and enclosures; RG 55/27 Report of Asst. Supervisor, WPA 1943; Progressive Guide, Mar. 11, 1939, Mar. 29 and July 19, 1941, and Mar. 4 and Oct. 28, 1943.

⁸ Annual Report of the Governor 1942, p. 3 and 11; NA RG 55/5, File 19-3 Actg. Governor to Chairman of School Board-St. Croix, June 24, 1941, Superintendent of Education-St. Thomas to Actg. Government Secretary, Sep. 18, 1941 and enclosures, and Memorandum to Actg. Governor from Director, Education & Training NYA Project, June 26, 1942 and enclosures; RG 55/27 Report of the Administrator for St. Croix, 1941, Report of the Superintendent of Education-St. Thomas, 1941, and Report of the Director, National Youth Administration (Virgin Islands), 1942; Daily News, Sep. 10, 1940.

areas.⁹ Shortly thereafter, the Governor obtained a \$550,000 grant from the Department of Agriculture to encourage the local cultivation and distribution of foodstuffs. Concomitantly, the PWA, WPA and VICO joined together to construct and operate an abattoir on St. Croix and a cold storage facilities on St. Thomas to provide islanders with a greater supply of meat.¹⁰ Then in 1942, the Governor received more good news when the Farm Security Administration agreed to take charge of the federal homestead project. Initially requested by Governor Cramer, the agreement to turn the federal homesteads over to the FSA eased the financial and administrative burden of the insular government.¹¹

⁹ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-13 (Part 6) Memorandum for Under Secretary of Interior from Director, Division of Territories, July 29, 1942 and enclosure; RG 55/5, File 16 Governor to Actg. Director, Division of Territories, Nov. 20, 1940; RG 55/27 Report of the Tax Assessor-St. Croix, 1943.

¹⁰ Annual Report of the Governor, 1942, p. 3; NA RG 48/749, File 1-188 (Part 1) Secretary of the Interior to President Roosevelt, July 8, 1941 and enclosure, File 9-11-13 (Part 6) Secretary of the Interior to President Roosevelt, Aug. 15, 1941 and enclosure, Memorandum for Undersecretary of the Interior from Director, Division of Territories, July 29, 1942 and enclosure, and File 9-11-13 (Part 7) Memorandum for Chairman of the Board, VICO from Secretary of the Board, VICO, May 8, 1944; RG 55/27 Report of the Commissioner of Finance, 1940 and Report of the Manager of the St. Thomas Municipal Market, 1943; RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 (Part 1) Manager, Livestock Project to Director, Division of Territories, Jan. 15, 1941 and enclosure.

¹¹ Annual Report of the Governor 1943, p. 5; NA RG 55/27 Report of the Administrator for St. Croix, 1942.

On the local level, similar successes rewarded the Governor's efforts. Once the United States entered the war, he convinced the municipal legislatures to enact their own programs to boost food production. In April 1942, the St. Croix Municipal Council opened for free all idle municipal land to anyone who wished to grow food crops. A few months later, the St. Thomas Council launched an even more ambitious program to provide seeds, transportation, and day laborers to that island's small farmers.¹² Two years later, Harwood capped these successes by announcing the reopening of the modernized Bethlehem sugar factory. As the crowning achievement of the New Deal rehabilitation program, the renovated facility allowed VICO to boost sugar exports to the United States.¹³ Yet, because the advent of the war disrupted food imports, the government needed to regulate food prices and distribution. During the summer of 1941, both Municipal Councils revived the Food Commissions that had set maximum prices during the first World War. Although the Commissions may have hindered local food production, they addressed the more immediate concern that island

¹² NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 8) Bill #80 enclosed in Actg. Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Oct. 20, 1942 and File 9-11-67 (Part 2) Actg. Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Mar. 14, 1945 and enclosure; Progressive Guide, July 1, 1942 and Nov. 13, 1943.

¹³ Creque, p. 122; Annual Report of the Governor, 1944, p. 1; Annual Report of the Governor 1946, p. 2; Avis, Nov. 2, 1944.

merchants would gouge consumers if left unregulated.¹⁴ The U.S. Department of Agriculture supported the local effort to provide food to all Virgin Islanders by extending the food stamp program of its Surplus Marketing Administration to the territory. Between May 1941 and October 1942, food stamps supplemented the income of some 3,000 islanders before being replaced by a program to distribute food imports directly to poor families. Then in 1943, the federal Food Distribution Administration extended to the Virgin Islands the national program to subsidize the buying and selling of local produce.¹⁵ Recognizing the necessity of food subsidies to prevent hunger, Virgin Islanders appreciated the work of these federal agencies, and the St. Thomas Municipal Council even passed a resolution stating that without the aid of the federal government, food prices would have been 40 percent higher than present levels.¹⁶

¹⁴ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 1) Actg. Governor to Governor, Aug. 9, 1941 and enclosure, File 9-11-30 (Part 2) Actg. Governor to Asst. Director, Division of Territories, Aug. 20, 1941, and File 9-11-30 (Separate File) Ordinance to Create a Commission to Regulate ... Prices of Foodstuffs ..., July 29, 1941 (amended Mar. 17, 1942); Avis, Oct. 2, 1942; Progressive Guide, July 12 & 26, and Aug. 2, 1941; Daily News, Oct. 6, 1942; Avis, Aug. 3, 1946.

¹⁵ Annual Report of the Governor 1942, p. 11; Annual Report of the Governor 1943, pp. 7-8; NA RG 55/27 Report of the Government Secretary 1941, Reports of the Superintendent of Public Welfare, St. Thomas and the Superintendent of Public Welfare, St. Croix, 1943; Progressive Guide, May 17, 1941, Mar. 20, Apr. 6 and Sep. 25, 1943, and Feb. 10, 1944.

¹⁶ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Separate File) Resolution in Recognition and Appreciation of the Work of the War Food Administration, May 2, 1944. In March 1943 the Food

Of course, to a large extent Virgin Islanders claimed they earned the right to benefit from federal programs by their willingness to participate in the defense of the United States. Even before the American entry into the war, each municipality had created its own Council for Defense, and immediately after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Governor Harwood authorized them to prepare the populace for war. Staffed by hundreds of volunteers, these Councils instituted nightly blackouts, conducted air raid and fire drills, and established numerous first-aid stations. Within a few weeks, officials from the U.S. Office of Civilian Defense observed that the Virgin Islands had outdistanced mainland communities in their preparation for an enemy attack.¹⁷

Their enthusiasm spurred Virgin Islanders beyond civilian defense measures. In October 1941, the St. Thomas Municipal Council organized a Home Guard to defend the island, and shortly after the United States declared war on Japan and Germany, the Crucian legislature followed the St.

Distribution Administration had become part of the War Food Administration.

¹⁷ Annual Report of the Governor 1942, pp. 1-2; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-67 (Part 2) Coordinator for Civilian Defense to Director of Old Age Social Insurance, Nov. 4, 1942 and enclosure, and Actg. Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Mar. 14, 1945 and enclosure; Daily News, Dec. 31, 1942; Progressive Guide, Dec. 20, 1941.

Thomas example.¹⁸ Unfortunately for the islanders, Congress ignored the formation of the Home Guard units. Although U.S. Army officers stationed in the territory agreed to train the guardsmen, they received neither weapons nor ammunition, and had to buy their own uniforms. Nevertheless, within a few weeks, the St. Thomas Home Guard recruited one hundred men, while nearly 300 volunteers swelled the ranks of the St. Croix Home Guard.

Besides allowing Virgin Islanders to defend their own homes against enemy attack, an armed Home Guard could have eased the racial tensions created by the arrival of hundreds of soldiers, sailors and marines from the mainland and Puerto Rico. Throughout the war, clashes between servicemen and civilians were commonplace, with the attendant racial slurs exchanged between white Americans, Puerto Ricans, and black natives. Although nobody was killed, several people were received severe injuries, and the presence of military personnel free on leave in town caused general uneasiness among the population. Under these circumstances, the arming

¹⁸ Lewis, The Virgin Islands, p. 93; NA RG 55/5, File 36 Governor to Administrator for St. Croix, Feb. 2, 1942 and enclosures; RG 55/27 Report of the Administrator for St. Croix, 1942; RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 8) Bill #68 enclosed in Actg. Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Dec. 21, 1942, File 9-11-30 (Separate File 1942) Ordinance to Establish St. Thomas Home Guard, approved Oct. 3, 1941. On St. Thomas, the 1941 ordinance merely revived and expanded a 1931 ordinance creating a Home Guard that had since languished. See NA RG 48/749 File 9-11-10 (Part 2) Actg. Secretary of the Interior to Secretary of War, Sep. 26, 1939, and RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 2) Ordinance to Establish the St. Thomas Home Guard, approved July 28, 1931.

of the Home Guards could have relieved tension by reducing the number of non-native troops needed on the islands. Instead, the denial of arms increased local resentment against Americans and Puerto Ricans.

The enthusiasm of Virgin Islanders prompted Governor Harwood to seek federal recognition of the Home Guards. He quickly gained support from officials in the Interior Department, but they could not convince their counterparts in the War Department that the arming of Virgin Islanders would make a significant contribution to the defense of the strategic outpost. In February 1942, the Secretary of War informed the Secretary of the Interior that the federal troops already assigned to the islands provided enough protection. Without support from the War Department, the Interior Department could not expect Congress to federalize the Home Guards.¹⁹ Unfortunately for Virgin Islanders, local pride mattered little where national defense was concerned.²⁰

¹⁹ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-10 (Part 3) Secretary of the Interior to Secretary of War, Apr. 2, 1942 and enclosures; RG 55/5, File 36 Home Guard 1942-1943; RG 126/1, File 9-11-67 (Part 1) Secretary of the Interior to Chairman, House Committee on Military Affairs, Sep. 7, 1942, File 9-11-67 (Part 2) Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Dec. 31, 1941, Director, Division of Territories to Governor, Feb. 7, 1942 and enclosure, and Coordinator for Civilian Defense to Director, Old Age Social Insurance, Nov. 4, 1942 and enclosure.

²⁰ Isaac Dookhan, "Military-Civilian Conflicts in the Virgin Islands During World War II," Journal of Caribbean History, 25:1 (1990), pp. 89-110; Annual Report of the Governor 1943, p. 9; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-10 (Part 3)

However, the Interior Department eventually did persuade President Roosevelt to extend the Selective Service Act of 1940 to the Virgin Islands. In addition to the efforts of the Interior Department, the St. Thomas legislature and individual Guardsmen on each island had petitioned the federal government to allow Virgin Islanders to arm themselves. Moreover, many Virgin Islanders argued that they would never enjoy the full rights of U.S. citizenship unless they bore the responsibility of defending the country, which bolstered the claim of the Interior Department that the islanders would make good soldiers.²¹ So while the lack of Congressional legislation prevented the arming of the Home Guards, a simple Presidential proclamation established the bureaucracy for inducting Virgin Islanders into the United States military. In

Secretary of Interior to Secretary of War, Apr. 2, 1942; RG 55/5, File 36 Actg. Governor to Administrator for St. Croix, Mar. 19, 1942 and enclosure, and Actg. Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Aug. 10, 1942 and enclosures; RG 55/27 Report of the Government Secretary, 1941 and Report of the Administrator for St. Croix, 1941; RG 126/1, File 9-11-9 (Part 4) Actg. Director, Division of Territories to President, Am. V.I. Civic Assoc., Sep. 1, 1943, File 9-11-67 (Part 2) Director, Division of Territories to Governor, Feb. 7, 1942 and enclosures, and Actg. Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Mar. 21, 1942.

²¹ NA RG 48/749, File 1-188 (Part 6) Actg. Secretary of the Interior to Director, Bureau of the Budget, Sept. 11, 1944, File 9-11-9 (Part 2) Actg. Secretary of the Interior to President Roosevelt, July 29, 1942 and enclosure, and File 9-11-10 (Part 3) Secretary of Interior to Secretary of War, Apr. 2, 1942 and enclosures; RG 55/5, File 36 Governor to Captain Harrigan, St. Croix Home Guard, April 14, 1943 and enclosure, and Actg. Governor to Secretary of Interior, June 16, 1942 and enclosure; Daily News, Oct. 3, 1940, and Oct. 30, 1943.

October 1943, after determining that no legal barriers prohibited the conscription of Virgin Islanders, the President authorized Governor Harwood to organize a draft board.²² Previously, Virgin Islanders wishing to enter military service had to travel to Puerto Rico or the mainland. Even so, some 250 men travelled abroad to enlist, and many more indicated they would readily comply with a requirement for local registration. By July 1944, 3,660 men had registered with the draft board, and the Governor could boast that the 211 men called into service thus far had all volunteered. By the end of the war, almost 5,000 men had registered, with some 800 actually inducted into the military.²³

Military life gave most V.I. servicemen their first experience of what life was like for black people in the southern United States. Organized into port companies and stationed outside New Orleans, Louisiana, the inductees quickly learned not only that the Army had little intention of allowing black troops into combat, but that they were also expected to accept the indignities of segregation. Unaccustomed to Jim Crow, the Virgin Islanders often resisted segregationist practices. For example, the

²² Creque, p. 122; Annual Report of the Governor 1944, p. 6; Progressive Guide, Oct. 30, 1943.

²³ Annual Report of the Governor 1944, p. 6; Annual Report of the Governor 1946, p. 15; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-67 (Part 1) Director, Selective Service System, July 17, 1944; Daily News, Apr. 9, 1945; Progressive Guide, Jan. 14, 1943.

racially motivated demotion of three island sergeants triggered a protest that could only be calmed by transferring two companies of Virgin Island servicemen to Hawaii.²⁴

Yet, despite the problems Virgin Island soldiers encountered in Louisiana, military service strengthened their identification with the United States. Transported by train and ship from Louisiana to Hawaii, the soldiers of the 872nd and 873rd Port Companies saw much of the country, and, after demobilization, returned home as heroes. For all Virgin Islanders, these soldiers symbolized the important role played by the islands in the war. With military bases on St. Thomas and St. Croix, naval ships in the harbors, hundreds of soldiers, sailors, and marines roaming the streets, and welcoming parades for their own servicemen, Virgin Islanders proudly claimed they had done their part to help America, once again, make the world safe for democracy. In cultural terms at least, the Second World War had done more to Americanize the Virgin Islands than anything else the colony had experienced since its transfer from Denmark.

If World War II made Virgin Islanders more loyal Americans, their participation in defending the United States also legitimized their struggle for greater democracy

²⁴ Creque, pp. 115-116; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-67 (Part 1) Chairman, Legislative Assembly to Secretary of War, June 23, 1945 and enclosure; Daily News, May 28-June 4, 1946.

in their own home. Like the 1920s and 1930s, many Virgin Islanders blamed racism for the absence of natives, particularly black persons, in high government positions. During the 1940s, they made pointed references to the contradictions between local policy and the grand political aims of the war. Despite the advances made under the Organic Act, continued federal control of the executive and judicial branches of government, along with their administrative bureaucracies, caused much mistrust between continental Americans and Virgin Islanders. That top government officials often joined the exclusive social clubs reserved for the islands' wealthiest white businessmen and landowners further increased suspicions that the government favored the local upper class. Feeling that their wartime actions proved their loyalty to the United States, black Virgin Islanders protested any attempt to relegate them to the status of second-class citizens.

Pressured by Virgin Islanders, the colonial administration finally conceded some important positions to black natives. Before 1940, while a black American served as District Judge, and a white native was appointed Commissioner of Finance, the post of government attorney was the only important government position held by a black native. As in the past, the New York-based American Virgin Islands Civic Association, under Ashley Totten, led the effort to place more natives in top government jobs.

Voicing the aspirations of Virgin Islanders living on the mainland, Totten continuously submitted to the Department of the Interior and the insular government the names of people qualified to hold responsible positions. On the islands, the Municipal Council of St. Thomas supported the efforts of the American V.I. Civic Association by petitioning President Roosevelt and Secretary Ickes to "Appoint Natives to Important Positions in the Government of the Virgin Islands."²⁵ Composed of the most ambitious members of the Progressive Guide, the St. Thomas Council eagerly pushed against the barriers that kept executive power in the hands of continentals. Having captured the legislature, the chance that one of its own members might some day become Governor seemed quite possible to the Progressive Guide. Together, the American V.I. Civic Association and the Progressive Guide achieved some success. By the end of the war, a black Virgin Islander headed the local section of the federal Office of Price Administration, and two others were appointed to direct the Departments of Finance and Social Welfare. Along with several lower level appointments, the granting of these important posts to black natives buoyed

²⁵ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Separate File) Resolution Petitioning the President . . . and the Secretary . . . of the Interior, May 12, 1944.

expectations that the federal government had committed itself to ending discrimination in the local government.²⁶

Efforts to secure direct representation in Congress achieved less success. After the approval of the Organic Act, Virgin Islanders began to clamor for the same rights enjoyed by Puerto Ricans since 1903 to send a non-voting delegate to the House of Representatives. Largely due to the efforts of the Progressive Guide, the right to direct Congressional representation became an important issue during the war years, but opposition from Governor Harwood and Secretary Ickes prevented its realization. Claiming that the Governor ably represented the territory, and that federal funds could be better used on projects for the direct benefit of the islanders, Harwood and Ickes blocked several attempts by the St. Thomas Municipal Council and the V.I. Legislative Assembly to persuade Congress to authorize

²⁶ Lewis, The Virgin Islands, pp. 114-115; Project Introspection, pp. 58-60; NA RG 48/749 File 9-11-2 (Part 3) Memorandum for Secretary of the Interior from Director, Division of Territories, May 13, 1944 and enclosure; RG 55/27 Report of the Tax Assessor-St. Croix, 1943; RG 126/1, File 9-11-9 (Part 3) President, Am. V.I. Civic Assoc. to Director, Division of Territories, Nov. 2, 1942, and Director, Division of Territories to President, Am. V.I. Civic Assoc., Nov. 26, 1942, File 9-11-9 (Part 4) President, Am. V.I. Civic Assoc. to President Roosevelt, June 1, 1943, Director, Division of Territories to President, Am. V.I. Civic Assoc., Nov. 11, 1943, President, Am. V.I. Civic Assoc. to Director, Division of Territories, Sep. 7, 1944, File 9-11-9 (Part 5) President, Am. V.I. Civic Assoc. to President Roosevelt, May 14, 1945, and File 9-11-24 (Part 3) Actg. Governor to Director, Division of Territories, May 8, 1944 and enclosure; Daily News, Oct. 14, 1942, May 16, 1944, and Oct. 29, 1945; Progressive Guide, Apr. 15, 1939, Jan. 9, 1943, and May 9, 1944.

a resident commissioner for the islands. By the end of the war, native politicians had only gained a promise from Secretary Ickes to support Congressional representation once Virgin Islanders had demonstrated sufficient political maturity. Meanwhile, Virgin Islanders would have to depend on white federal officials to represent their interests in Congress.²⁷

This sense that Virgin Islanders were not being treated fairly by Americans extended to the relations between laborers and their employers. While recognizing the need to sacrifice for the war effort, native workers complained that the rapidly rising cost of living merited an increase in wages. When federal officials and defense contractors claimed either that the local economy could not bear higher wages, or that government employers were bound to pay 'prevailing wages,' Virgin Islanders countered that the

²⁷ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, p. 276; Paiewonsky, p. 123; Annual Report of the Governor 1947, p. 12; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-2 (Part 2) President, USA to Senator Mead, Feb. 15, 1941 and enclosures, and File 9-11-2 (Part 3) Secretary of Interior to Governor, Oct. 7, 1943; RG 126/1, File 9-11-2 Hearings Before the Senate Committee on Territories and Insular Affairs, Mar. 31 and Apr. 1, 1936, File 9-11-2 (Part 5) Director, Division of Territories to Governor, Aug. 31, 1945, File 9-11-30 (Part 1) Chairman, V.I. Legislative Assembly to President Roosevelt, Oct. 16, 1942 and enclosures, Memorandum for Secretary of Interior from Acting Director, Division of Territories, Jan. 19, 1944 and enclosures, Legislative Assembly Bill #21 enclosed in Governor to Secretary of Interior, Feb. 9, 1945, and File 9-11-30 (Part 2) Legislative Assembly Bill #18, Passed Feb. 2, 1946; Avis, Jan. 31, Feb. 2 & 3, 1931; Daily News, June 27, 1944; Progressive Guide, June 21, 1941, Mar. 7 & 25, Aug. 1, and Sept. 29, 1942, Feb. 16, June 3, Sep. 21, Oct. 19, Dec. 2 & 16, 1943, Jan. 11 and June 24, 1944.

continued existence of a local schedule for federal employees, which kept native wages at half the level paid continentals for comparable work, was based on the racist notion that the black islanders were accustomed to a lower standard of living. Indeed, between September 1939 and October 1943, despite local legislative efforts to freeze food prices and house rents, the cost of living rose 36 percent, and many laborers began to consider the possibility of striking.²⁸

On St. Croix, the refusal of the Virgin Islands Company to raise wages finally forced a strike. In November 1941, in an effort to boost sugar production, Governor Harwood convinced the St. Croix Municipal Council to abolish the \$6 a ton export duty on sugar, and, a month later, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced that the Virgin Islanders would at last begin receiving benefit payments

²⁸ Lewis, The Virgin Islands, p. 94; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-13 (Part 6) First Asst. Secretary of Interior to Chief, Sugar Division of the Department of Agriculture, June 17, 1942 and File 9-11-33 (Part 1) Secretary of the Interior to Secretary of the Navy, Oct. 11, 1943; RG 126/1, File 9-11-8 Actg. Governor to President, Am. V.I. Civic Assoc., Nov. 17, 1941, "A Message to American Virgin Islanders Resident in New York," Oct. 15, 1943, File 9-11-9 (Part 3) Memorandum of Conference held in Office of the Director, Division of Territories, July 1, 1942, File 9-11-24 (Part 2) Actg. Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Mar. 7, 1942 and enclosures, File 9-11-30 (Separate File) Ordinance to Amend Title III, Chapter 89, Section 11 of the Code of Laws, approved June 13, 1941, and File 9-11-50 (Part 2) Commissioner of Labor Statistics to Director, Division of Territories, Oct. 28, 1946 and enclosure; Avis, Aug. 28 and Oct. 2, 1942; Daily News, Jan. 11, 1943, and May 6, 1944; Progressive Guide, June 7 and Nov. 29, 1941, and July 1, 1943.

under the 1937 Sugar Act. Because these two measures would increase the income earned by VICO, the St. Croix Labor Union felt justified in asking higher wages. However, the sugar company only offered the possibility of a retroactive increase after the Department of Agriculture determined what would be fair wages under the Sugar Act. In mid-February 1942, the Union rejected this offer and called a strike.²⁹

For nearly five weeks, the strike halted VICO's sugar harvest, until the Works Progress Administration agreed to pay the cane cutters. Although the WPA kept the first class rate at \$1.04, many workers returned to the fields on the assumption that they could work at the slower pace expected on other work relief projects, and VICO officials soon complained that the amount of cane cut by each worker had fallen drastically from traditional standards. Indeed, the cutters put considerably less than their full effort into the harvest, and the average amount of cane cut each day per worker fell from the usual 5,000 lbs. to 2,800 lbs. Without

²⁹ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-13 (Part 6) Memorandum for Under Secretary of Interior from Director, Division of Territories, July 29, 1942 and File 9-11-15 Secretary of Agriculture to Secretary of the Interior, Apr. 24, 1942; RG 55/27 Report of the Administrator for St. Croix, 1942; RG 126/1, File 9-11-8 Actg. Governor to President, Am. V.I. Civic Assoc., Nov. 17, 1941, File 9-11-24 (Part 2) Memorandum for Director, Division of Territories from President, VICO, Feb. 28, 1942, File 9-11-30 (Part 2) "A Word Picture of St. Croix's Economic History and Present Status...", Jan. 1943, and File 9-11-38 (Part 7) Actg. President, VICO to President, VICO, Feb. 10, 1942.

a new contract with the Union, the already troubled Virgin Islands Company slid further into debt.³⁰

Fortunately for VICO and the Labor Union, the Department of Agriculture made a relatively quick decision on wages. In late March, Department representatives arrived on St. Croix to decide the level of benefit payments to be paid sugar producers. In early May, after the representatives had returned to Washington, the sugar laborers agreed to resume working directly for VICO, pending a determination by the Department of Agriculture on fair wages. In July, the Secretary of Agriculture announced that the Labor Union's request for a \$1.36 daily harvest wage and a \$1.04 cultivation wage was justified and that sugar benefit payments would be tied to the new wages and retroactive to the beginning of the year. By allowing VICO to raise wages, this decision prevented a long strike that could have crippled the Crucian sugar industry.³¹

³⁰ Dookhan, "Virgin Islands Company," pp. 62-63; Annual Report of the Governor 1942, p. 3; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 2) First Asst. Secretary of the Interior to Chief, Sugar Division, Department of Agriculture, June 17, 1943 and File 9-11-30 (Part 2) "A Word Picture of St. Croix's Economic History and Present Status," Jan. 1943.

³¹ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 2) First Asst. Secretary of the Interior to Chief, Sugar Division, Department of Agriculture, June 17, 1942, President, VICO to Director, Division of Territories, [undated c. July 27, 1942] and enclosures, Actg. Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Aug. 21, 1942 and enclosures, Vice President, VICO to Director, Division of Territories, Feb. 27, 1943, and File 9-11-38 (Part 7), Vice President, VICO to First Asst. Secretary of the Interior, May 2, 1942; Avis, Aug. 7, 1942.

On St. Thomas, only government appeals to patriotism ended a strike on the defense projects. During the first months of 1943, the U.S. Army Engineers and Navy Sea Bees took direct control of the projects that had been contracted out to private companies, and announced that most native workers would have to be reclassified as common laborers because they were overpaid and underworked. Since the great majority of Virgin Islanders had been employed by the private contractors as semi-skilled and skilled workers, earning thirty to ninety cents an hour, most refused to work for the twenty cents minimum wage paid newly-hired common laborers, and even those few men who accepted the new wage worked at a reduced pace. Partly because they were not organized, the native workers did not declare a formal strike, but their action slowed construction so much that the military officials threatened to import additional Puerto Ricans and British West Indians to resume normal operations.³²

In July and August 1943, the months immediately following the announcement of the new labor policy, so few Virgin Islanders reported to work that Governor Harwood decided to intervene to resolve the impasse. On August 7, the Governor issued a public appeal to the workers, assuring

³² NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-33 (Part 1) Secretary of the Interior to Secretary of the Navy, Oct. 11, 1943; RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 3) Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Sep. 7, 1943 and enclosure; Progressive Guide, Mar. 4 and Aug. 12, 1943.

them that the military had no intention of restricting natives to twenty cents an hour, and that the war effort required their labor. A week later, because of the inadequate response to his appeal, the Governor invited representatives from the military and the workers, as well as government officials, Municipal Council members, and journalists, to discuss the labor problem. At the same time, he arranged for a conciliator from the Department of Labor to visit St. Thomas. Together, the Governor and the labor conciliator convinced most of the men to return to work while the government negotiated proper job classifications with the military. By September, many workers had regained their skilled positions.³³

Patriotism may have persuaded Virgin Islanders to return to work, but the rising cost of living prevented them from accepting the existing wage. While some men had reacquired their former jobs, the new labor policies reduced average wages, and many natives appealed to the government to enact new minimum wage legislation. In a letter to a local newspaper, "A Utility Man" poignantly described the laborers' plight:

We are not an Idle People. We have no big savings because we eat to live and not live to eat. The high standard and cost of living today is such that we cannot exist on 20c per hour. As for representation, we have none. Then how is it

³³ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 3) Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Sep. 7, 1943 and enclosure; Progressive Guide, Aug. 14 & 21, 1943.

possible to be represented? If we were would these conditions exist? No, they wouldn't--not if the brainstorms were doing something to alter them.³⁴

In response to these pleas, the Virgin Islands Progressive Guide initiated an effort to revive the local branch of the American Federation of Labor, dormant for nearly a decade. By November 1943, enough workers had joined the union for it to regain its charter from the national Federation. Having elected Valdemar Hill, the leader of the Progressive Guide and Councilmember, to the Presidency, union members hoped they had formed an effective political lobby for higher wages.³⁵

But the sudden curtailment of the work relief and defense projects ended the workers' hope for an immediate raise. Between December 1943 and April 1944, the Works Projects Administration, the Navy Sea Bees, and the Army Engineers all terminated their projects on St. Thomas, throwing some 2,500 persons out of work. Due to the greatly decreased economic activity on the island, the majority of Councilmembers accepted the Governor's contention that neither public nor private employers could afford a wage increase. Despite the close relationship between the

³⁴ Progressive Guide, Aug. 10, 1943.

³⁵ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-33 (Part 1) Secretary of the Interior to Secretary of the Navy, Oct. 11, 1943; Daily News, Jan. 26, 1945; Progressive Guide, July 8, 10, & 15, Sep. 16 & 23, Dec. 28, 1943, and Jan. 8, 1944.

Progressive Guide and the AFL union, the legislators agreed to put aside the issue until conditions improved.³⁶

Not until the U.S. Department of Labor announced an increase in the minimum wage for workers engaged in interstate commerce, did the St. Thomas union agitate anew for higher wages. In September 1944, the Department's Wage and Hour Division, following the guidelines established by the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act, decided to raise the minimum hourly wage from thirty to thirty-two cents for workers employed by shipping companies and to thirty-five cents for those in the profitable rum industry. Following this announcement, Valdemar Hill called on the Governor to grant a ten cent hourly increase to all municipal workers, and reinforced the demand by presenting the chief executive with a petition signed by 500 employees of the Department of Public Works.

Because Governor Harwood was away in Washington, Acting Governor Morris De Castro responded to the petition. Noting the present economic difficulties of the municipality, he refused to increase wages. When Governor Harwood returned to the island, the union appealed to him, but gained only a slight modification of DeCastro's refusal. In late December 1944, Harwood agreed to grant municipal employees a ten

³⁶ Annual Report of the Governor 1944, p. 2; NA RG 55/27, Report of the Superintendent of Public Welfare, 1943; Daily News, Apr. 8 and May 15, 1944; Progressive Guide, Oct. 9, 1943.

percent pay increase, a concession far short of union demands.³⁷

Rejected by the Governor, Valdemar Hill turned to his legislative colleagues for assistance. At first, most Council members agreed with the Governor that municipal revenues could not support increased wages. Undaunted, Hill continued to remind the legislators of their political responsibility to the community. As quoted by a St. Thomas newspaper, Hill implored the Council:

"Please consider the fact," he urged, "that labor is not a commodity that can be priced like bacon and cheese. Labor consists of men working, sweating in the hot sun--men with families, children to send to school, shelter to be provided, and subsistence to be taken care of. A great deal of our local troubles can be traced to the inadequate wages."³⁸

According to Hill, the electoral promises of the Progressive Guide obligated the St. Thomas Council to reorder budget priorities to meet the needs of the poorest members of the community. Finally, in November 1945, the Council amended Hill's 1941 Wage and Hour Act in order to raise the minimum hourly wage for unskilled labor to thirty cents.³⁹

³⁷ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1) Economic Report on Industries Operating in the ... Virgin Islands, July 1944 and File 9-11-24 (Part 2) Administrative Order #228, Mar. 4, 1944; Daily News, Sep. 22, Oct. 11 & 21, Dec. 8 & 13, 1944, Jan. 9, and June 21, 1945; Progressive Guide, Apr. 22, 1944.

³⁸ Daily News, Oct. 11, 1944.

³⁹ Daily News, Nov. 2 & 15, 1945.

Yet, the amendments only became law after President Truman declined to support the veto of the local chief executive. In December 1945, Morris De Castro, again acting for the absent Governor Harwood, vetoed the wage increase; and when the Council easily overrode the veto, the Acting Governor appealed to the President to disapprove the legislation. However, although the Organic Act gave the President the legal right to disregard the actions of the insular legislature, Truman recognized the political implications of denying poor workers a wage increase, and he refused to stop the amendments from becoming law. In July 1946, thanks to President Truman, St. Thomian workers received their wage increase.⁴⁰

Like the cane field strike on St. Croix, the effort to obtain higher wages on St. Thomas taught Virgin Islanders that their expressed loyalty to the United States did not gain them the sympathy of local employers. Whether they worked on the sugar estates, the defense projects, or public works, Virgin Islanders had to struggle to gain a wage increase needed to keep pace with the rapidly rising cost of living. Although their employers were quick to point out that natives were in a much better position than the alien

⁴⁰ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-9 (Part 3) Secretary of the Interior to President Truman, May 1, 1946; RG 126/1, File 9-11-24 (Part 1) Actg. Governor to President Truman, Jan. 2, 1946 and enclosures, Actg. Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Jan. 21, 1946, and Memorandum for Secretary of the Interior from Executive Clerk, July 8, 1946 and enclosures; Daily News, Dec. 18, 20, & 24, 1945.

laborers who were quite happy to work for twenty cents an hour, Virgin Islanders compared themselves to other U.S. citizens.⁴¹ Believing that U.S. citizenship entitled them to a higher standard of living, Virgin Islanders also learned that only their own efforts would gain them that better life. As expressed by a native carpenter: "Fight for what you get, that's the American Way."⁴²

Beyond the struggle to obtain better jobs and higher wages, the publicity given several events and personalities during the war years revealed much about how Virgin Islanders evaluated their position in American society. Concerned that American racism limited the development of local democracy, Virgin Islanders denounced incidents of racial and political injustice while, at the same time, censuring a fellow native for poorly representing the Virgin Islands on the mainland. In one instance, the futility of local protests against the dismissal of a top government official demonstrated that Virgin Islanders still had little power to influence the executive branch of their government, while two other events revealed that islanders would cast aside the freedom of speech rights granted by the Organic Act to enhance the image of the Virgin Islands.

⁴¹ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-33 (Part 1), Secretary of the Interior to Secretary of the Navy, Oct. 11, 1943; Daily News, Apr. 15 and Aug. 11, 1944; Progressive Guide, June 29, 1943.

⁴² Progressive Guide, Sep. 2, 1943.

In the first event, Virgin Islanders protested the dismissal of the Government Secretary by Congress for allegedly being pro-Communist. Appointed to the islands' second most powerful political position under Governor Cramer, Robert Lovett gained the admiration of many Virgin Islanders by his willingness to consider more natives for top government posts and his advocacy of higher wages on the defense projects. Unfortunately for Lovett, his liberal attitudes earned him the disfavor of Governor Harwood, who used Lovett's long association with various socialist and pacifist organizations to submit his name to the committee of the House of Representatives charged with investigating subversive activities. In April 1943, the Sub-Committee on Un-American Activities of the Appropriations Committee summoned the Government Secretary to testify on his political views, and then approved a resolution removing him from office. Despite the opposition from the Secretary of the Interior, the Senate, and President Roosevelt, the House Appropriations Committee attached the resolution to an urgent spending bill which had to be enacted to prevent the disruption of government services. In November, Lovett lost his job.⁴³

⁴³ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 202-203; Lewis, The Virgin Islands, p. 97; Lovett, pp. 275-291 & 341-358; Palewonsky, pp. 124-125; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-9 (Part 3) President, American V.I. Civic Association to President Roosevelt, Sep. 26, 1942 and File 9-11-24 (Part 3) Secretary of the Navy to Secretary of the Interior, Oct. 12, 1943; Progressive Guide, Apr. 29, 1943.

As the resolution against Lovett wound its way through the various Congressional committees, Virgin Islanders rushed to defend the Government Secretary. Describing him as "an American gentleman, a patriotic citizen, and a humane administrator,"⁴⁴ the Municipal Councils hoped to dispel the charges against Lovett by writing a joint letter to the House Sub-Committee on Un-American Activities. Because the letter had no effect on the Sub-Committee, the Virgin Islands Progressive Guide, the St. Thomas Municipal Council, and the V.I. Legislative Assembly all passed resolutions urging Congress to reconsider the removal of Robert Lovett. From New York, the American V.I. Civic Association joined these efforts by accusing Governor Harwood of trying to stifle progressive government in the islands.⁴⁵

The Lovett case clearly demonstrated that, despite the democratic progress made under the Organic Act, the Governor remained above local politics. By making clever use of his national connections, Harwood manoeuvred the ouster of Lovett without having to worry much about local opinion.

⁴⁴ Lovett, p. 343.

⁴⁵ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, p. 203; Lewis, The Virgin Islands, p. 97; NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-2 (Part 3) Memorandum for the Secretary of the Interior from Director, Division of Territories, May 13, 1944 and enclosure; RG 126/1, File 9-11-9 (Part 4) President, Am. V.I. Civic Assoc. to Secretary of the Interior, Nov. 4, 1943 and enclosures, File 9-11-30 (Part 1) Chairman, Legislative Assembly to President Roosevelt, Dec. 16, 1943 and enclosures, and File 9-11-30 (Part 10) Bill #93 enclosed in Governor to Secretary of the Interior, July 12, 1943; Progressive Guide, May 8 and Dec. 16, 1943.

Perhaps because he feared retribution from Secretary Ickes or President Roosevelt, the Governor remained quiet during the Congressional proceedings, but his standing among Virgin Islanders caused him little concern. All that mattered was that Lovett's liberalism sometimes stood in the way of the defense program.⁴⁶

Shortly after Robert Lovett was forced to leave the islands, a controversial decision by the federal district court judge again inflamed local passions. In May 1944, the police arrested Harry Beatty, a member of the white Crucian elite, for the murder of Andrew Thompson, a black squatter who had refused to vacate land owned by Beatty. After the accused waived his right to a jury trial, Judge Herman Moore, a black man Chicagoan, tried the case himself and declared that Beatty had killed Thompson in self-defense. The verdict shocked the Crucian community, and the island's two leading newspapers published editorials denouncing the district judge. Then, when Judge Moore responded by sentencing the editors of the offending papers to ten days in jail for contempt of court, an angry St. Croix Municipal

⁴⁶ Lewis, The Virgin Islands, p. 98. In 1946, Lovett finally received some justice when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that his removal had been unconstitutional. See Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, p. 203.

Council petitioned President Roosevelt to dismiss the district Judge.⁴⁷

Because of the obvious constitutional questions concerning freedom of speech, one of the editors, Canute Brodhurst, decided to appeal his sentence. Judge Moore had based the sentence on the same laws which, two decades earlier, had allowed Judge George Washington Williams to convict Rothschild Francis, but Brodhurst argued that the Organic Act had curtailed the power of the courts to control the press. In 1945, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia sided with Brodhurst, and Virgin Islanders could celebrate an extended freedom of the press.⁴⁸

But an appeal to the Organic Act could not solve the political problem created by the Crucian petition to have a black judge removed from office. While the American V.I. Civic Association seconded the call to remove Judge Moore, the St. Thomas Municipal Council rebuked its Crucian counterpart for pandering to popular sentiment. On one side, the Association and the Crucian politicians chastised the Judge for collaborating in the perpetuation of a social system that placed little value on the lives of black people. In contrast, the St. Thomas Council claimed that

⁴⁷ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 187-189; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (1944) Resolution Petitioning the President . . . to Recall . . . Herman E. Moore, Passed June 19, 1944; Daily News, May 31, June 1, 2, 3, 8, 19, 20, & 24, 1944.

⁴⁸ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, pp. 189-190.

the protests against Judge Moore would only damage efforts to get more black persons appointed to important government posts. Without the support of the St. Thomians, the attempt to remove the District Judge had little effect in Washington. More importantly, the arguments of the St. Thomian politicians indicated the value Virgin Islanders placed on the opinion of federal officials.⁴⁹

This concern with national opinion motivated the attempt to censure the work of a local scholar. In 1944, J. Antonio Jarvis, a native teacher and amateur historian, published The Virgin Islands and Their People, which contained material that many people felt ridiculed the islanders. Critics of the book particularly condemned the chapter entitled, "Superstitions, Witchcraft, and Necromancy Undermine Health and Morals" for portraying a false image of Virgin Islanders. Although obeah rituals were part of everyday life, these critics argued that the publicity given them by Jarvis would adversely affect the respect Virgin Islanders sought from continental Americans. Afraid that the book might encourage the practice of obeah, chase away tourists, and increase unemployment among Virgin Islanders in the United States, the Legislative Assembly passed a

⁴⁹ Lewis, The Virgin Islands, p. 102; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 8) Bill No. 39 enclosed in Actg. Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Sep. 13, 1944 and File 9-11-30 (Separate File) St. Croix--Resolution denouncing St. Thomas Council, passed June 29, 1944; Daily News, Sep. 9 and Nov. 3, 1944; Progressive Guide, June 22 & 24, 1944.

resolution asking the Governor to ban both Jarvis and his book from the school system. Of course, Acting Governor Morris de Castro, citing the freedom of speech rights of every American, rejected the resolution. Nonetheless, Jarvis lost his job when the Assembly refused to appropriate money for his salary.⁵⁰

The contrasting attitudes toward Lovett, Moore, and Jarvis unveiled a certain vulnerability of local political decisions to possible national reactions. While their defense of the Government Secretary and their attacks on the District Judge demonstrated that Virgin Islanders would defend themselves against unfair treatment by Americans, the need for federal approval tempered the campaign against the Judge, and led to the condemnation of Jarvis. Often the interplay between national and local politics caused unpredictable results. For example, the same politicians who defended Lovett's right to express his opinions voted to censure the local author, and the American V.I. Civic Association lambasted Jarvis for ruining the image of Virgin Islanders even after it had risked federal displeasure by attacking Judge Moore.⁵¹ Yet, because federal politicians

⁵⁰ Boyer, America's Virgin Islands, p. 204; Lewis, The Virgin Islands, p. 101; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 1) Actg. Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Dec. 29, 1944 and enclosure, and Bill No. 19 enclosed in Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Feb. 9, 1945.

⁵¹ Lewis, The Virgin Islands, p. 101; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-9 (Part 4) President, Am. V.I. Civic Assoc. to Secretary of the Interior, Dec. 6, 1944 and enclosure.

still decided who would administer the territory, Virgin Islanders often could not make local decisions without concern for national opinion.

Just as Virgin Islanders evaluated their position in American society, federal officials began to discuss the post-war role of the Virgin Islands. The need to ready the islands for war prompted Congressional expenditures for basic infrastructural improvements, but suggestions for a more substantial program of economic assistance conjured up images of the inconclusive rehabilitation programs of the 1930s. Still, the islands had been useful during the war, and could remain an important outpost of American influence in the region. Torn between the reluctance to prop up an economy that would surely collapse once defense expenditures ceased, and the desire to enhance American prestige in the Caribbean, federal policymakers had to decide whether to abandon Virgin Islanders to their own meager resources, or to integrate the colony into a larger, national program designed to affirm the new paramount position of the United States in the world. By the end of the war, Congress had committed itself to the latter option, but budget constraints slowed the infrastructural improvements that Virgin Islanders hoped would raise their standard of living.

The post-war Congressional decision to include the Virgin Islands in a national economic development plan

proceeded from Governor Harwood's wartime appeal for \$10 million to upgrade the local infrastructure. Despite receiving nearly \$13 million in federal aid since 1917, the islands still lacked proper hospitals, housing, roads, and sewers, all of which were important for the conduct of military operations, or the well-being of the military and civilian population. Because even the absence of such things as fire trucks and telephones could have dire consequences in a wartime situation, the Governor compiled an extensive list of required expenditures.⁵²

In response to Harwood's request, the Interior Department authorized the Federal Works Agency to conduct a survey of the public works needs of the colony. In early 1942, after visits to the islands by the Agency Administrator and his staff, the FWA issued a report supporting Governor Harwood. The still unhealthy living conditions of many Virgin Islanders especially shocked the surveyors.

Sanitary conditions in the Virgin Islands are extremely unsatisfactory due to such primitive facilities as nightsoil removal services, open gutters in which garbage and filth of every description flow through the streets, garbage disposal into the bay immediately offshore with resultant pollution, lack of sufficient water for drinking and culinary uses, lack of adequate and decent housing making it necessary for four and five people to occupy a single small room, the nonexistence in most houses of any plumbing

⁵² Lewis, *The Virgin Islands*, p. 100; Grede, pp. 107-108; NA RG 55/27 Report of the Commissioner of Finance, 1940; Progressive Guide, June 7, 1941.

fixtures, possibility of malaria epidemics due to mosquito-infested swamps, etc. which are certainly a menace to the health and well being of not only the civilian population, but of the military personnel as well.⁵³

Altogether the Agency suggested that \$1 million be spent to improve health and fire protection services in case of enemy attack, \$3 million to build new houses and install a water supply and sewage drainage system to hinder the spread of disease, and nearly \$4 million to remedy the islands' transportation and communication problems.⁵⁴

But the Interior Department decided that such an ambitious program required further study. While some Department officials questioned the military importance of the program, others suggested that the best solution for the Virgin Island problem would be to encourage emigration to the United States. Because even Harwood favored a plan to send Crucian agricultural workers to the southern United States, Department officials hesitated to prepare Congressional legislation until they could decide on the future of the insular economy. Then, in June 1943, the National Resources Planning Board issued a report that Interior officials could use to determine how to treat the

⁵³ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-2 (Part 3) Actg. Secretary of the Interior to Vice President Wallace, June 30, 1942 enclosed in First Asst. Secretary of the Interior to Director, Bureau of the Budget, July 8, 1942.

⁵⁴ NA RG 48/749, File 9-11-2 (Part 3) First Asst. Secretary of the Interior to Director, Bureau of the Budget, July 8, 1942 and enclosure.

Virgin Islands. Authorized to develop a post-war economic plan for the whole country, the Board decided that the islands should be included in national plans, but also suggested that the Virgin Islanders be made to rely more on their own natural resources. Most importantly, the Board argued that emigration, from St. Croix in particular, should be encouraged. If the Crucian population could be reduced from 13,000 to 7,500, the island could be moved closer to agricultural self-sufficiency. While not rejecting Harwood's plea for \$10 million, the Board implied that any expenditures should be tied to a comprehensive economic development plan. Lacking such a plan, the Interior Department dared not approach Congress.⁵⁵

Ironically, the profitability of Virgin Islands rum accomplished more than the Governor's appeals to Congress to fund an economic development program. Between 1940 and 1944, aided by wartime restrictions on mainland liquor production, V.I. rum manufacturers quadrupled their exports to the United States, thereby reviving demands for the return of the federal internal revenue taxes to the municipal treasuries. Indeed, by 1944, when the taxes collected reached \$28 million, local officials could argue

⁵⁵ NA RG 48/749, File 9-8-12 (Part 2) Actg. Secretary of the Interior to Food Administrator Davis, June 24, 1943, File 9-11-2 (Part 3) Under Secretary of the Interior to Administrator, FWA, Dec. 2, 1942 and enclosures, and File 9-11-33 (Part 1) Secretary of the Interior to Chairman, War Manpower Commission, May 1, 1943; RG 55/5, File 3-2 "A Development Plan for the Virgin Islands," June 1943.

quite persuasively that the islands had no need for special federal appropriations if Congress would treat them fairly and return the internal revenue taxes. Faced with this argument, Harwood's request for \$10 million seemed quite reasonable, especially since it would allow the federal government to control the expenditures; and the Interior Department agreed to present Congress with a legislative proposal. Finally, in December 1944, Congress authorized the expenditure of \$10 million for a Virgin Islands public works program.⁵⁶

Virgin Islanders applauded Governor Harwood for obtaining the \$10 million public works program.⁵⁷ Not since 1917 had Virgin Islanders felt that their connection to the United States meant so much to their daily lives. The termination of the work relief and defense construction programs had threatened economic disaster for the territory, but now the promise of a vast public works program seemed a reward for its loyalty during the war. Virgin Islanders had

⁵⁶ Creque, p. 122; Paiewonsky, pp. 118 and 121; Dookhan, "The Virgin Islands Company," pp. 62-63; U.S. House of Representatives, 78th Congress, 2nd Session, Committee on Insular Affairs--Report #1673, June 17, 1944; Proceedings of the Fourth Municipal Council of St. Thomas-St. John, Oct. 9, 1944; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-26 (Part 1) Governor to Director, Division of Territories, Feb. 23, 1945; Progressive Guide, Dec. 8, 1944. See Chapter 8, pp. 256-259 for information on 1930s rum production.

⁵⁷ Creque, pp. 122-123; NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 1) Legislative Assembly Bill #16 enclosed in Governor to Secretary of the Interior, Feb. 9, 1945.

eagerly participated in the war effort, and now they could share in the victory.

Indeed, the United States had recognized the value of the tiny colony for national defense. Not only had the islands served as an important transshipment point for bauxite coming from South America, but they also gave the United States an important outpost from which it could control the Caribbean Sea. Although bases in the Virgin Islands may not have been as important as those constructed in Panama, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, they formed part of a military chain that kept the southern United States and the Panama Canal safe from enemy attack. Without American control of the Virgin Islands, the defense of the Caribbean area would have been more problematic, especially if enemy ships had gained access to the islands.

Because of their military importance, the Second World War strengthened the process of Americanization in the islands. By mid-1943, when the National Resources Planning Board reported that the colony should be integrated into post-war economic planning, federal officials had largely decided that the economic development of the islands could not be separated from conditions on the mainland. At the same time, the success of rum exports to the United States demonstrated that the Virgin Islands could carve out an economic niche in the national economy. Thus, unlike the New Deal rehabilitation program, which aimed at economic

autonomy for the islands, the recommendations of the National Resources Planning Board and the authorization of the \$10 million public works program envisioned greater coordination between local and national economic planning. Then, just as stronger economic ties followed strategic needs, closer economic integration assured a more thorough Americanization of local politics and culture.

CONCLUSION

The participation of Virgin Islanders in the American war effort consolidated their status as U.S. citizens. By enacting the 1936 Organic Act, Congress gained the support of the islanders for the war effort, and then rewarded their loyalty by promising continued financial aid. Of course neither political reform nor economic assistance could fully solve the racial and class conflicts that plagued V.I. society, but they guaranteed that social struggle would occur in a context modeled after American institutions. Virgin Islanders would continue to use American ideals as reference points in their own debates, and in their appeals to the federal government.

Indeed, their wartime experience gave Virgin Islanders much reason to be optimistic about their future as a U.S. territory. Despite the discrimination they faced, several hundred Virgin Islanders had served proudly in the victorious U.S. Armed Forces. Similarly, native workers had forced the defense contractors to raise wages, and the abundance of defense jobs at least temporarily ended the chronic problem of underemployment. Most importantly, the strategic value of the colony prompted Congress to promise Virgin Islanders the \$10 million public works program.

Judged against the days of Danish rule, life in the Virgin Islands had improved considerably. The medical programs initiated by the Navy doctors had reduced the infant mortality rate and enhanced the basic health of all islanders. Then, in an effort that Denmark could scarcely have afforded, U.S. government food and work relief programs prevented wide spread suffering during the depression decade of the 1930s. At the same time, both Navy and civilian administrations extended the educational facilities to make public secondary schooling available to every child. Politically, the implementation of universal suffrage widened the participation of middle and working class natives in Council elections, thereby curtailing planter and merchant domination. By 1946, Virgin Islanders were healthier, better educated, and had a greater voice in political affairs than they had when the Danes left the colony.

Many of these improvements were the direct result of the transfer. In 1943, the federal Administrator for St. Croix succinctly described the changes on that island:

[In 1917,] medical services and sanitation were limited, and public schooling was only through the sixth grade. There were only a score instead of 300 motor cars. The streets and highways were not then asphalted nor were they adorned by colorful signs advertising India Beer, Coca Cola, Pabst and WPA. There were no cinemas, radios or juke boxes, and only nine rum shops--which closed at 8 o'clock. Denmark had set up no FERA, FSHC, RFC, FSA, FWA, PWA, CCC, SCS, NYA, REA, SMA, AMA, OR

WPA to shower their millions of dollars upon the island.¹

Certainly some of these changes would have occurred if Denmark had retained control of the islands, but the Danes could never have provided the same array of goods and services that became available to Virgin Islanders as a consequence of their attachment to the world's most powerful national economy. If only to re-create the conditions they left at home, the small number of Americans who settled in the colony expected a wider variety of consumer goods, adequate sanitary conditions and good roads. While few Virgin Islanders could afford to share fully in the lifestyle brought by the Americans, everyone benefitted from the basic improvements in the local infrastructure.

Yet, all the improvements did not come easily. Virgin Islanders struggled for ten years to convince Congress to grant them U.S. citizenship, which they used as a foundation to demand increased economic aid and political rights. Still another ten years elapsed before Congress approved universal suffrage, and then the popularly elected legislatures had to struggle constantly to include the Virgin Islands in federal aid programs. Whether lobbying on issues such as the need for a new constitution or the return of the internal revenue taxes on rum exports, Virgin Islanders became quite adept at pressuring both local and

¹ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-30 (Part 2) "A Word Picture of St. Croix's Economic History ...," Jan. 1943.

national officials. To a large extent, Congress recognized the lobbying skills of Virgin Islanders by approving the postwar public works program.

But Virgin Islanders scored their greatest victory by getting the local administration to distance itself from the interests of the local elite. More than anyone else, this was a victory for middle class islanders, who persuaded federal officials that the planters and merchants could no longer manage the affairs of the territory. The undiluted racism of the Navy officials, which prevented them from cooperating with the black middle class, weighed heavily in the Presidential decision to transfer the colony to the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior, just as the benefits of forging an alliance with the middle class spurred Governor Cramer to support the passage of the Organic Act. Similarly, the opposition of the Crucian elite halted neither the formation of the Virgin Islands Company nor the homesteading program, which together heralded the demise of the planter class on St. Croix. By 1946, black islanders had also made considerable progress in gaining control of the colonial legislatures and bureaucracy. While the largest businesses and best agricultural lands still remained in the hands of the traditional elite, its members often now had to accept the political decisions of the middle class.

Victory for the middle class benefitted the islands' workers. Recognizing that the responsibility for economic development could not be left to the local elite, federal officials inaugurated several government projects that hired more people at wages higher than those paid by private employers. Likewise, the election of the Progressive Guide legislature on St. Thomas not only resulted in the passage of such social legislation as Hill's Wages and Hours Act, but also gave working people their first real opportunity to participate in electoral politics. Moreover, the interest of middle class political activists in organizing labor unions helped workers to confront the St. Thomas merchants and the Crucian planters.

At the same time, the middle class depended on working class support to achieve its victories. Although many middle class persons gained important social positions by making themselves useful either to government officials or the leading capitalists, others forced their way to social prominence by voicing the interests of workers. Neither D. Hamilton Jackson nor Valdemar Hill could have become powerful politicians without working class support. Formed during the last years of Danish rule, the alliance between middle class activists and disgruntled workers remained intact for the first generation of American rule, and affected the decision of the federal administration to abandon the elite.

By the end of World War II, Virgin Islanders had forged a relationship with the United States that would endure for some time to come. The conclusions of the National War Planning Board and Congressional approval of the \$10 million public works program virtually guaranteed that the islands would continue to receive federal economic aid, while the appointment of several black natives to important positions in the insular bureaucracy indicated that the Department of Interior would allow Virgin Islanders to have a greater voice in local affairs. Then in May 1946, President Truman demonstrated that the federal government would further lower racial barriers to social progress by appointing William Hastie as the first black Governor of the Virgin Islands. While Hastie, who has served as the territory's first black District Judge in the 1930s, was not a Virgin Islander, his appointment raised expectations that a native black islander could soon become chief executive. Reform would be slow, but it would come.

As always, Virgin Islanders would have to initiate political change. At the end of the war, returning servicemen finally shook free the St. Croix Municipal Council from the control of the planters. Their social vision broadened by their military experience, the demobilized soldiers took control of the St. Croix Labor Union, and used that organization to sweep the November 1946 municipal elections. Led by Ludwig Harrigan and Walter

Hodge, the Labor Union candidates then enacted the same kind of social legislation passed by the Progressive Guide on St. Thomas during the war years. Universal suffrage had at last begun to affect the political culture of St. Croix.²

Successful political reform and federal economic assistance separated Virgin Islanders from the nationalist movements that developed in the British West Indies after the Second World War. While most British colonies began a process that would lead to their independence in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, political reform in the Virgin Islands led to an elected governor in 1970 without substantially altering their relationship to the United States. Whatever feelings of nationalism that developed in the American colony were muted by a tourist boom that gave Virgin Islanders the highest standard of living in the Caribbean. Because the influx of tourists largely depended on the islands' political ties to the United States, few Virgin Islanders wished to risk the uncertainties of independence.

Moreover, Virgin Island satisfaction with their relationship with the United States promoted American claims to moral superiority in the Caribbean. During the 1920s and 30s, the effects of Prohibition and the Great Depression on the V.I. had tarnished this claim, but the jobs created by

² Creque, p. 117; Hill, pp. 99-101; Avis, Jan. 28, Feb. 2, 8 & 9, Mar. 26, Apr. 10 & 11, July 6 & 20, Aug. 16, Sep. 27 & Nov. 6, 1946. Daily New, June 17 & 18, 1946.

the wartime projects made the residents of other islands increasingly jealous of the standard of living in the American colony. For example, in January 1941, the U.S. Vice Consul in the British West Indies reported that the majority of people in the adjacent British Virgin Islands favored their annexation by the United States.³ Then, when the British West Indian independence movements failed to attract American Virgin Islanders, U.S. policymakers boasted that their colonial experiment had been successful.

But while the Virgin Island experience afforded Americans the opportunity to claim that Caribbean people could benefit from U.S. rule, federal policymakers decided against the annexation of additional colonies in the region. Some Americans pushed for more colonies, but many others feared the consequent migration of large numbers of black people to the United States.⁴ Even after the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, when the need for additional military bases again became important and pro-American sentiment in the Caribbean reached a high point, the United States declined to acquire more colonies. In January 1941, while commenting on British debts to the United States, President Franklin Roosevelt acknowledged the importance of racism in the formulation of Caribbean policy:

³ NA RG 126/1, File 9-11-2(Part 1) Report by U.S. Vice Consul, Barbados, Jan. 24, 1941.

⁴ Chester, pp. 5-6; Avis, June 14, 1921 and Mar. 27, 1930.

There is always the possibility of [the British] putting up their sovereignty to and over certain colonies, such as Bermuda, the British West Indies, British Honduras and British Guinea [Guiana?]. I am not yet clear in my mind, however, as to whether the United States should consider American sovereignty over these Islands and their populations and the two mainland colonies as something worth while or as a distinct liability. If we can get our naval bases why, for example, should we buy with them two million headaches, consisting of that number of human beings who would be a definite economic drag on this country, and would stir up questions of racial stocks by virtue of their new status as American citizens.⁵

Fortunately for the United States, the destroyers for bases deal fashioned by Roosevelt and Winston Churchill allowed the Americans to establish naval bases in the British Caribbean without having to take political or economic responsibility for those societies.

Thus, race remained the key disparate element in defining different visions of Americanization. For the same reasons that President Roosevelt decided against the acquisition of more colonies, many people in the United States refused to fully accept Virgin Islanders as Americans. Of course, because this refusal paralleled the experience of black people living in the United States, Virgin Islanders closely identified with black Americans and their struggles. So close was this identification that Virgin Islanders only began to question their relationship

⁵ Memorandum by President Roosevelt to the Secretary of State, Jan. 11, 1941 in Foreign Relations of the United States 1941, Vol. III (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1959), p. 3.

with the United States as a consequence of the rise of the nationalist ideology of the 1960s Black Power movement. Even so, the foundation laid during the years 1917-46 kept Virgin Islanders from seeking political independence. Virgin Islanders wanted be American, and they had much success in shaping the process of Americanization. Only the pillars of racism that undergirded U.S. policy toward the Virgin Islands, and the rest of the Caribbean, reminded islanders that they might never be accepted as equal participants in the American nation.

APPENDIX A GOVERNORS OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS 1911-1949

	Danish
Lars C. Helweg-Larsen	Nov. 7, 1911-May 6, 1915
Reimund Baumann	May 6, 1915-Nov. 28, 1915
Lars C. Helweg-Larsen	Nov. 28, 1915-Oct. 3, 1916
Henri Konow	Oct. 6, 1916-Mar. 31, 1917
	U.S. Navy
James H. Oliver, Admiral	Apr. 9, 1917-Apr. 8, 1919
Joseph W. Oman, Admiral	Apr. 8, 1919-Apr. 26, 1921
Sumner E.W. Kittelle, Admiral	Apr. 26, 1921-Sep. 16, 1922
Henry H. Hough, Captain	Sep. 16, 1922-Dec. 3, 1923
Philip Williams, Captain	Dec. 3, 1923-Sep. 11, 1925
Martin E. Trench, Captain	Sep. 11, 1925-Jan. 6, 1927
Waldo Evans, Captain	Mar. 1, 1927-Mar. 18, 1931
	U.S. Department of the Interior
Paul M. Pearson	Mar. 18, 1931-July 23, 1935
Lawrence W. Cramer	Aug. 31, 1935-Feb. 1, 1941
Charles Harwood	Feb. 2, 1941-May 16, 1946
William H. Hastie	May 17, 1946-Nov. 30, 1949

APPENDIX B

THE ORGANIC ACT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS
OF THE UNITED STATES

AN ACT

To provide a civil government for the Virgin Islands of the United States.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the provisions of this Act, and the name "the Virgin Islands" as used in this Act shall apply to and include the territorial domain, lands and waters acquired by the United States through cession of the Danish West Indian Islands by the convention between the United States of America and His Majesty the King of Denmark entered into August 4, 1916, and ratified by the Senate on September 7, 1916 (39 Stat. L. 1706).

Sec. 2. The insular possession which is the Virgin Islands shall be divided into two municipalities, namely, (1) the municipality of Saint Croix and (2) the municipality of Saint Thomas and Saint John. The boundaries of said municipalities shall be the same as at present established in accordance with laws in force on the date of enactment of this Act, and the capital seat of the central government shall be Saint Thomas. In this Act the phrase "the Government of the Virgin Islands" shall include, in addition to the governing authority of the insular possession, the governing authority of the two municipalities, unless the context shall indicate a different intention.

Sec. 3. The inhabitants of the municipality of Saint Croix and of the municipality of Saint Thomas and Saint John are hereby constituted into bodies politic and juridic, under the present name of each such municipality, and as such bodies they shall have perpetual succession and power (a) to adopt and use an official seal; (b) to sue and in cases arising out of contract to be sued; (c) to demand the fulfillment of obligations under the law and to defend and prosecute all actions at law; (d) to acquire property by purchase, exchange, donation or bequest, by virtue of proceedings for the collection of taxes, by eminent-domain proceedings, or by any other means provided by law, and to possess, administer, and govern such property; and (e) to alienate or encumber any of their property, subject to the provisions of this Act.

Sec. 4. All property which may have been acquired by the United States from Denmark in the Virgin Islands under the convention entered into August 5, 1916, not heretofore or within one year hereafter reserved by the United States for public purposes, is hereby placed under the control of the Government of the Virgin Islands: **Provided**, That, except as otherwise expressly provided, all laws of the United States for the protection and improvement of the navigable waters of the United States and the preservation of the interest of navigation and commerce shall apply to the Virgin Islands: **Provided further**, That nothing in this Act shall be construed to affect or impair in any manner the terms and conditions of any authorizations, permits, or other powers heretofore lawfully granted or exercised in or in respect of the Virgin Islands by any authorized officer or agent of the United States: **Provided further**, That the Secretary of the Interior shall be authorized to lease or sell upon such terms as he may deem advantageous to the Government of the United States any property of the United States under his administrative supervision in the Virgin Islands not needed for public purposes.

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

Sec. 5. All local legislative powers in the municipality of Saint Croix, except as herein otherwise provided, shall be vested in a local legislative assembly, which shall be designated the "Municipal Council of Saint Croix." Said council shall consist of nine members elected by the qualified electors of the municipality for a term of two years beginning the 1st day of January next succeeding the date of election. The members shall be elected in four representative districts, two of which shall be the town of Christiansted and the country district thereof, and two of which shall be the town of Frederiksted and the country district thereof, as defined by law in force on the date of enactment of this Act: **Provided**, That two members shall be elected for each of said districts and one member at large.

Sec. 6. All local legislative powers in the municipality of Saint Thomas and Saint John, except as herein otherwise provided, shall be vested in a local legislative assembly which shall be designated the "Municipal Council of Saint Thomas and Saint John." Said council shall consist of seven members elected by the qualified electors of the municipality for a term of two years beginning the 1st day of January next succeeding the date of election. The members shall be elected in three representative districts, one of which shall be the town district and one the country district of Saint Thomas, and one the district of Saint John, as defined by law in force on the date of enactment of this Act: **Provided**, That two members shall be elected for each of the districts of Saint

Thomas, one member for the district of Saint John, and two members at large.

Sec. 7. After January 1, 1937, joint sessions of said municipal councils shall constitute and shall be designated the "Legislative Assembly of the Virgin Islands." The legislative assembly shall convene in Saint Thomas upon call by the Governor, and also whenever both municipal councils shall determine by resolutions passed by each of them: **Provided**, That the Governor shall call the legislative assembly at least once during each calendar year. The legislative assembly shall have power to enact legislation applicable to the Virgin Islands as a whole, but no legislation shall be considered other than that specified in the message by the Governor calling such a session, or in both of said resolutions: **Provided further**, That so long as the membership of the legislative assembly does not exceed sixteen members, a quorum of the legislative assembly shall consist of not less than ten members, and no bill shall be enacted until it shall be passed by a two-thirds majority vote of the members present. The municipal councils shall not enact laws or ordinances in conflict with the enactments of the legislative assembly.

Sec. 8. The present colonial councils shall continue to function until January 1, 1937. The next general election in the Virgin Islands shall be held on November 3, 1936. At such election there shall be chosen the entire membership of each municipal council as herein provided. Thereafter the elections shall be held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November, beginning with the year 1938, and every two years thereafter. The terms of office of members of the respective colonial councils of the municipalities of Saint Thomas and Saint John and of Saint Croix, whose terms of office under existing law would expire prior to January 1, 1937, are hereby extended to that date.

Sec. 9. No person shall be eligible to be a member of either municipal council unless he is a citizen of the United States, over twenty-five years of age, is a qualified voter of the municipality in which elected, has resided in the Virgin Islands for a period of not less than three years next preceding the date of election, and has not been convicted of a felony or of a crime involving moral turpitude. Each municipal council may exclude from membership therein persons receiving compensation from the Government of the United States or from either of the municipal governments of the Virgin Islands.

Sec. 10. The members of each municipal council shall receive allowance for actual travel expenses and such reasonable subsistence as may be prescribed by the council.

Sec. 11. The respective municipal councils shall be the sole judges of the elections, returns, and qualifications of their members, shall be vested with the authority and attributes inherent in legislative bodies, and

shall jointly or separately have the power to institute and conduct investigations, issue subpoenas to witnesses and other parties concerned, and administer oaths. Existing rules of the colonial councils shall continue in force and effect, except as inconsistent with this Act, until altered, amended, or repealed by the respective municipal councils. No member shall be held to answer before any tribunal other than the respective municipal councils themselves for any speech or debate in the municipal councils and the members shall in all cases, except treason, felony, or breach of the peace, be privileged from arrest during their attendance at the sessions of the municipal councils and in going to and returning from the same.

Sec. 12. Each municipal council shall annually appoint from among its members, for a term of one year, three members to serve as a standing committee, which, under the name of the "Municipal Committee," shall advise the Governor concerning the management of the fiscal affairs of the municipality, and concerning matters relating to the municipality. The procedure of the Municipal Committee shall be in accordance with bylaws adopted by the municipal council and approved by the Governor. The Municipal Committee shall have power when granted by local law to recommend to the Governor transfers between items in the annual budgets, and loans from municipal funds, but no such transfers or loans shall be made by the Governor except upon the recommendation of the Municipal Committee.

Sec. 13. Each municipal council shall assemble for ordinary meetings on a certain day of every second month, which day shall be previously fixed by the Governor for the whole year, and for extraordinary meetings at the call of the Governor or the chairman of the council. The Governor may postpone the meetings of the municipal councils, but not for a longer period than fourteen days. The Municipal Council of Saint Thomas and Saint John shall convene at Saint Thomas, and the Municipal Council of Saint Croix shall convene at Christiansted.

Sec. 14. The Governor may introduce bills in the respective municipal councils. The Governor shall submit to the respective municipal councils, at least ninety days before the close of each fiscal year, a budget of estimated receipts and expenditures for the respective municipalities, which shall be the basis for the annual local appropriation bills for such municipalities. He shall from time to time submit to the respective municipal councils such reports concerning the fiscal affairs of the municipalities as may be requested by shall be entered on the journal.

Sec. 15. The quorum of each municipal council shall consist of an absolute majority of all its members. No bill shall become a law until it shall be passed by a majority (yea-and-nay) vote of the members present and voting of the municipal council having jurisdiction, entered upon the

journal, and approved by the Governor, except as otherwise herein provided. Each municipal council shall keep a journal of its proceedings and publish the same during the year, and the yeas and nays of the members voting on any question shall be entered on the journal.

Sec. 16. New legislation, and repeals, alterations, and amendments of local laws of the Virgin Islands by the municipal council having jurisdiction, and by the legislative assembly, shall be effective and enforced when, and to the extent, such new legislation, repeals, alterations, and amendments are approved by the Governor, and the Governor shall state specifically in each case whether his approval or disapproval is in whole or in part, and if in part only, what part is approved and what part not approved. The Governor may veto any specific item or items in any bill which appropriates money for specific purposes, but shall veto other bills, if at all, only as a whole. If any bill passes by the municipal council having jurisdiction or by the legislative assembly be disapproved in whole or in part by the Governor, the Governor shall within thirty calendar days return such bill to the said municipal council or to the legislative assembly, whether in actual session or not, setting forth his objections. If after reconsideration by the legislative body having jurisdiction two-thirds of all the members of the said body pass such bill or part thereof, it shall be sent to the Governor who, in case he shall not then approve it, shall transmit the same to the President. If the President approves such bill or part of bill, he shall sign it and it shall become law; if he does not approve such bill or part of bill, he shall return it to the Governor, so stating, and it shall not become law. If any bill shall not be returned by the Governor as herein provided within thirty calendar days after it shall have been presented to him the same shall become a law in like manner as if he had signed it. The President shall approve or disapprove an act submitted to him under the provisions of this section within three months from and after its presentation for his approval; and if not acted upon within such time, it shall become a law the same as if it had been specifically approved. All laws enacted by the Municipal Council of Saint Croix, by the Municipal Council of Saint Thomas and Saint John, or by the legislative assembly, shall be reported by the Governor to the Secretary of the Interior, and by him to the Congress, which hereby reserves the power and the authority to annul the same. The laws not annulled shall be published annually as a public document. If at the termination of any fiscal year the appropriation necessary for the support of the municipal government for the ensuing fiscal year shall not have been made, then the several sums appropriated in the last appropriation bills for the objects and purposed therein specified, so far as the same may be applicable, shall be deemed to be

reappropriated, item by item; and until the municipal council of the municipality having jurisdiction shall act in such behalf, the Governor may make the payments and collections necessary for the purpose aforesaid.

Sec. 17. Beginning on January 1, 1938, or on such earlier date subsequent to January 1, 1937, as may be fixed by local law or ordinance for either municipality, and thereafter, the franchise shall be vested in residents of the Virgin Islands who are citizens of the United States, twenty-one years of age or over, and able to read and write the English language. Additionally, qualifications may be prescribed by the legislative assembly: **Provided, however,** That no property or income qualification shall ever be imposed upon or required of any voter, nor shall any discrimination in qualification be made or based upon difference in race, color, sex, or religious belief.

Sec. 18. The laws of the United States applicable to the Virgin Islands on the date of enactment of this Act, and all local laws and ordinances in force on such date in the Virgin Islands, not inconsistent with this Act, shall continue in force and effect: **Provided,** That the Municipal Council of Saint Croix and the Municipal Council of Saint Thomas and Saint John, and the legislative assembly, shall have power, when not inconsistent with this Act and within their respective jurisdictions, to amend, alter, modify, or repeal any law of the United States of local application only, or any ordinance, public or private, civil or criminal, continued in force and effect by this Act, except as herein otherwise provided, and to enact new laws and ordinances not inconsistent with this Act and not inconsistent with the laws of the United States hereafter made applicable to the Virgin Islands or any part thereof, subject to the power of the Congress to annul the same. The laws of the United States relating to patents, trade marks, and copyrights, and to the enforcement of rights arising thereunder, shall have the same jurisdiction in causes arising under such laws as is exercised by United States district courts.

Sec. 19. The legislative power of the Virgin Islands shall extend to all subjects of local application not inconsistent with this Act or the laws of the United States made applicable to said islands, but no law shall be enacted which would impair rights existing or arising by virtue of any treaty entered into by the United States, nor shall the lands or other property of nonresidents be taxed higher than the lands or other property of residents.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Sec. 20. The executive power of the Virgin Islands and of the municipalities thereof shall be vested in an executive officer whose title shall be "the Governor of the

Virgin Islands" and shall be exercised under supervision of the Secretary of the Interior. The Governor shall be appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, and shall hold office at the pleasure of the President and until his successor is chosen and qualified. The Governor shall reside in the Virgin Islands during his official incumbency. He shall have general supervision and control of all executive and administrative departments, bureaus, and offices of the Government of the Virgin Islands. He shall faithfully execute the laws of the United States applicable to the Virgin Islands, and the laws and ordinances of the Virgin Islands. He may grant pardons and reprieves and remit fines and forfeitures for offenses against the local laws, and may grant respites for offenses against the applicable laws of the United States until the decision of the President can be ascertained. He may veto any legislation as provided in this Act. He shall commission all officers that he may be authorized to appoint. He may call upon the commanders of the military and naval forces of the United States in the islands, or summon the posse comitatus, or call out the militia, to prevent or suppress violence, invasion, insurrection, or rebellion; and he may, in case of rebellion or invasion, or imminent danger thereof, when the public safety requires it, suspend the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus, or place the islands, or any part thereof, under martial law, until communication can be had with the President and the President's decision thereon made known. He shall annually, and at such other times as the President or the Congress may require, make official report of the transactions of the Government of the Virgin Islands to the Secretary of the Interior, and his said annual report shall be transmitted to the Congress. He shall perform such additional duties and functions as may, in pursuance of law, be delegated to him by the President, or by the Secretary of the Interior. He shall have the power to issue executive regulations not in conflict with any applicable law or ordinance. He shall attend or may depute another person to represent him at the meetings of the legislative authorities herein established, and may give expression to his views on any matter before such bodies.

Sec. 21. The President shall appoint a Government Secretary for the Virgin Islands, who shall have all the powers of the Governor in case of a vacancy or temporary removal, resignation, or disability of the Governor, or in case of his temporary absence. He shall have custody of the seal of the Virgin Islands and shall countersign and affix such seal to all executive proclamations and all other executive documents. He shall, when practicable, attend all meetings of the Municipal Council of Saint Thomas and Saint John, before which body he shall give expression to the advice of the Governor. He shall record and preserve the

laws enacted by the legislative authorities herein established. He shall promulgate all proclamations and orders of the Governor and all laws enacted by said legislative authorities. He shall have such executive powers and perform such other duties as may be prescribed by law or assigned to him by the Governor.

Sec. 22. The Secretary of the Interior shall appoint an Administrator for Saint Croix, who shall act for the Governor in the administration of the affairs of the municipality of Saint Croix. He shall, when practicable, attend all meetings of the Municipal Council of Saint Croix, before which body he shall give expression to the advice of the Governor. He shall exercise supervision over all administrative departments in the municipality of Saint Croix, subject to the direction of the Governor.

Sec. 23. The Secretary of the Interior shall appoint such other executive and administrative officers as may, in his discretion, be required. Such officers shall have such powers and duties as may be conferred or imposed upon them by law or ordinance, or by order of the Secretary of the Interior or executive regulation of the Governor not inconsistent with any such law or ordinance. The salary of all executive officers and employees appointed by the President or by the Secretary of the Interior shall be paid from funds appropriated for the Government of the Virgin Islands by the Congress in annual appropriation bills, or as may be otherwise provided by law. The officers appointed by the Secretary of the Interior shall hold office during his pleasure, and in making such appointments the Secretary shall give due consideration to natives of the Virgin Islands.

Sec. 24. The Governor shall appoint, by and with the advice and consent of the municipal council having jurisdiction, all salaried officers and employees of the municipal governments whose salaries are provided for in the budgets of the municipal governments. In the event of a vacancy in any appointive office under the Government of the Virgin Islands, or the absence, illness, or temporary disqualification of any appointive officer, the governor shall designate an officer or employee of the Government of the Virgin Islands to discharge the functions of such officer during such vacancy, absence, illness, or temporary disqualification.

JUDICIAL BRANCH

Sec. 25. The judicial power of the Virgin Islands shall be vested in a court to be designated "the District Court of the Virgin Islands" and in such court or courts of inferior jurisdiction as may have been or may hereafter be established by local law: **Provided**, That the legislative assembly may provide for the organization and conduct of a

Superior Court of the Virgin Islands and may transfer from the district court to such Superior Court jurisdiction over any or all causes other than those arising under the laws of the United States. Appeals from the Superior Court shall be as provided by law in the case of appeals from the district court.

Sec. 26. The President shall, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, appoint a judge and a district attorney for the District Court of the Virgin Islands who shall hold office for the term of four years and until their successors are chosen and qualified unless sooner removed by the President for cause.

The Attorney General shall appoint and fix the compensation of all other officers necessary for the transaction of the business of the district court, and the compensation of the judge of the district court, and of the district attorney, and the administrative expenses of such court shall be paid from appropriations made for the Department of Justice. The duties of such officers shall be prescribed by law or ordinance and by order of the Attorney General not inconsistent therewith: **Provided**, That the Governor may call upon the district attorney to advise him upon any legal questions concerning the administration of the Government of the Virgin Islands.

Sec. 27. The District Court of the Virgin Islands shall consist of two divisions, one constituted by the municipality of Saint Croix and one constituted by the municipality of Saint Thomas and Saint John, as defined by local law in force on the date of enactment of this Act. The judge of the district court shall be prescribed by law or ordinance or by rules and regulations of the district judge not inconsistent with law or ordinance. The process of the district court shall run throughout the Virgin Islands.

Sec. 28. The district court shall have jurisdiction of--

(1) All criminal cases under the laws of the respective municipalities or under the laws of the United States applicable to the Virgin Islands;

(2) All cases in equity;

(3) All cases in admiralty;

(4) All cases of divorce and annulment of marriage;

(5) All cases at law involving principal sums exceeding \$200;

(6) All cases involving title to real estate;

(7) All appeals from judgments rendered in the inferior courts;

(8) All matters and proceedings not otherwise hereinabove provided for which, on the date of enactment of this Act, were within the jurisdiction of the District Court of the Virgin Islands, or of the judge thereof, or which may hereafter be placed within the jurisdiction of the District

Court of the Virgin Islands, or of the judge thereof, by local law.

The district court shall also have concurrent jurisdiction with the inferior courts as provided in section 32.

Sec. 29. The district court shall also have jurisdiction of offenses under the criminal laws of the United States when such offenses are committed on the high seas beyond the territorial limits of the Virgin Islands on vessels belonging in whole or in part to the United States, to any citizen thereof, or to any corporation created by or under the laws of the United States or of any State or Territory thereof, and the offenders are found in the Virgin Islands or are brought into the Virgin Islands after the commission of the offense.

Sec. 30. Appeals from the District Court of the Virgin Islands shall be provided by law in force on the date of enactment of this Act: **Provided**, That no appeal shall be predicated upon the existence of a right to appeal under the law of Denmark.

Sec. 31. In any criminal case originating in said district court, no person shall be denied the right to trial by jury on the demand of either party: **Provided**, That if no jury is demanded the case shall be tried by the court without a jury: **Provided further**, That the judge of the district court may, on his own motion, order a jury for the trial of any criminal action: **Provided further**, That the respective municipal councils of Saint Croix and of Saint Thomas and Saint John, may provide for trial in misdemeanor cases by a jury of six qualified persons.

Sec. 32. The inferior courts shall have jurisdiction concurrent with the district court in all civil cases in which the principal sum claimed does not exceed \$200, and of all criminal cases wherein the punishment that may be imposed shall not exceed a fine of \$100 or imprisonment not exceeding six months, all violations of police regulations and executive regulations, and any cause or offense wherein jurisdiction hereafter shall have been conferred by local law. Such inferior courts shall hold preliminary investigations in charges of felony and charges of misdemeanor in which the punishment that may be imposed is beyond the jurisdiction granted to the inferior courts by this section, and shall commit offenders to the district court and grant bail in bailable cases. The rules governing said courts and prescribing the duties of inferior judges and inferior court officers, oaths, and bonds, the times and places of holding such courts, the disposition of fines, costs, forfeitures, enforcements of judgments, providing for appeals therefrom to the district court, and the disposition and treatment of prisoners shall be established by law or ordinance in force on the date of enactment of this Act or

as may hereafter be established by law or ordinance by the municipal council having jurisdiction.

Sec. 33. Appeals in civil and criminal cases from the judgments and rulings of the inferior courts shall be to the district court and shall be taken in accordance with the laws and ordinances of the respective municipalities: **Provided**, That the right of appeal in all cases, civil and criminal, shall be as established by law or ordinance in force on the date of enactment of this Act, or as may hereafter be established by law or ordinance by the municipal council having jurisdiction.

MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

Sec. 34. No law shall be enacted in the Virgin Islands which shall deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law or deny to any person therein equal protection of the laws.

In all criminal prosecutions the accused shall enjoy the right to be represented by counsel for his defense, to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation, to have a copy thereof, to have a speedy and public trial, to be confronted with the witnesses against him, and to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor.

No person shall be held to answer for a criminal offense without due process of law, and no person for the same offense shall be twice put in jeopardy of punishment, nor shall be compelled in any criminal cause to give evidence against himself; nor shall any person sit as judge or magistrate in any case in which he has been engaged as attorney or prosecutor.

All persons shall be bailable by sufficient sureties in the case of criminal offenses, except for first-degree murder or any capital offense when the proof is evident or the presumption great.

No law impairing the obligation of contracts shall be enacted.

No person shall be imprisoned or shall suffer forced labor for debt.

All persons shall have the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus and the same shall not be suspended except as herein expressly provided.

No ex-posto-facto law or bill of attainder shall be enacted.

Private property shall not be taken for public use except upon payment of just compensation ascertained in the manner provided by law.

Nothing contained in this Act shall be construed to limit the power of the municipal councils herein provided to enact laws for the protection of life, the public health, or the public safety.

Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishment inflicted. The right to be secure against unreasonable searches and seizures shall not be violated.

No warrant for arrest or search shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched and the persons or things to be seized.

Slavery shall not exist in the Virgin Islands.

Involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall not exist in the Virgin Islands.

No law shall be passed abridging the freedom of speech or of the press or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and petition the Government for the redress of grievances.

No law shall be made respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, and the free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship without discrimination or preference shall forever be allowed, and no political or religious test other than an oath to support the Constitution and the laws of the United States applicable to the Virgin Islands, and the laws of the Virgin Islands, shall be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the Government of the Virgin Islands.

The contracting of polygamous or plural marriages is prohibited.

No money shall be paid out of the treasury except in accordance with an Act of Congress or money bill of the local legislative authority having jurisdiction and on warrant drawn by the proper officer.

The employment of children under the age of fourteen years in any occupation injurious to health or morals or hazardous to life or limb is hereby prohibited.

Sec. 35. All taxes, duties, fees, and public revenues collected in the municipality of Saint Croix shall be covered into the treasury of the Virgin Islands and held in account for said municipality and all taxes, duties, fees, and public revenues collected in the municipality of Saint Thomas and Saint John shall be covered into said treasury of the Virgin Islands and held in account for said municipality: **Provided**, That the proceeds of customs duties, less the cost of collection, and the proceeds of the United States income tax, and the proceeds of any taxes levied by the Congress on the inhabitants of the Virgin Islands, and all quarantine, passport, immigration, and naturalization fees collected in the Virgin Islands shall be covered into the treasury of the Virgin Islands and held in account for the respective municipalities, and shall be expended for the benefit and government of said municipalities in accordance with the annual municipal budgets. The Municipal Council of

Saint Croix may make appropriations for the purposes of said municipality from, and to be paid out of, the funds credited to its account in the treasury of the Virgin Islands; and the Municipal Council of Saint Thomas and Saint John may make appropriations for the purposes of said municipality from, and to be paid out of, the funds credited to its accounts in said treasury.

Sec. 36. Taxes and assessments on property and incomes, internal-revenue taxes, license fees, and service fees may be imposed and collected, and royalties for franchises, privileges, and concessions granted may be collected for the purposes of the Government of the Virgin Islands as may be provided and defined by the municipal councils herein established: **Provided**, That all money hereafter derived from any tax levied or assessed for a special purpose shall be treated as a special fund in the treasury of the Virgin Islands and paid out for such purpose only, except when otherwise authorized by the legislative authority having jurisdiction after the purpose for which such fund was created has been accomplished. Until Congress shall otherwise provide, all laws concerning import duties and customs in the municipality of Saint Thomas and Saint John now in effect shall be in force and effect in and for the Virgin Islands: **Provided**, That the Secretary of the Treasury shall designate the several ports and sub-ports of entry in the Virgin Islands of the United States and shall make such rules and regulations and appoint such officers and employees as he may deem necessary for the administration of the customs laws in the Virgin Islands of the United States; and he shall fix the compensation of all such officers and employees and provide for the payment of such compensations and other expenses of the collection of duties, fees, and taxes imposed under the customs laws from the receipts thereof. The export duties in effect on the date of enactment of this Act may be from time to time reduced, repealed, or restored by ordinance of the municipal council having jurisdiction; **Provided further**, That no new export duties shall be levied in the Virgin Islands except by the Congress.

Sec. 37. All judicial process shall run in the name of "United States of America, scilicet, the President of the United States," and all penal or criminal prosecutions in the local courts shall be conducted in the name of and by authority of "the People of the Virgin Islands of the United States."

Sec. 38. All officials of the Government of the Virgin Islands shall be citizens of the United States, and before entering upon the duties of their respective offices shall take an oath to support the Constitution and the laws of the United States applicable to the Virgin Islands and the laws of the Virgin Islands.

Sec. 39. All reports required by law to be made by the Governor to any official of the United States shall hereafter be made to the Secretary of the Interior, and the President is hereby authorized to place all matters pertaining to the Government of the Virgin Islands under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Interior, except matters relating to the judicial branch of said Government which shall be as hereinbefore provided under the supervision of the Attorney General.

Sec. 40. This Act shall take effect upon its enactment, but until its provisions shall severally become operative as herein provided, the corresponding legislative, executive, and judicial functions of the existing government shall continue to be exercised as now provided by law or ordinance, and the present incumbents of all offices under the Government of the Virgin Islands shall continue in office until their successors are appointed and have qualified unless sooner removed by competent authority.

Sec. 41. This Act may be cited as the Organic Act of the Virgin Islands of the United States.

Approved, June 22, 1936.

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