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Author(s): Andrew J. O'Shaughnessy
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The Stamp Act Crisis
in the British Caribbean

Andrew J. O'Shaughnessy

The thirteen mainland colonies were not the only colonies in British America to resist the Stamp Act of 1765. The duties met vigorous opposition in Nova Scotia and in the federal colony of the Leeward Islands, especially in St. Kitts and Nevis. In contrast to the virtual unity experienced on the mainland, however, the British Caribbean islands diverged greatly in their responses to the act. Jamaica and Barbados complied with the act, and their passivity, not the Leewards' opposition, has been the focus of the few historical accounts of the period.

This article seeks to explain why the Leeward Islands, despite their seemingly weaker position, were so bold in their opposition, in contrast to the vir-

Mr. O'Shaughnessy is a member of the Department of History, University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh. He wishes to thank Virginia Crane, Alan Karras, and Philip Lawson for their comments on drafts. The author is grateful to Olive, Countess Fitzwilliam, the Wentworth Settlement Trustees, and the director of the Sheffield City Libraries for permission to quote from the Rockingham Papers. He also wishes to acknowledge the help of a University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh, Faculty Development Grant toward the completion of primary research. A preliminary version of this essay was presented at the Association of Caribbean Historians.


2 The principal British Leeward Islands are Antigua, St. Kitts, Nevis, Tortola, and Montserrat. They include Barbuda and Anguilla and the small islands of the British Virgin Islands like Virgin Gorda (Spanish Town), Jos Van Dykes, Guana Isle, Beef and Thatch Islands, Anegada, Nichar, Prickly Pear, Ginger, Cooper's Island, Salt Island, and Peter's Island.

3 For example, Spindel, "Stamp Act Crisis in the British West Indies," 211, 213, cites the high proportion of slaves, the military and naval presence, and the economic and military dependence on Britain to explain the passivity of Jamaica and Barbados. These conditions, however, also existed in the Leeward Islands. Spindel, ibid., 216-217, notes...
tual acquiescence of Jamaica and Barbados. The Leeward Islands are much smaller than Jamaica and Barbados. St. Kitts is about sixty-eight square miles, Nevis thirty-six. Altogether, the Leewards comprise 251 square miles compared to Jamaica's 4,411. These islands were especially dependent on the cultivation of sugar and on the domestic English sugar market for their exports. Their scattered white populations declined throughout the second half of the eighteenth century. Slaves outnumbered whites 12 to 1 in St. Kitts and 15 to 1 in Antigua—the highest proportions in British America. A regiment of troops, based in Antigua, could easily enforce British policy and suppress revolts among the small white populations of the Leewards. The main dockyard of the Royal Navy in British America was at English Harbor, Antigua. These conditions would lead us to expect the Leewards to have been more submissive than Barbados or Jamaica. Their resistance requires explanation.

The argument here attributes the more assertive response of the Leeward Islands to their closer ties to the mainland and especially to their greater vulnerability to economic pressure exerted by mainland merchants during the crisis of 1765-1766. In contrast, the other West Indian colonies were less dependent on mainland trade and therefore less susceptible to external pressure. The administrative structure and the geography of the Leewards will also be shown to have facilitated their opposition. All the island colonies, including Jamaica and Barbados, despite the apparent differences in their reactions, disliked the stamp tax. Nevertheless, the response of all the islands—even the Leewards—differed significantly from the mainland colonies. These differences later influenced the preferential treatment of the islands by Britain before the Revolutionary War. Finally, the response of the islands to the Stamp Act crisis anticipated their divergence from mainland colonies during the Revolutionary War.

The Stamp Act imposed a greater burden of taxation on the Caribbean than on the mainland colonies through clauses that specifically discriminated against the islands. These included a duty on "any probate of a will, letters of administration, or of guardianship for any estate above the value of twenty pounds"—double the rate for the mainland. The stamp duties on crown land grants were treble those levied on the mainland. Crown land grants below 100 the low proportion of slaves in the towns of the Leeward Islands, which again was also true of the towns of Barbados and Jamaica. She argues that the slaves of the Leeward Islands were more passive. Yet the 1736 conspiracy in Antigua was unequaled in Barbados in the 18th century. She makes no reference to the friction with North America and the impact of the North American boycott.

acres paid a 3s. duty in the Caribbean, necessitating the printing of a special stamp, in contrast to 1s. on the mainland. Public officials in the islands, but not on the mainland, paid a stamp duty on assuming offices worth over £20 per annum.6

Consequently, the British government allocated more stamps to the island colonies than to the mainland (relative to the size of the free population). The greatest single consignment of stamps to British America, worth £15,781 sterling, went to Jamaica, where the white population numbered under 18,000, in contrast to £12,934 sterling sent to New York, where the white population was three and a half times larger. The government apportioned more stamps to the Leeward Islands than to any of the mainland colonies: it expected revenues from Antigua to be higher than from North Carolina or Maryland.7 The speaker of the assembly of Antigua speculated that total revenues from the Caribbean would be twice those of all the mainland colonies. Furthermore, the cost in the islands would fall almost entirely on trade and litigation rather than on the trifling volume of newspapers, books, pamphlets, and printed advertisements.8 Finally, the tax brought no positive benefits to the islands such as additional military protection.9 On the contrary, the ministry simultaneously reduced military garrisons in the older colonies (predating 1763) to the great dismay of the white population: the two army regiments in Jamaica were reduced from over two thousand to a thousand men, and the regiment in Antigua fell from 700 to under 350 in 1764.10 Ministers did not propose to increase the size of the forces in the Caribbean with the new revenues, while since the 1660s Barbados and the Leeward Islands paid a 4.5% duty to the British government to cover the cost of imperial defense and administra-

8 Samuel Martin to Samuel Martin, Jr., Aug 5, 1765, Add. MSS 41347, 205, British Library, London; see also Samuel Martin to Samuel Martin, Jr., July 1, 1765, Add. MSS 41350, 19, and Samuel Martin to James Gordon, July 28, 1765, ibid.
9 The islands “ceded” by the French (Tobago, Grenada, Dominica, and St. Vincent) by the 1763 Peace of Paris received additional regiments. However, these reinforcements made little difference to the inhabitants of the other islands, who thought solely in terms of their domestic military strength and the danger of local slave rebellions.
The Stamp Act thus required the islands to pay more for less toward an imperial tax that purported to subsidize defense.

Island and mainland colonies had similar objections to the Stamp Act. Island and mainland colonies had similar objections to the Stamp Act. They asserted that they enjoyed inherited and customary liberties common to all British subjects. Samuel Martin, a former speaker of the Antigua assembly and an outspoken critic of the Stamp Act, argued that these liberties had been defended against the Norman yoke and Stuart tyranny. They were enshrined in Magna Carta, the common law, and the revolutionary settlement of 1688. Henry Duke, solicitor general of Barbados, later recalled that the whole island had opposed the Stamp Act: "It was an Invasion, they said, of the constitutional Rights of English Subjects." In addition to appealing to the British Constitution, the Barbados assembly also cited the authority of the island's charter.

Like mainland patriots, islanders maintained that taxes should be raised exclusively through their elected assemblies. The Barbados assembly had stated bluntly in 1740 that taxes "laid upon the inhabitants without the consent of their representatives" are invalid. The assembly repeated that claim in November 1765 when it told the governor that there should be "no Internal Taxation of Government but what is authorized by the representative Body of each Society in concert with the representative Body of the Crown presiding over it." "We think," wrote the agent for Barbados in 1765, "of the Doctrine of internal Taxations like our Brethren on the Continent."

Island colonists similarly rejected the British argument that the colonies were virtually represented through their connections and influence in England "since we have there no representatives to inform them of the true state of our circumstances." Samuel Martin denied that the colonies were virtually repre-

13 [John Gay Alleyne], A Letter to the North American, on Occasion of his Address to the Committee of Correspondence in Barbadoes ([Bridgetown], Barbados, 1766), 16.
15 Minutes of the Assembly of Barbados, Sept. 10, 1771, CO/31/36, PRO.
16 [Alleyne], Letter to the North American, 25; they later regretted their appeal to the charter but felt that "they were led into the Error by their fellow subjects on the continent."
18 Minutes of the Assembly of Barbados, Nov. 25, 1765, CO/31/32.
19 George Walker to the Committee of Correspondence of Barbados, Nov. 26, 1765, CO/31/33, PRO.
20 Barbados Mercury, Apr. 19, 1766.
sentenced, although he could exert political influence through his oldest son, a royal office holder and a member of Parliament. Martin declared that the Stamp Act and the Admiralty Courts, entrusted with enforcing the act, infringed on traditional liberties including taxation by their own representatives and trial by jury. William Beckford, the foremost absentee Jamaican planter in Parliament, also rejected the government’s defense that the colonies were virtually represented and that Parliament was entitled to levy internal taxes in the colonies.

Some West Indians asserted their right to resist if their traditional privileges were threatened by tyranny. Sir John Gay Alleyne of Barbados wrote, in a public letter to a North American, “Our political creed on the point of Resistance to the Supreme Power of the State, in case of any imagined oppression of our several colonies, is the same as yours.” A Barbadian pamphlet proclaimed that wherever tyranny was attempted “all Opposition becomes lawful” and that tyranny was no more supportable by a group than by a single individual. Samuel Martin denounced the Stamp Act for treating the colonies “as Slaves, to arbitrary power: for Tyranny may be as well displayed by many in conjunction as by one man.” He feared that compliance with the tax would set a precedent that, “if it were unopposed, there was no knowing where it would stop.”

West Indian merchants and planters residing in Britain actively opposed the Stamp Act. At its introduction, Beckford spoke against the act in the House of Commons, the single member reported to have done so. His effort to obstruct the bill by a procedural motion received support only from “West Indian gentlemen and a few others connected with America.” Absentee planters and merchants, along with island agents, campaigned against the bill. They initially hesitated to petition Parliament, knowing that parliamentary procedure disallowed petitions relating to money bills. When, however, they heard that the Treasury was claiming that “none of the colonies had any objection,” they decided to petition the House of Commons as “a Monument of our unwillingness to submit to and our inability to bear such a burthen.” On February 15, Rose Fuller, brother of Jamaica’s agent Stephen Fuller, announced the petition

23 [Alleyne], Letter to the North American, 10.
24 Candid Observations on two pamphlets lately published, viz. An Address to the Committee of correspondence in Barbados by a North-American (Barbados, 1766), 25.
26 Thomas, British Politics and the Stamp Act Crisis, 93.
27 Stephen Fuller to the Jamaican Committee of Correspondence, Feb. 7, 1765, Fuller Letterbook 1762–1773, Nicholas M. Williams Ethnological Collection, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Mass.
of certain Persons trading to, and interested in the Island of Jamaica," stating their inability to pay the tax.28

West Indian merchants and planters in London also played a role in the eventual repeal of the Stamp Act. In December 1765, the agent for Barbados urged the marquis of Rockingham to allow North American vessels to enter West Indian ports without stamps. Rockingham promised to lay the issue before the Privy Council. On leaving the minister, the agent was followed by Rockingham's secretary Edmund Burke, who assured him "that the Marquis was very desirous to relieve us. That he detested the Stamp Act and had always opposed it. But that the party which made it were upon the watch to take every advantage of him; and if he was to Relax in any part of it, they would charge him with the miscarriage of the whole."29 Rose Fuller was the chairman of the American Committee (February 17, 1766) that played an important role in persuading parliamentary opinion of the adverse effects of colonial disturbances on the British economy. He arranged for opponents of the Stamp Act to be the first witnesses to appear before his committee. These included many with interests in the West Indies such as Beeston Long, chairman of the West India merchants' committee, James Carr, a Jamaica merchant, and Henry Wilmot, agent for the Leeward Islands.30

Although all the islands opposed the Stamp Act, only the Leeward Islands resisted its implementation. There were riots in St. Kitts and Nevis on October 31, the eve of enforcement, and on November 5, which was the emotional anniversary of both the Gunpowder Plot (Pope's Day) and the Glorious Revolution (William III's landing at Torbay in 1688). The riots were well planned and organized. They mirrored the rituals of major riots on the mainland including ceremonial processions, effigy burning, forced recantations by stamp officials, and destruction of the stamps.31 The riots were boisterous and violent: private houses and even the long boat of a Royal Navy battleship were burned. The stamp distributor in St. Kitts was convinced that the riots were


29 George Walker to the Barbados Committee of Correspondence, Nov. 19, 1765, Minutes of the Council of Barbados, CO/31/33.


31 The rituals of the crowd are similar to those described in Peter Shaw, American Patriots and the Rituals of Revolution (Cambridge, Mass., 1981).
not spontaneous but covertly organized; he was "greatly surpriz'd . . . as I had not heard that even such a thing was intended: (so secret was the design kept)."32 Information is lacking about the identity of the local Sons of Liberty, as they were dubbed in the mainland press, and the participants in the mobs, although we know that the latter included Yankee sailors. The scale of the riots in St. Kitts suggests involvement of over half the free white adult male population. In other words, if contemporary estimates are accurate, these riots were proportionally equivalent to those of Boston and New York.

The riot of October 31 began when a crowd of three to four hundred people gathered at about 8 P. M. at Noland's Tavern in Basseterre, the capital of St. Kitts. To the beat of a drum, they marched to the home of John Hopkins, a local merchant and the deputy of William Tuckett, the stamp distributor for St. Kitts and Nevis, where they shouted three huzzahs and demanded the stamp papers. When the stamps were turned over, they ceremoniously burned about "4 or 5 quires" of them at the door. After searching the house, they forced Hopkins to swear to have nothing further to do with the stamps and made him accompany them about three-quarters of a mile out of town to a house where Tuckett was recovering from a fever.33 With drums still beating, the crowd seized Tuckett and returned with him on horseback to the public market. According to Tuckett's account, he was knocked to the ground when he dismounted and would have been murdered but for the help of "some Negroes" who knew him and rescued him "from the enraged Populace," allowing him to leave Basseterre.34 His escape was short-lived; the mob of "500 white People at least" came after him and made him walk back to town. Tuckett pleaded with their leaders for the sake of his weak health but was gibed with "gross insults" and obliged to resign his office. He promised to announce his resignation in the newspaper "to avoid being suspended," presumably by hanging.35

After finishing with Tuckett, the mob rampaged through the streets of Basseterre to the office of the island secretary, Mr. Smith, where they broke in the door and burned another "four or five quires of stamped paper."36 They then walked Smith home "with great acclamations of huzzas" and went on to the office of the deputy provost marshal, where they burned "one quire" of stamps.37 Finally, they surrounded the custom house but were eventually persuaded to leave after the collector declared "over and over upon his word and honor" that he had no stamps inside.38 Disorder continued throughout the night with many "Violences and Disturbances," especially against supporters

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32 William Tuckett to George Thomas, Dec. 5, 1765, CO/152/47, PRO.
33 Ibid; Massachusetts Gazette, Dec. 6, 1765; Boston Post-Boy and Advertiser, Dec. 9, 1765.
34 Tuckett to Thomas, Dec. 5, 1765, CO/152/47.
35 Ibid.
36 Mass. Gaz., Dec. 6, 1765; Boston Post-Boy, Dec. 9, 1765.
38 Mass. Gaz., Dec. 6, 1765; Boston Post-Boy, Dec. 9, 1765.
of the act who were subjected to “low and public Threats” and taunted with insulting language.\footnote{39}

During the night, Tuckett fled across the seven-mile channel from Basseterre to his native Nevis. There, he again began “to distribute those badges of slavery” on November 2, the day after the Stamp Act took effect.\footnote{40} The St. Kitts “Sons of Liberty” followed him, and, joined by other supporters, resolved that they would by “some stratagem, get and burn, or tuck him up,” but Tuckett escaped their clutches.\footnote{41} In a trail of destruction, they burned two houses and hauled up a navy long boat that they loaded with stamps and “set the whole on fire.”\footnote{42}

Violence did not subside in St. Kitts. “There is hardly a Man among them from the highest to the lowest,” the Boston Gazette reported, “who does not openly show his hearty Abhorrence of the Stamp Law.”\footnote{43} On November 5, a crowd reassembled in Basseterre to parade effigies of the stamp master and his deputy that they burned in the common pasture. The evening concluded “with an elegant supper, Drums beating and the French Horns playing; and the last Toast was Liberty, Property and No Stamps.”\footnote{44} In late November, opponents of the act prevented a new supply of stamps from being landed and intercepted the correspondence of the stamp distributor. Tuckett still feared revenge and even assassination. He could find no one in St. Kitts willing to be his deputy or even to let a house to him.\footnote{45} Defended by a small bodyguard, Tuckett reneged on his oath and clung to his office in Nevis, where he remained a figure of ridicule long beyond the repeal of the Stamp Act.\footnote{46}

All the Leeward Islands successfully opposed the Stamp Act. Montserrat ignored the duties. Antigua, the unofficial seat of government in the Leewards,
reacted more ambivalently and inconsistently than the other islands but similarly succeeded in obstructing the payment of stamp duties. The inhabitants of Antigua were involved in "mighty doings" before the arrival of the stamp papers. Antigua stamp master William Otley was in Britain, and the late arrival of the stamps left the tax unenforced by the end of November. Governor George Thomas rather misleadingly assured the secretary of State for the Colonies that everything had gone quietly for the first three weeks of November. An unidentified stranger, "walking down the Water Side, and seeing a Bale of them (the stamps) lying on the Wharf, altogether neglected for Three Days, took charge of, and distributed them" for about sixteen days. The Antigua Gazette was published on stamped paper for six weeks until late December, when the paper announced the resignation of the third distributor who had acted for "about 16 days much against the inclination of the People." In January 1766, the merchant John Harper "found not the least Difficulty arising from my papers not being stamp'd." A correspondent of the Virginia Gazette found that ships "enter and clear . . . as usual" without stamped papers. The situation changed again the following February, for reasons that remain unclear, when reports circulated that the tax was being enforced. This is corroborated by the existence of a February 15 document bearing a 5s. stamp from Antigua. Despite these reversals and changes in their stance, no duty was sent back to Britain. The Maryland Gazette praised the island for having "to its great Honour, most loyally withstood this Pest, contrived against his Majesty's loving subjects." A report compiled for the British Treasury in 1772 revealed that no duties were received from Antigua despite an outstanding balance of £2,275 sterling for unaccounted papers.

The presence in Antigua of both the governor of the Leeward Islands and the king's Sixty-eighth Regiment may explain why the inhabitants initially paid the duty, "though sorely against their wills." On the arrival of the stamp papers, Governor Thomas promptly ordered two sentries to guard the home of the stamp distributor and commanded a hundred regulars to protect the stamp papers. The governor observed in December "a general uneasiness and discon-

50 Halifax Gaz., Dec., 19–26, 1765.
51 Thomas to Conway, Dec. 21, 1765, CO/152/47.
52 Dunlap's Md. Gaz., Mar. 13, 1766; Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon), Apr. 4, 1766.
55 Va. Gaz. (Purdie and Dixon), Mar. 21, 1766.
56 Koeppel, Stamps That Caused the American Revolution, 13, 23.
57 Dunlap's Md. Gaz., Apr. 17, 1766.
tent in the People of all Ranks."60 Lieutenant Colonel Josiah Martin of the
Sixty-eighth later recalled that "many people who knew better" opposed
the Stamp Act. Martin lamented that, in their desire to expose the servants of
the crown to public odium, people daily heckled and abused the sentries
guarding the stamp office and even the men of the regiment.61 According to
Martin, only the presence of the troops prevented rioting. As two Pennsylvania
merchants wrote home from the island, "we could wish the people dare shew
their dislike to [the Stamp Act] . . . here in the same Open manner that they
do on your side of the Water, but they are Over Awed by his Majesty's Sixty
Eighth Regt."62 Nevertheless, three successive stamp officers quit before the
end of December.63 Thomas Warner, although offered a personal bodyguard,
resigned without "being solicited," apparently having heard of the fate of
Tuckett.64 William Atkinson, who was also secretary of the island, discovered
that "not a man in the Island would keep the stamp officer company, though
before he was universally beloved, so that he resigned his office."65

The legislatures of the Leeward Islands also opposed the Stamp Act. In St.
Kitts, the merchants who composed a joint committee of the legislature
appointed to investigate the riots failed to take any action. The St. Kitts
assembly refused to join the council in another committee of investigation in
January and instead suggested that they should draw up a joint address to the
king representing "the Extreme grievances and heavy burthen of the Stamp
Act in order if possible to obtain a repeal."66 In Nevis, the legislature feigned
abhorrance at the tumults, but private letters of council member John Pinney
reveal "rather a somewhat guarded exultation."67 In Antigua, the assembly
rejected a land warrant and petition that had been submitted on stamped
paper. In December 1765, for reasons that will become apparent, the joint leg-
islature of the island resolved to petition the king for repeal.68

The disturbances in St. Kitts and Nevis were unequaled elsewhere in the
British Caribbean. Barbados and Jamaica complied with the Stamp Act. Stamp
officials there, unlike the majority of distributors on the mainland, never
resigned. Barbados shared the general grievances against the Stamp Act. There
were "loud complaints" in Barbados against the West Indian members of

60 Thomas to Conway, Dec., 21, 1765, CO/152/47.
61 Ibid.; Vernon O. Stumpf, "Josiah Martin and His Search for Success: The Road to
North Carolina," North Carolina Historical Review, LIII (1976), 64.
62 Harper and Hartshorn to Clifford, Nov. 25, 1765, quoted in Spindel, "Stamp Act
Crisis," 219; John Batho to his father, Nov. 10, 1765, ibid., 217.
63 The author has been able to identify only two of the stamp distributors in Antigua
by name.
64 Va. Gaz. (Purdie and Dixon), Mar. 21, 1766.
(Purdie and Dixon), Mar. 7, 21, Apr. 4, 1766.
67 Richard Pares, A West India Fortune (London, 1950), 92.
68 Va. Gaz. (Purdie and Dixon), Apr. 4, 1766; Mass. Gaz., Mar. 20, 1766; Stumpf,
"Josiah Martin," 64–65.
Parliament for failing to be more vocal in their opposition. In November 1765, the assembly complained to Governor Charles Pinfold of the irregular nature of the tax and cited its compliance with British requests during the last war. In December, the lower house resolved to send a joint remonstrance to the king. The agent for Barbados warned Rockingham that “Peaceable as we are, Distress will make us desperate—Barbados will be in confusion like Boston.” The following January, the lower house accepted a council proposal to send a joint address to its London agent to be communicated to the government. By the time of the repeal of the Stamp Act, Pinfold thought the island “ripe for Disturbances.” There was talk in the assembly of voting no local taxes for the support of government, including the governor’s salary, and of reducing sugar exports to Britain. Despite sympathy with the general opposition to the Stamp Act, Barbados complied with its enforcement. So great was the demand for stamps that the distributors feared their supply would run out. The Barbados Mercury and the Barbados Gazette were printed on stamped paper. In Philadelphia, a stamped Barbadian newspaper was brought out one evening in “the Coffee House,” where it was “handcuffed” by an iron chain and triumphantly burned to loud cheers. The Barbados Mercury printed a tirade from one planter to a correspondent in Philadelphia warning that the North Americans were “not of such Consequence, that your vain Threats shall oblige us to throw off that Duty that we owe to our Sovereign, and join with a Sett of Men, who, under the specious Name of Asserters of their Liberty, dare, contrary to all Laws human and divine, break out into the most outrageous Acts of Rebellion against their Sovereign Defender.” The writer vowed that no hardship, however extreme, would “lessen in us that loyal Attachment we have to Perform of our most gracious sovereign, or that tender Regard we bear our Mother Country.” The governor of Barbados reported that all was “quiet and easy” and that the act was “obeyed with... Readiness.” King George III personally acknowledged the loyal compliance of Barbados.

70 Address of the Assembly to Governor Pinfold, Nov. 26, 1765, CO/31/32.
71 George Walker to the Barbados Committee of Correspondence, Nov. 19, 1765, CO/31/33.
72 Minutes of the Assembly of Barbados, Dec. 17, 1765, Jan. 21, 1766, ibid.
74 [Alleynel, Letter to the North American, 31, 32.
76 Isaiah Thomas, The History of Printing in America, ed. Marcus A. McCorison (New York, 1970), 607. There are 4 extant examples—two at the PRO, London, and one each at the Library Company of Philadelphia and the AAS.
78 Barbados Mercury, Feb. 1, 1766.
79 Pinfold to the Board of Trade, Feb. 21, 1766, CO/28/32, 197; Pinfold to Secretary of State, Aug. 26, 1765, Feb. 21, 1766, CO/28/50, 99, 105.
80 Minutes of the Assembly of Barbados, Dec. 3, 1766, CO/31/32.
The assembly of Barbados, the oldest representative body in the Caribbean, bowed to the objections of the council and refrained from petitioning the king in December. The following January it compromised on a joint letter to its agent in London. An adulterated copy of the letter, probably originating in the island and circulated in print on the mainland, condemned "the present rebellious opposition given to authority" by the North Americans—for which John Dickinson of Philadelphia reproached the assembly in an anonymous pamphlet.81 The Barbados assembly and its apologists vainly protested that "incorrect copies had been sent abroad" and that the offensive clause was not in the official draft.82 As one of the members astutely observed, it was not simply the clause that angered Dickinson, "but the obedience yielded by them to the lawful Authority of our Mother Country, in a case where they might have been tempted by a very notable Example of Resistance."83 On the repeal of the Stamp Act, Barbados "did not show the least sign of rejoicing... on that glorious occasion."84

Jamaicans made only nominal opposition to the Stamp Act. They were already displeased with George Grenville's policies following the closure of the Spanish bullion trade and thus potentially sensitive to any changes in imperial policy. They made "repeated Threats of Violence, Torrents of Personal abuse and many other very disagreeable Circumstances" against the stamp distributor, John Howell. Howell believed that only the speedy removal of the stamps to a safe place in Spanish Town, the capital of Jamaica, saved the stamp office because the people found the duties so "obnoxious."85 Jamaicans did not use stamps on the probate of wills. The deeds in the Court of Ordinary in Spanish Town show that many people rushed to complete business before the stamp duty came into force; many deferred their legal business until its repeal, and others evaded it.86 By the beginning of 1766, North American ships were clearing Port Royal without stamped papers. Following repeal, the islanders burned effigies of Howell and Grenville.87

For all its token resistance, Jamaica paid more stamp duty than the rest of the empire in toto, amounting to over £2,000 sterling during the four and a half months the act was in force.88 Howell believed that the revenue would

81 [Dickinson], An Address to the Committee of Correspondence in Barbados, iv.
82 Ibid.; Minutes of the Assembly of Barbados, Mar. 18, 1766, CO/31/32; [Kenneth Morrison], An Essay towards the vindication of the Committee of correspondence in Barbados, from the aspersions and calumnies thrown upon them, in an anonymous piece printed in Philadelphia, under the title of an Address to them, occasioned by their letter to their Agent in London ([Bridgetown], Barbados, 1766), 5; [Alleyne], Letter to the North American, 5; Candid Observations on two pamphlets lately published, 7.
83 [Alleyne], Letter to the North American, 8.
84 N.-Y. Mercury, June 9, 1776.
88 Dickerson, Navigation Acts, 193, 206 n. 88.
have been much greater “had not the people conceived a repeal of the Law unavoidable which they inferred from the conduct of the N. Americans.”

Two slaves carted the stamps overland for more than ten miles without interference, and local admiralty courts prosecuted at least eight North American ships for carrying unstamped clearances. Mainland newspapers reported that the tax met no opposition and quipped “that the Inhabitants of the Town of Kingston fed so voraciously on them (the stamps), that not less than 300 of them alone died in the Month of November.” After repeal, the secretary of state congratulated the governor on the lack of disturbances. Grenada, the only Windward Island to be sent an official stamp distributor, also used stamps.

The obedience of Jamaica and Barbados seems surprising. Their advantages over the Leewards made gestures of defiance against imperial authority more feasible. Jamaica and Barbados possessed a lower proportion of slaves—a potentially restraining influence on violence within the white community—than the Leeward Islands. They contained larger white populations than the Leewards, which, in contrast to the latter’s decline, increased between 1710 and 1770. They boasted legislatures jealous of their privileges and more assertive than many mainland assemblies in the first half of the eighteenth century. They exhibited no more dependence on Britain than the Leeward Islands. Barbados especially had no history of slave rebellions, no regiments of British soldiers, a lower rate of absentee ownership, and the highest proportion of white settlers anywhere in the British Caribbean. It is paradoxical that the Leeward Islands should have shown the initiative in opposing the Stamp Act.

89 Howell to Conway, May 31, 1766, CO/137/62, 208.
91 Halifax Gaz., Feb. 13–20, 1766. The 300 deaths were more likely owing to a fever epidemic. The St. James Chronicle, Oct. 24–28, 1765, reported that “yellow fever and sickness . . . raged more severely this season than for some Years past, by which great Numbers had been carried off.”
92 Conway to Lyttelton, Apr. 10, 1766, CO/137/62.
93 Koeppel, Stamps That Caused the American Revolution, 11; Boston Post-Boy, Mar. 3, 1766.
94 See Greene, Pursuits of Happiness, 155–162, for direct comparisons.
The greater vulnerability of the Leeward Islands to economic sanctions by North American merchants explains their comparatively violent opposition. The Leewards depended heavily on the mainland trade, the source of essential provisions, especially salted fish and corn to feed their slaves, because sugar cultivation was so extensive.97 During the American Revolution, the Leewards faced conditions of famine and acute shortages unsurpassed anywhere in the Caribbean, owing to the loss of this trade.98 Alternative sources of supply proved too expensive, too distant, or simply insufficient. The Leewards faced a stark alternative in November 1765: either rise in opposition or face the specter of famine with the attendant danger of a slave rebellion.

Tensions between planters and merchant suppliers sharpened with the Sugar Act of 1764. Mainland merchants suspected West Indians of complicity in the passage of the act—a belief that Grenville almost certainly cultivated in a successful attempt to divert criticism and divide the colonial interest.99 The continental patriots were now additionally enraged by the sugar islands’ submissive compliance to the Stamp Act. Radicals among them proposed to starve the “Creole Slaves” by a virtual embargo.100 John Adams fumed “can no Punishment be devised for Barbadoes and Port Royal in Jamaica? For their base Desertion of the Cause of Liberty? Their tame Surrender of the Rights of

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Britons? Their mean, timid Resignation to slavery?"\textsuperscript{101} The patriots urged their fellow countrymen to deny the islanders "the comfortable Enjoyment of every delicious Dainty from us . . . till they are brought to a State of Despondency, without any Thing but stinking Fish and false Doctrine."\textsuperscript{102}

Mainland newspapers demanded reprisals against the island colonists. The \textit{New-York Mercury} and a Philadelphia correspondent in the \textit{Halifax Gazette or Weekly Advertiser} condemned the tame acquiescence of the sugar islands: "to be successful in Opposition to this severe Law, all the People who are to be affected by its Operation should be unanimous; and when any of them prove degenerate, it behoves the remainder to resent it by every Means in their Power. The Means are assuredly in the Power of these Colonies, by withholding from them [the sugar islands] the Provisions that are necessary for their support; and indeed the very Nature of their Crime entails this Punishment, as no individual can be secure in his Property that sends thither a ship with unstamped clearances."\textsuperscript{103} The \textit{Massachusetts Gazette} also made threats against the island provision trade: "the SLAVISH Islands of Barbados and Antigua—Poor, mean spirited, Cowardly, Dastardly Creoles, I wish they may have neither Fresh or Salt Provisions from any Son of LIBERTY on the Continent, and that they may like the Blacks, whom they now make Slaves of with Rigour, be deemed to wear the Internal Badge of STAMPS about their Necks, till they like the brave Sons of LIBERTY on the Continent become Free."\textsuperscript{104} The mainland radicals implemented these threats.

North American merchants either blacklisted those islands that complied with the duties or simply stayed away for fear that their ships would be seized with unstamped papers aboard. Captain John Langdon of New Hampshire, sailing from Portsmouth for Montserrat in December 1765, sent home reports containing a list of ports that could be entered safely without stamped papers.\textsuperscript{105} The \textit{Massachusetts Gazette} informed readers that the vessels cleared for Barbados had altered their voyages "upon hearing the scandalous news" of the local submission to the Stamp Act.\textsuperscript{106} Vessels from the mainland arrived "loaded with threats of starving us Islanders."\textsuperscript{107} The islands, according to Governor Pinfold, were spared neither threats nor entreaties by their correspondents on the mainland to persuade them to resist.\textsuperscript{108} When Denmark imposed stamp duties on the Danish West Indies in 1773, the council of the largely British-populated island of St. Croix warned that "we must expect that the North Americans will entirely forsake us as the very name of the stamp

\textsuperscript{102} Quoted in Miller, \textit{Origins of the American Revolution}, 141–142.
\textsuperscript{103} \textit{N.-Y. Mercury}, Dec. 16, 1765; \textit{Halifax Gaz.}, Jan. 16–23, 1766.
\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Mass. Gaz.}, Mar., 27, 1766.
\textsuperscript{105} Morgan and Morgan, \textit{Stamp Act Crisis}, 210.
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Mass. Gaz.}, Jan., 2, 1766.
\textsuperscript{107} Pinfold to the Board of Trade, Feb. 21, 1766, CO/28/32, 68.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
paper is obnoxious to them and will operate to us a prohibition."109 The islands were in effect subjected to a blockade until they joined the mainland’s opposition to the stamp duties.

Repercussions in the Leeward Islands were immediate. By the end of 1765, the cessation of provisions and lumber from North America threatened Antigua with famine. Samuel Martin wrote that the Stamp Act had driven the Americans into French ports and that planters had no casks to ship sugar to England. Another Antiguan planter wrote that the island was in imminent danger of being ruined because submission to the Stamp Act had reaped the wrath of the North Americans.110 A couple of days later, a local trader warned that without the northward trade “the estates can never be supported.” He feared that if conditions continued, “we are likely to be Miserably off for want of lumber and Northern Provisions as the North Americans are determined not to submit to the Stamp Act . . . . The Islands (nay the Merchants in England as our Remittances principally center there) will feel the Effects severely, for there is not one tenth of the lumber in the Islands that will be required for the next crop.”111 Beeston Long testified before a committee of the House of Commons in February 1766 that Antigua faced starvation and ruin.112

The Leeward Islands yielded to the economic pressure of the North Americans. The inhabitants of Antigua rose against the stamp distributor when the captains of two ships from New York threatened to leave because their “orders were not to sell at any Island where the Stampt Papers were used,” a proscription that the Massachusetts Gazette hoped would be followed by owners of all vessels bound for the West Indies.113 In addition to northern economic pressure, the presence of Yankee sailors may also explain events in St. Kitts and Nevis. According to several contemporary accounts, the particularly violent disturbances in St. Kitts and Nevis were fomented by the crews of New England vessels lying off St. Kitts, who “behaved like young lions” during the riots.114

The unique administrative structure of the Leeward Islands also partially explains their successful opposition to the Stamp Act. The most scattered and loose-knit federal colony in the empire, the Leewards had four deputy governors, four councils, and four assemblies (a fifth, in Tortola, was added in 1774). As Governor Sir Ralph Payne noted some years later, "The government is divided into an Archipelago of Islands extending between two and three hundred miles . . . which have distinct legislatures and laws, and in fact Governments independent of each other, although under one General and Chief Commander, it is perfectly impracticable to carry on the very laborious Business of my Government, without a ready and easy communication with every District of it." Payne was the first to tour all the Leewards in 1773. Local planters, rather than outside worthies, often held the governorship owing to the unprofitability of the post. Deputy governors on each island theoretically aided the governor, but they lived in England. In practice, the presidents of the councils governed each island. This dilution of authority severely undermined executive power in the Leewards.

Poor communication among the islands was another impediment to executive control. "The distance of the several Islands of my Government," according to Governor George Thomas, "necessarily created delays." Thomas blamed these distances for his failure to reply to the earl of Halifax's circular letter announcing the Stamp Act until after a year had elapsed. He claimed that he was not even aware of Tuckett's appointment as stamp distributor in St. Kitts and Nevis until early December, when he received Tuckett's letter describing the riots. Thomas believed that, had he been better informed, "the stamps might have been secured in the first [place], till the ferment in People's Minds should have subsided." The first distributor of stamps for Antigua lived in England, and the stamp papers did not arrive until a month after the date of enforcement. The colonists in Montserrat denied having received any

116 See Goveia, Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century (New Haven, Conn., 1965), 51–102, for an excellent discussion of the administration and political system of the Leeward Islands.
118 Thomas to Halifax, Apr. 11, 1765, CO/152/47, 6, PRO. Halifax sent his circular letter to the colonies on Aug. 11, 1764; it was not received by Thomas until Jan. 15, 1765; Thomas did not reply until Apr. 11, and his letter was not read by the secretary of state until the middle of June. See Payne to Wills Hill, June 20, 1772, for the Payne's complaints about the irregular reception of council and assembly minutes from the other islands.
119 Thomas to Conway, Dec. 21, 1765, CO/152/47, 116–118.
stamps by the end of 1765 and claimed that they were unaware of the act, although two Philadelphian merchants had heard in November that they threatened to burn them. In Tortola, at the outermost edge of the colony, there was no stamp master or stamp consignment as late as January 1766.\footnote{Treasury Minutes, Aug. 19, 1765, Wentworth Woodhouse Muniments; Mass. Gaz., Dec. 6, Jan. 23, 1766. Distance between islands also encouraged insularity: Tuckett was probably particularly unpopular in St. Kitts because he was a native of Nevis.}

The failure of Thomas, a former governor of Pennsylvania who was a native of Antigua, to take effective action also contributed to successful resistance in the Leewards. Thomas responded to the news of the riots in St. Kitts and Nevis by issuing a proclamation on December 5, in conjunction with the council of St. Kitts, offering a reward for information leading to the seizure of the riot organizers. He frankly admitted at the same time that "where there is so general discontent, I have had little hopes of Discovery."\footnote{Thomas to Conway, Dec. 21, 1765, CO/152/47, 116-118; minutes of the council of St. Kitts, Dec. 5, 1765, CO/152/19; Va. Gaz. (Purdie and Dixon), Apr. 4, 1766.} He did not visit the turbulent islands, and he sent the most superficial account of events to the secretary of state in late December. He went so far as to join the legislature of Antigua in petitioning Parliament for relief from the Stamp Act.\footnote{Va. Gaz. (Purdie and Dixon), Apr. 4, 1766.} By January 1766, he became distracted by private affairs: his daughter eloped with a member of the Antigua council. Distraught, Thomas returned of his own accord to England at the beginning of June 1766.\footnote{Samuel Martin to Samuel Martin, Jr., Jan. 13, Mar. 5, 1766, Add. MSS 41347, 214, 218, Brit. Lib.; Thomas to the Board of Trade, Jan. 29, 1766, CO/152/30, 50-51; Anthony Stokes, A View of the Constitution of the British Colonies . . . (London, 1783), 240; Bryan Edwards, History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies, 5th ed. (London, 1819), II, 395.} The government of the Leeward Islands then devolved on the president of the council of St. Kitts, James Verchild, who took no further action against his fellow natives.

The high rate of absenteeism among St. Kitts and Nevis planters may well have weakened the potential restraining influence of a local elite. Absenteeism was still quite rare in Nevis in the 1730s, when the Reverend Robert Robertson observed that the majority of planters were unable to live abroad, but by 1745 absentee planters owned half the property in St. Kitts. The diarist Janet Schaw, visiting the island in 1775, found it "almost abandoned to overseers and managers, owing to the amazing fortunes that belong to Individuals, who almost all reside in England."\footnote{Robertson, Detection of the State and Situation of the Sugar Planters, 50, 52; James George Douglas to the Board of Trade, received Mar. 19, 1745, in Frank W. Pitman, The Development of the British West Indies, 1700-1763 (New Haven, Conn., 1917), 39; Evangeline Andrews with Charles Andrews, eds., Journal of a Lady of Quality . . . (New Haven, Conn., 1923), 92; William Matthew Burt to Lord George Germain, Mar. 30, 1780, CO/152/60, 103.} The proportion of land owned by absentee in these islands far exceeded that of resident planters by the time of the Stamp Act.
Historians cite exceptional local circumstances to explain Jamaica's lack of opposition to the Stamp Act. The Jamaican assembly, prorogued for most of the period by Governor William Henry Lyttelton, could not respond to the stamp duties. Before the advent of the Stamp Act, Jamaicans sought Lyttelton's recall, and their energies were engaged in a bitter struggle with the governor.\footnote{Metcalf, Royal Government and Political Conflict in Jamaica, 164; Spindel, "Stamp Act Crisis," 206; Clayton, "Sophistry, Security, and Socio-Political Structures in the American Revolution," 325. I am grateful to Jack P. Greene for allowing me to see his forthcoming article on "The Jamaica Privilege Controversy, 1764–66: An Episode in the Process of Constitutional Definition in the Early Modern British Empire."} In addition, they were already accustomed to paying stamp duties under local laws to subsidize new defenses in the wake of the slave rebellion of 1760.\footnote{Spindel, "Stamp Act Crisis," 206.} The stature and personality of the stamp distributor, John Howell, also promoted the successful enforcement of the duties. He was not a native of the region in contrast to all the other stamp distributors except Georgia's. He enjoyed close court connections through a German brother-in-law who was confidant of George III. Howell was provost marshal of Jamaica, which gave him greater powers of arrest than his fellow stamp distributors. His office in Spanish Town was situated seventeen miles from the merchant community of Kingston, where opposition would most likely be centered.\footnote{Lane, "Roots of Jamaican Loyalism," 367–368.} Finally, the outbreak of a slave rebellion in Jamaica at the end of November 1765 diverted potential resistance.

Such explanations beg questions. Why should a dispute with the governor prevent Jamaicans from also attacking the Stamp Act? Why did Jamaicans fail to set up extralegal conventions or committees when the governor closed the assembly? The existence of earlier local stamp acts in Jamaica has little explanatory power. Massachusetts introduced local stamp laws in the same period but fiercely resisted the imperial duty. The local stamp duties in Jamaica differed from the new imperial duties in important respects, and, furthermore, they were levied by the planters' own representatives.\footnote{The difference between the local stamp duties and the Stamp Act was explained before the American Committee in Feb. 1766 by James Irwin; Newcastle Papers CCCXLV, Add. MSS 33030, fols. 186–188. Selwyn Carrington very kindly drew my attention to this document. Lane, "Roots of Jamaican Loyalism," 307–312, makes a comprehensive comparison of the different duties.} Local popularity did not save stamp distributors on the mainland from verbal and physical abuse. The slave rebellion of 1765 broke out "prematurely" a month after the enforcement of the stamp duties and was quickly suppressed.\footnote{Orlando Patterson, The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development, and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica (Cranbury, N. J., 1969), 271–272; Edward Long, The History of Jamaica . . . (London, 1774), II, 465–471.} The fear of slave revolt, especially in Jamaica, may well explain the unwillingness of whites to riot, but it does not explain their failure to develop other strategies of opposition. The local constitutional struggles in Jamaica demonstrate that
the planters were usually very capable of defending their interests. These mitigating local factors in Jamaica did not exist in Barbados, which nevertheless acquiesced in collecting stamp duties. The passivity of Barbados is all the more striking because it was the most truculent of the British islands in its relations with imperial government during the American Revolution.130

By concentrating on local conditions to explain the reactions of Jamaica and Barbados, the essential point—that the Leeward Islands were abnormal in the virulence of their opposition—is lost. Jamaica and Barbados typified the natural inclination of the islands toward conciliation, which became more pronounced in the build up to the Revolutionary War. Even taking the opposition of the Leeward Islands into account, the reaction of all the islands differed in important respects from that of the mainland colonies during the crisis of the 1765–1766.

The island colonies in general exhibited less strident opposition than their mainland counterparts. In petitions and memorials to Britain, island legislatures and agents did not formally articulate the constitutional principles on which they opposed the act. They preferred instead to emphasize commercial and practical objections. The absentee planters and merchants of Jamaica called on Stephen Fuller to draw up a petition to Parliament "that should be liable to as few objections as possible upon such an occasion." "In order that his Petition might give no offence," Fuller personally consulted Grenville and was shocked to hear from the minister of the "violent & inflammatory" style of some of the North American petitions. The final draft of the petition questioned only the expediency of the stamp duties and avoided reference to the issue of direct taxation by Parliament.131 Fuller actually took up Grenville's invitation to suggest amendments to the Stamp Act. He advocated the removal or reduction of the duty on rums from the British islands, as well as the introduction of a 6d. duty per gallon on French brandy and tougher measures against smuggling in Britain. But Fuller lost vital lobbying time by going off to survey Britain's coastline. Significantly, no other colonial agent was prepared to bargain with Grenville because to do so would fatally imply acknowledgment of parliamentary authority to tax the colonies.132 At least three absentee West Indian members of Parliament voted for the Stamp Act, and six of an estimated thirteen voted against repeal.133

131 Stephen Fuller to the Barbados Committee of Correspondence, Feb. 16, 1765, Fuller Letterbook 1762–1773, 70.
132 Ibid.
Fuller's timid formula, circumventing reference to rights and principles, was adopted in the petition of the Antigua legislature. The committee of correspondence of the Barbados assembly instructed its agent to draw up a petition that avoided anything "in the stile and substance of that Representation that might give offence to those from whom only our Redress can come." Indeed, not only was it left to the discretion of agent whether to introduce the question of principles, but the committee actually admitted that it was uncertain of the constitutional legitimacy of its case: "How far, indeed, we are intitled, by the constitution of England, or our own peculiar character, to an exemption from every other internal tax, than such as may be laid upon us by the representatives of our own people, in conjunction with the two other branches of our legislative body, we can not positively say." The committee preferred to seek repeal by a "humble submission to authority." As late as 1771, a member of the Barbados assembly was willing to argue that the Stamp Act was "impracticable and inexpedient" but constitutionally legitimate. The sentiments of the Barbados assembly differed so widely from those of the mainland colonies that Dickinson wrote that the latter would "rather die" than set such a precedent for perpetual servility.

Dickinson's criticism roused three Barbadians to defend the assembly. The replies, although representing a variety of views, indicate the gulf between the island and mainland colonies. Kenneth Morrison, an Anglican clergyman, came close to advocating obedience to any parliamentary ruling; Alleyne, an admirer of Boston radical James Otis and later speaker of the assembly, prided Barbados on its pragmatic and prudent response; and an anonymous writer, posing as a mediator between Morrison and Dickinson, criticized British parliamentary power and advocated parliamentary reform. All three condemned the injustice of the Stamp Act; even Morrison thought it detestable. Yet, despite their different stances, they all emphasized that the act was passed with the authority of "legal garb" and was therefore entitled to respect. They distrusted Dickinson's "zeal for natural rights."

135 Barbados Mercury, Apr. 19, 1766.
136 Ibid.
137 Speech of James Maycock, Minutes of the Assembly of Barbados, Sept. 10, 1771, CO/31/36.
138 [Dickinson], An Address to the Committee of Correspondence in Barbados, iv, v, 3–4, 15.
140 [Morrison], Essay toward the vindication of the Committee of correspondence, 14.
141 Ibid; [Alleyne], Letter to the North American, 8; Candid observations on two pamphlets lately published, 4.
142 [Morrison], Essay toward the vindication of the Committee of correspondence, 9, 12;
charged that the real crime of the committee in the eyes of Dickinson was its appeal to authorities other than the laws of nature. He mischievously quipped that, "in such a well cleared and little spot," it was impossible for the assembly to appeal to the laws of nature with "no woods, no Back-Settlements to retreat to." Morrison and Alleyne accused "the North American" of advocating violence and bloodshed. All three authors expressed shock at the behavior of the patriotic mobs in America and defended the moderation of Barbados. At the same time, they absolved the island of the "Jacobitical Taint" of extreme passive obedience. Morrison and Alleyne could not resist commenting on the irony that the North Americans were celebrating the repeal of the Stamp Act although Parliament had failed to acknowledge the right of the colonists to tax themselves and had specifically asserted its own right to legislate in all cases whatsoever in the Declaratory Act.

The conciliatory response of Jamaica and Barbados was anathema to the mainland Sons of Liberty. To pay any stamp duty appeared to the mainland patriots to be both a tacit acknowledgment of Parliament's authority to tax the colonies and a fatal precedent for the future. Further, it broke the united front that they held necessary to defeat the tax. The reaction of Jamaica and Barbados paralleled that of mainland loyalists like Thomas Hutchinson who, although privately disliking the Stamp Act, believed that the act should be obeyed until the wisdom of imperial government brought about its repeal.

No radical leader, like Samuel Adams or Patrick Henry, who rose to prominence through opposition to the Stamp Act, emerged in the islands. Samuel Martin, the most outspoken critic in Antigua, became an opponent of the American Revolution. Alleyne, the popular speaker of the Barbados assembly after 1767 and the aggressive champion of assembly rights, voted against sending a memorial to the king about the Stamp Act. He sat on the assembly's committee of correspondence and defended Barbados in reply to Dickinson. The island assemblies, even in St. Kitts and Nevis, showed little initiative during the crisis. Unlike the mainland colonies, they passed no resolutions defining colonial rights. They made no attempt at federation like the Stamp Act Congress. No formal organizations or committees existed outside St. Kitts and Nevis. They made no appeal to homespun or any attempt to limit trade with nonimportation agreements. They did not denounce luxury and corruption in Britain. To the disgust of Isaiah Thomas, the radical New

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143 [Alleyne], Letter to the North American, 27; Candid observations on two pamphlets, 13.
144 Ibid.
145 [Morrison], Essay toward the vindication of the Committee of correspondence, 13; [Alleyne], Letter to the North American, 27.
146 [Morrison], Essay toward the vindication of the Committee of correspondence, 4; [Alleyne], Letter to the North American, 10-12; Candid observations on two pamphlets, 4.
147 [Morrison], Essay toward the vindication of the Committee of correspondence, 15-16; [Alleyne], Letter to the North American, 27.
148 [Morrison], Essay toward the vindication of the Committee of correspondence, 10; [Alleyne], Letter to the North American, 42.
England printer, the island presses failed to stir during the crisis despite the threat high duties posed to the existence of their newspapers. The printers produced no bold political pamphlets on the subject of the stamp duty. The mainland patriots understood the urgency of resistance, fearing that the act would enforce itself as Grenville had intended. They therefore moved swiftly to compel distributors to resign—nine of the thirteen did so—and to block the circulation of the stamps before enforcement. By the beginning of November 1765, none of the island distributors had resigned. None of the island assemblies sent a formal protest to Parliament during the passage of the stamp bill, in contrast to at least nine mainland assemblies. By failing to act immediately, the island colonists ensured the successful enforcement of the stamp duties among themselves.

The acquiescence of the major island colonies may have had important consequences for imperial policy. During the late 1760s, Barbados politically exploited its submission to the Stamp Act. Henry Frere, a member of the council, wrote a history in 1768 to show that “Barbados hath always preserved a uniform and steady attachment to Great Britain, and therefore is intitled to the affection and indulgence of the mother country.” After a terrible fire in Bridgetown, Barbados, in 1767, Grenville himself urged Parliament to reward the colony, which had “acted dutifully” in 1765. Secretary of War Lord Barrington contended in March 1770 that the islands, unlike the mainland colonies, should be exempted from all duties because of their loyalty. “Are they,” he asked “to be treated in the same manner as Boston?” After 1767, the island colonies were increasingly immune and sometimes specifically exempted from many of the new imperial policies. The response of the major island colonies may well have misled the British government about the likely consequences of future imperial reforms. John Derry, in his study of English politics and the American Revolution, speculates that the failure of the islands to protest vigorously against the Stamp Act deluded ministers at Whitehall into thinking that their policies could work and contributed to their lack of appreciation of the uniqueness of the American situation.

The divergence of the island and mainland colonies during the Revolutionary War was anticipated in the 1760s. The island colonies were...
muter still in their response to the Townshend duties (1767). On that occasion, the islands sent no petitions to Britain and formed no nonimportation associations. They made no attempt to coordinate or to set up committees of correspondence. The November 1765 Stamp Act riots in St. Kitts and Nevis belie the notion that the whites of the British Caribbean were incapable of even token opposition to imperial policy. These riots were major in proportion to the size of the free population. They occurred despite the dependence of these islands on the British sugar market, despite the highest proportion of slaves in British America, and despite a powerful military presence in the region. The later failure of the British Caribbean to support the American Revolution was not simply a response to the threat of military coercion or to the impracticality of a revolt. It reflected fundamental differences between the development of the island and mainland colonies that were apparent during the Stamp Act crisis.  

156 The loyalty of the islands during the American Revolution is the subject of O'Shaughnessy, Patriots and Creoles: The American Revolution and British Caribbean (forthcoming), which seeks to explain the islands' divergence from the mainland colonies.